

NO. 2 – PRESBYTERY OF ALGOMA AND NORTH BAY

Re: Amending guarantee of stipend terms

(Referred to Assembly Council and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Ministry and Church Vocations), p. 215–16, 24)

WHEREAS, the guarantee of stipend to clergy in the Book of Forms now reads in Appendix A-29: “We agree to make payments of the above amounts on the first day of each month [if the minister and the session agree on an alternative payment schedule, amend this statement accordingly,] and agree to review the stipend and allowances annually in view of any changes in the cost of living or the needs of our minister.”; and

WHEREAS, the words “agree to review...in view of any changes in the cost of living” may lead to a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding; and

WHEREAS, if a congregation decides at the time of a call to offer more than the minimum stipend as suggested in the most recent A&P, that this excess amount be maintained and not eroded over time by assuming it takes the place of increasing the amount stipulated as the COLA increase; and

WHEREAS, it is misleading and unfair to incoming clergy to be under the assumption that what appears to be a generous offer at the time of a call may be eroded; and

WHEREAS, if, at the time of a call, the offer is exactly as the A&P stipulates, then, annually, the increase as the A&P suggests (which is adding the COLA) usually takes place; and

WHEREAS, it should not be any different, if, at the time of the call, the amount offered is more than the A&P suggests, the intent should be that the COLA be added to whatever the previous year’s stipend is and that any difference in base stipend above the A&P should not be eroded; and

WHEREAS, this is also a matter of living up to the terms of the covenant made by the congregation with its minister at the time of the call and the guarantees regarding the financial package;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Algoma and North Bay humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to amend the guarantee of stipend to clergy and others to clarify for all concerned the intent of the financial package being offered to the candidate for induction, noting a suggested amendment might be: “and agree to add to the stipend and allowances annually in view of any changes in the cost of living and the needs of our minister.”, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 3 – PRESBYTERY OF WESTMINSTER

Re: Budgeting for General Assembly costs

(Referred to Assembly Council, p. 216, 24)

WHEREAS, the Presbytery of Westminster was asked to host the 141st General Assembly (2015) at fairly short notice; and

WHEREAS, the Presbytery of Westminster was informed that it needed to have a significant budget for the Local Arrangements Committee to host the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, this budget is to include basic and necessary costs such as: ground transportation, worship, banquets and hospitality; and

WHEREAS, the Presbytery of Westminster notes that there are presbyteries in Ontario that bear the cost of hosting the General Assembly fairly frequently; and

WHEREAS, the Presbytery of Westminster believes the costs of the national church should be borne by the church as a whole;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Westminster humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to direct the Assembly Council to budget all necessary costs for General Assembly in the General Assembly budget, beginning with the General Assembly subsequent to the 141st General Assembly in 2015, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 4 – PRESBYTERY OF EAST TORONTO

Re: Full inclusion in the church of all persons regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee, (Justice Ministries) p. 382–84, 541, 47)

WHEREAS, there is one true God whom to know is life eternal, and whom to serve is joy and peace (Living Faith 1.1) and the mystery of human existence is that we belong to God and have been made in the divine image (Living Faith 2.2.1); and

- WHEREAS, the teachings of Jesus challenged the people of his time, and us today, to think critically about the exclusion of those previously considered unacceptable such as women (under certain conditions), lepers, eunuchs (a form of gender variance in Jesus' time, see Matthew 19:11), Gentiles and Samaritans; and
- WHEREAS, we commit to seek to read the scriptures under the continual illumination and correction of the Holy Spirit; and
- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada historically has been on the forefront of advocating for the decriminalization of same sex relationships and for full justice for all, out of our gospel conviction of equality for all (Galatians 3:28); and
- WHEREAS, recent biblical scholarship within the Reformed tradition such as the work of Jack Rogers (*Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality*), Beverly Harrison (*Making the Connections*), James Brownson (*Bible, Gender, Sexuality*) and Chris Glaser (*Uncommon Calling*) has concluded that there are faithful ways of reading scripture that affirm Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT)* people in committed relationships; and
- WHEREAS, many LGBT people within The Presbyterian Church in Canada struggle with the ambiguity of their position within the church where an unresolved tension and inconsistency exists between who they experience themselves to be but, at the same time, being considered barred from living who they are, and required to be celibate not as a matter of choice but of rule; and
- WHEREAS, the imposition of permanent involuntary celibacy even in ordained ministry was rejected during the Reformation; and
- WHEREAS, ecumenical partners of The Presbyterian Church in Canada such as The Presbyterian Church (USA), the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the United Church of Canada and the Church of Scotland have developed nuanced and affirming theological positions on matters of human sexuality and committed relationships in recent years; and
- WHEREAS, the assessment of the scientific and medical communities as well as the recognition of The Presbyterian Church in Canada's statement on human sexuality is that sexual orientation and gender identity are not only a matter of choice or lifestyle, but also factors in place prior to birth; and
- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognizes that homosexual orientation is not a sin (Social Action Handbook, p. 35), and
- WHEREAS, it is 20 years (1994) since The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted a statement on human sexuality, and twelve years (2003) since the reception and adoption of the report of the Special Committee re Sexual Orientation (A&P 2003, p. 526ff); and
- WHEREAS, LGBT people are fully included in our Canadian society and discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibited throughout Canada in private and public sector employment, marriage, housing, services provided to the public and publicity, in part due to the historic justice advocacy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and
- WHEREAS, more and more congregations and presbyteries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognize and celebrate the diversity of their membership with the inclusion of LGBT people in full participation in congregational activities and leadership and discern the fruit of the Spirit and a call from God in them and their relationships; and
- WHEREAS, those who are living in, or who may live in a committed same sex relationship, feel called by God and show gifts for ministry to serve in ordained and diaconal ministries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and
- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada consists of a diversity of people and perspectives that may vary on biblical interpretation and Christian praxis while maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3);
- THEREFORE, the Presbytery of East Toronto humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly,
- to cease ecclesial discipline in the courts of the church against ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments, diaconal ministers, and elders where such discipline is based on such ministers and elders being in committed, faithful relationships with people of the same sex, and
 - to prepare through the Life and Mission Agency of the General Assembly, in consultation with Justice Ministries a declaratory statement for the General Assembly that affirms that The Presbyterian Church in Canada is fully inclusive of every person regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity in all aspects of

church life, including calling, designation, ordination, and marriage equality as a matter of justice and hospitality,

or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

(*The term 'LGBT' is an acronym currently used to refer to people whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual and/or whose gender identity does not conform either to binary male/female categories or the 'assigned' gender at birth. While variations of the acronym exist to emphasize the spectrum that exists with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity, LGBT will be used for the purpose of this overture.)

NO. 5 – PRESBYTERY OF WATERLOO-WELLINGTON

Re: Full inclusion of all persons regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries) and Church Doctrine Committee, p. 382–84 and 268–73, 541, 47)

WHEREAS, it is 20 years since The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted a statement on human sexuality in 1994 (A&P 1994, p. 251ff); and

WHEREAS, it has been twelve years since the 2003 reception and adoption of the report of the Special Committee re Sexual Orientation (A&P 2003, p. 526ff); and

WHEREAS, the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation's recommendation that the Life and Mission Agency and the colleges of the church continue to study questions of human sexuality was adopted in 2003; and

WHEREAS, knowledge and the study of issues of human sexuality, both scripturally and scientifically, has changed significantly over the last 20 years; and

WHEREAS, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered (LGBT) people are fully included in our Canadian society and discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibited throughout Canada in private and public sector employment, marriage, housing, services provided to the public and publicity; and

WHEREAS, ecumenical partners of The Presbyterian Church in Canada such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the United Church of Canada and the Church of Scotland have developed nuanced and affirming theological positions on matters of human sexuality over this period; and

WHEREAS, more and more congregations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognize and celebrate the diversity of their membership with the inclusion of LGBT people in full participation in congregational activities and leadership; and

WHEREAS, many LGBT people within The Presbyterian Church in Canada struggle with the ambiguity of their position within the church and the lack of pastoral affirmation and hospitality they experience in light of the 1994 Report on Human Sexuality and its interpretation; and

WHEREAS, those who are living in, or who may live in a committed same sex relationship, feel called by God to serve as ordained ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, Christian organizations that used to seek to change people's sexual orientation such as Exodus International and New Direction Ministries have recognized and apologized for deep spiritual harm and psychological damage done to LGBT people by not affirming their innate sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity; and

WHEREAS, in the residential school apology we confessed the "sin of trying to change someone's fundamental nature"; and

WHEREAS, the assessment of the scientific and medical communities is that largely sexual orientation and gender identity is not a matter of choice or lifestyle, but a factor in place prior to birth; and

WHEREAS, our Leading with Care Policy ensures that congregations, groups and organizations within The Presbyterian Church in Canada will ensure "a safe place for all"; and

WHEREAS, the anti-LGBT stance of the Christian church in its many worldwide forms has resulted in approval of, or collaboration in, the persecution of LGBT persons, leading to verbal, psychological and physical assaults and killings; and

WHEREAS, the teachings of Jesus require that acceptance and inclusiveness of oppressed or persecuted minorities is central to the gospel message;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to affirm that The Presbyterian Church in Canada is fully inclusive of every person regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity in all aspects

of church life, calling and relationship as a matter of justice and hospitality; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 6 – SESSION OF KORTRIGHT, GUELPH, ONTARIO

Re: Affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee, p. 268–73, 540, 46)

- WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, (A&P 1994, p. 30, 48, 56–63, 251–74); and
- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a “union in Christ” between “a man and a woman” (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889 and in confirmation of the Statement on Human Sexuality [A&P 1998, p. 42, 471; WCF XXIV.1 and Living Faith 8.2.3]); and
- WHEREAS, the General Assembly in 2002 passed a recommendation “that, through the Clerks of Assembly, it be communicated to the Government of Canada and the provincial governments of Canada that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to the position that marriage is between one man and one woman and that this position is clearly stated in our church’s doctrinal standards” (A&P 2002, p. 21, 237); and
- WHEREAS, the General Assemblies of 2003 and 2009 expressed their reservations about going in a direction affirmative of same-sex intimacy by (a) declining to commend the resource: “Listening...” to congregations and sessions for study (2003) and (b) declining to receive Overture No. 16, 2009 which sought to redefine marriage with respect to love and faithfulness rather than specifying its participants as “a man and a woman” (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545 and A&P 2009, p. 21, 526–67); and
- WHEREAS, what has not changed in the past 20 years is the validity of the arguments advanced in the Statement on Human Sexuality, for example (a) the theological significance of gender complementarity, (b) the hermeneutical significance of the Bible’s consistent negativity toward same-gender intimacy (despite ancient awareness of the complex origins of homosexual identity, the diverse kinds of homosexual relationships, and the gospel’s mandate to include various previously excluded sin-neutral groups: Gentiles, women, slaves, etc), and (c) the pastoral significance of the testimonies to liberation and abundant life discovered through disciplined sexual faithfulness and participation in Christian community; and
- WHEREAS, each of these trajectories of argument anticipated by the Statement on Human Sexuality have been helpfully developed in the intervening 20 years, by, for example (a) Christopher Roberts on the theology of gender complementarity, answering the proposals of Eugene Rogers and James Brownson, (b) Robert Gagnon, William Webb and Bernadette Brooten on exegesis and hermeneutics of the relevant biblical texts, answering the proposals of Jack Rogers and William Stacy Johnson, and (c) Richard Hays, Wesley Hill and Rosaria Butterfield, answering the proposals of Chris Glaser and Jeffrey John; and
- WHEREAS, what has changed in the past 20 years is the intensification of cultural and political pressure to regard same-sex intimacy (and other diverse forms of sexual identity and expression) as part of a normalized diversity; and
- WHEREAS, what has also changed is the move by a particular kind of church/denomination (ie. northern hemisphere, wealthy, mainline, declining) toward acceptance of homosexual practice/relationships in regard to ordination and/or marriage; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit (tethered to the Word, in Reformed theology) rarely corresponds with the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age) but most often empowers the church to be truly prophetic in a counter-cultural mode; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity and is most surely grieved by such division as has occurred in the Anglican communion, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other denominations following the decision to extend ordination and marriage to practicing same sex partners, which has only weakened the church in its witness and mission; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit creates a particular kind of multi-ethnic community which we cherish in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and which the present drive to normalize, and even to celebrate same sex relationships, risks destroying, since many Ghanaian, Korean, Cameroonian, Arabic, Taiwanese Presbyterians etc., find such discussion alien to

their interests, exclusive of their voices, and a scandal to their understanding of the faith;
and

WHEREAS, the pneumatology of the Statement on Human Sexuality with respect to the above-mentioned matters of discernment, prophetic speaking and ecclesiastical unity is not particularly robust; and

WHEREAS, language of “inclusion” and “justice” is often incendiary, offensive and aggressively divisive in its suggestion that those who affirm the church’s teaching on human sexuality are somehow unjust, inhospitable and ultimately complicit in “deep spiritual harm” or “persecution” or “oppression” or “...killings” (see, for example, Overture No. 5. 2015 sent to this Assembly from the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington (p. 575–76) and the open letter posted at pccforinclusion.org), when such a spirit is the furthest thing from the heart of most non-affirming congregations and pastors in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from the welcome experienced by homosexual persons worshipping in these congregations; and

WHEREAS, we admittedly have some ways to go in realizing the vision of the Statement on Human Sexuality for a church which repents of past antipathy to homosexuals, and offers an environment where unmarried persons (wherever they identify themselves on the straight to LGBTQ spectrum) may be transparent about their desires, and speak openly to the challenge of living sexually faithful lives in a generation where sexual gratification is idolatrously pursued as if it were the holy grail; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals (as a political/justice issue simply), without close study of questions of exegesis, theology, polity and possible practical and pastoral fallout, would be a grave disservice to the church, and an unwarranted usurpation of the role of the committees of General Assembly under whose aegis these matters naturally fall; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in “declaring truth” on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;

THEREFORE, the Session of Kortright Church, Guelph, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which addresses current literature on the subject of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church’s prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural moment, (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that “fullness of life” which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2), and (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington, without comment.

NO. 7 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW’S, ARTHUR, ONTARIO

Re: Affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee, p. 268–73, 540, 46)

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, (A&P 1994, p. 30, 48, 56–63, 251–74); and

- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a “union in Christ” between “a man and a woman” (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889 and in confirmation of the Statement on Human Sexuality [A&P 1998, p. 42, 471; WCF XXIV.1 and Living Faith 8.2.3]); and
- WHEREAS, the General Assembly in 2002 passed a recommendation “that, through the Clerks of Assembly, it be communicated to the Government of Canada and the provincial governments of Canada that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to the position that marriage is between one man and one woman and that this position is clearly stated in our church’s doctrinal standards” (A&P 2002, p. 21, 237); and
- WHEREAS, the General Assemblies of 2003 and 2009 expressed their reservations about going in a direction affirmative of same-sex intimacy by (a) declining to commend the resource: “Listening...” to congregations and sessions for study (2003) and (b) declining to receive Overture No. 16, 2009 which sought to redefine marriage with respect to love and faithfulness rather than specifying its participants as “a man and a woman” (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545 and A&P 2009, p. 21, 526–67); and
- WHEREAS, what has not changed in the past 20 years is the validity of the arguments advanced in the Statement on Human Sexuality, for example (a) the theological significance of gender complementarity, (b) the hermeneutical significance of the Bible’s consistent negativity toward same-gender intimacy (despite ancient awareness of the complex origins of homosexual identity, the diverse kinds of homosexual relationships, and the gospel’s mandate to include various previously excluded sin-neutral groups: Gentiles, women, slaves, etc), and (c) the pastoral significance of the testimonies to liberation and abundant life discovered through disciplined sexual faithfulness and participation in Christian community; and
- WHEREAS, each of these trajectories of argument anticipated by the Statement on Human Sexuality have been helpfully developed in the intervening 20 years, by, for example (a) Christopher Roberts on the theology of gender complementarity, answering the proposals of Eugene Rogers and James Brownson, (b) Robert Gagnon, William Webb and Bernadette Broton on exegesis and hermeneutics of the relevant biblical texts, answering the proposals of Jack Rogers and William Stacy Johnson, and (c) Richard Hays, Wesley Hill and Rosaria Butterfield, answering the proposals of Chris Glaser and Jeffrey John; and
- WHEREAS, what has changed in the past 20 years is the intensification of cultural and political pressure to regard same-sex intimacy (and other diverse forms of sexual identity and expression) as part of a normalized diversity; and
- WHEREAS, what has also changed is the move by a particular kind of church/denomination (ie. northern hemisphere, wealthy, mainline, declining) toward acceptance of homosexual practice/relationships in regard to ordination and/or marriage; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit (tethered to the Word, in Reformed theology) rarely corresponds with the Zeitgeist (the spirit of the age) but most often empowers the church to be truly prophetic in a counter-cultural mode; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity and is most surely grieved by such division as has occurred in the Anglican communion, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other denominations following the decision to extend ordination and marriage to practicing same sex partners, which has only weakened the church in its witness and mission; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit creates a particular kind of multi-ethnic community which we cherish in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and which the present drive to normalize, and even to celebrate same sex relationships, risks destroying, since many Ghanaian, Korean, Cameroonian, Arabic, Taiwanese Presbyterians etc, find such discussion alien to their interests, exclusive of their voices, and a scandal to their understanding of the faith; and
- WHEREAS, the pneumatology of the Statement on Human Sexuality with respect to the above-mentioned matters of discernment, prophetic speaking and ecclesiastical unity is not particularly robust; and
- WHEREAS, language of “inclusion” and “justice” is often incendiary, offensive and aggressively divisive in its suggestion that those who affirm the church’s teaching on human sexuality are somehow unjust, inhospitable and ultimately complicit in “deep spiritual harm” or “persecution” or “oppression” or “...killings” (see, for example, Overture No. 5. 2015 sent to this Assembly from the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington

(p. 575–76) and the open letter posted at pccforinclusion.org), when such a spirit is the furthest thing from the heart of most non-affirming congregations and pastors in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from the welcome experienced by homosexual persons worshipping in these congregations; and

WHEREAS, we admittedly have some ways to go in realizing the vision of the Statement on Human Sexuality for a church which repents of past antipathy to homosexuals, and offers an environment where unmarried persons (wherever they identify themselves on the straight to LGBTQ spectrum) may be transparent about their desires, and speak openly to the challenge of living sexually faithful lives in a generation where sexual gratification is idolatrously pursued as if it were the holy grail; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals (as a political/justice issue simply), without close study of questions of exegesis, theology, polity and possible practical and pastoral fallout, would be a grave disservice to the church, and an unwarranted usurpation of the role of the committees of General Assembly under whose aegis these matters naturally fall; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in “declaring truth” on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order, and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew’s, Arthur, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which addresses current literature on the subject of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church’s prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural moment, (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that “fullness of life” which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2), and (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington, without comment.

NO. 8 – SESSION OF WESTMINSTER- ST. PAUL’S, GUELPH, ONTARIO

Re: Affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee, p. 268–73, 540, 46)

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, A&P 1994, p. 30, 48, 56–63, 251–74); and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a “union in Christ” between “a man and a woman” (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889 and in confirmation of the Statement on Human Sexuality [A&P 1998, p. 42, 471, WCF XXIV.1 and Living Faith 8.2.3]); and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly in 2002 passed a recommendation “that, through the Clerks of Assembly, it be communicated to the Government of Canada and the provincial governments of Canada that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to the position that marriage is between one man and one woman and that this position is clearly stated in our church’s doctrinal standards” (A&P 2002, p. 21, 237); and

- WHEREAS, the General Assemblies of 2003 and 2009 expressed their reservations about going in a direction affirmative of same-sex intimacy by (a) declining to commend the resource: “Listening...” to congregations and sessions for study (2003) and (b) declining to receive Overture No. 16, 2009 which sought to redefine marriage with respect to love and faithfulness rather than specifying its participants as “a man and a woman” (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545 and A&P 2009, p. 21, 526–67); and
- WHEREAS, what has not changed in the past 20 years is the validity of the arguments advanced in the Statement on Human Sexuality, for example (a) the theological significance of gender complementarity, (b) the hermeneutical significance of the Bible’s consistent negativity toward same-gender intimacy (despite ancient awareness of the complex origins of homosexual identity, the diverse kinds of homosexual relationships, and the gospel’s mandate to include various previously excluded sin-neutral groups: Gentiles, women, slaves, etc) and (c) the pastoral significance of the testimonies to liberation and abundant life discovered through disciplined sexual faithfulness and participation in Christian community; and
- WHEREAS, each of these trajectories of argument anticipated by the Statement on Human Sexuality have been helpfully developed in the intervening 20 years, by, for example (a) Christopher Roberts on the theology of gender complementarity, answering the proposals of Eugene Rogers and James Brownson, (b) Robert Gagnon, William Webb and Bernadette Broton on exegesis and hermeneutics of the relevant biblical texts, answering the proposals of Jack Rogers and William Stacy Johnson, and (c) Richard Hays, Wesley Hill and Rosaria Butterfield, answering the proposals of Chris Glaser and Jeffrey John; and
- WHEREAS, what has changed in the past 20 years is the intensification of cultural and political pressure to regard same-sex intimacy (and other diverse forms of sexual identity and expression) as part of a normalized diversity; and
- WHEREAS, what has also changed is the move by a particular kind of church/denomination (ie. northern hemisphere, wealthy, mainline, declining) toward acceptance of homosexual practice/relationships in regard to ordination and/or marriage; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit (tethered to the Word, in Reformed theology) rarely corresponds with the Zeitgeist (the spirit of the age) but most often empowers the church to be truly prophetic in a counter-cultural mode; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity and is most surely grieved by such division as has occurred in the Anglican communion, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other denominations following the decision to extend ordination and marriage to practicing same sex partners, which has only weakened the church in its witness and mission; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit creates a particular kind of multi-ethnic community which we cherish in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and which the present drive to normalize, and even to celebrate same sex relationships, risks destroying, since many Ghanaian, Korean, Cameroonian, Arabic, Taiwanese Presbyterians etc., find such discussion alien to their interests, exclusive of their voices, and a scandal to their understanding of the faith; and
- WHEREAS, the pneumatology of the Statement on Human Sexuality with respect to the above-mentioned matters of discernment, prophetic speaking and ecclesiastical unity is not particularly robust; and
- WHEREAS, language of “inclusion” and “justice” is often incendiary, offensive and aggressively divisive in its suggestion that those who affirm the church’s teaching on human sexuality are somehow unjust, inhospitable and ultimately complicit in “deep spiritual harm” or “persecution” or “oppression” or “...killings” (see, for example, Overture No. 5, 2015 sent to this Assembly from the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington (p. 575–76) and the open letter posted at pccforinclusion.org), when such a spirit is the furthest thing from the heart of most non-affirming congregations and pastors in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from the welcome experienced by homosexual persons worshipping in these congregations; and
- WHEREAS, we admittedly have some ways to go in realizing the vision of the Statement on Human Sexuality for a church which repents of past antipathy to homosexuals, and offers an environment where unmarried persons (wherever they identify themselves on the straight to LGBTQ spectrum) may be transparent about their desires, and speak openly to the challenge of living sexually faithful lives in a generation where sexual gratification is idolatrously pursued as if it were the holy grail; and

- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals (as a political/justice issue simply), without close study of questions of exegesis, theology, polity and possible practical and pastoral fallout, would be a grave disservice to the church, and an unwarranted usurpation of the role of the committees of General Assembly under whose aegis these matters naturally fall; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in “declaring truth” on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;
- THEREFORE, the Session of Westminster-St. Paul’s Church, Guelph, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which addresses current literature on the subject of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church’s prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural moment, (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that “fullness of life” which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2), and (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington, without comment.

NO. 9 – PRESBYTERY OF PICKERING

Re: Dissolving the pastoral tie during long term disability

(Referred to Pension and Benefits Board to consult with Clerks of Assembly, p. 480, 283–85, 31)

- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has demonstrated its care and concern for its servants by providing for their support by congregations in cases of short-term illness or disability and through a program of long term disability benefits when the period of infirmity is extended; and
- WHEREAS, periods of long term disability can, and often do, extend for a number of years; and
- WHEREAS, long term disability benefits themselves become available only after a period of approximately seven months; and
- WHEREAS, prolonged periods of pastoral absence can, and often do, have a significant impact on both the health and well-being of the congregation and on the health and well-being of the relationship between the pastor and people; and
- WHEREAS, the current policy of the church merely suggests that pastors, after a year on long term disability benefits, should consider resigning, but offers no clear guidance to congregations or presbyteries if this does not occur; and
- WHEREAS, the alternative which is left open to presbyteries is to consider a dissolution of the pastoral tie, which action is often seen to be disciplinary in nature; and
- WHEREAS, such action creates the very real possibility of civil legal action which cannot but harm the reputation of the church and of the church’s Lord; and
- WHEREAS, many collective bargaining agreements which include long term disability benefits now also include a clause which makes it clear both to employee and employer how long the disabled employee’s position will be held for him/her before the employment relationship is deemed to have ended; and

WHEREAS, such a policy would offer clarity to all involved, allowing presbytery, congregation and pastor to plan together for the future;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Pickering humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to adopt a policy concerning long term disability benefits which makes it clear that, in an instance of long term disability, the pastoral tie will be dissolved after a period of one year of long term disability benefits (approximately nineteen months after the disability begins), or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 10 – SESSION OF ESSA ROAD, BARRIE, ONTARIO

Re: Affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee, p. 268–73, 540, 46)

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, (A&P 1994, p. 30, 48, 56–63, 251–74); and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a “union in Christ” between “a man and a woman” (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889 and in confirmation of the Statement on Human Sexuality [A&P 1998, p. 42, 471; WCF XXIV.1 and Living Faith 8.2.3]); and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly in 2002 passed a recommendation “that, through the Clerks of Assembly, it be communicated to the Government of Canada and the provincial governments of Canada that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to the position that marriage is between one man and one woman and that this position is clearly stated in our church’s doctrinal standards” (A&P 2002, p. 21, 237); and

WHEREAS, the General Assemblies of 2003 and 2009 expressed their reservations about going in a direction affirmative of same-sex intimacy by (a) declining to commend the resource: “Listening...” to congregations and sessions for study (2003) and (b) declining to receive Overture No. 16, 2009 which sought to redefine marriage with respect to love and faithfulness rather than specifying its participants as “a man and a woman” (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545 and A&P 2009, p. 21, 526–67); and

WHEREAS, what has not changed in the past 20 years is the validity of the arguments advanced in the Statement on Human Sexuality, for example (a) the theological significance of gender complementarity, (b) the hermeneutical significance of the Bible’s consistent negativity toward same-gender intimacy (despite ancient awareness of the complex origins of homosexual identity, the diverse kinds of homosexual relationships, and the gospel’s mandate to include various previously excluded sin-neutral groups: Gentiles, women, slaves, etc) and (c) the pastoral significance of the testimonies to liberation and abundant life discovered through disciplined sexual faithfulness and participation in Christian community; and

WHEREAS, each of these trajectories of argument anticipated by the Statement on Human Sexuality have been helpfully developed in the intervening 20 years, by, for example (a) Christopher Roberts on the theology of gender complementary, answering the proposals of Eugene Rogers and James Brownson, (b) Robert Gagnon, William Webb and Bernadette Brooten on exegesis and hermeneutics of the relevant biblical texts, answering the proposals of Jack Rogers and William Stacy Johnson, and (c) Richard Hays, Wesley Hill and Rosaria Butterfield, answering the proposals of Chris Glaser and Jeffrey John; and

WHEREAS, what has changed in the past 20 years is the intensification of cultural and political pressure to regard same-sex intimacy (and other diverse forms of sexual identity and expression) as part of a normalized diversity; and

WHEREAS, what has also changed is the move by a particular kind of church/denomination (ie. northern hemisphere, wealthy, mainline, declining) toward acceptance of homosexual practice/relationships in regard to ordination and/or marriage; and

WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit (tethered to the Word, in Reformed theology) rarely corresponds with the Zeitgeist (the spirit of the age) but most often empowers the church to be truly prophetic in a counter-cultural mode; and

WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity and is most surely grieved by such division as has occurred in the Anglican communion, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other denominations following the decision to extend ordination and marriage

to practicing same sex partners, which has only weakened the church in its witness and mission; and

WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit creates a particular kind of multi-ethnic community which we cherish in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and which the present drive to normalize, and even to celebrate same sex relationships, risks destroying, since many Ghanaian, Korean, Cameroonian, Arabic, Taiwanese Presbyterians etc., find such discussion alien to their interests, exclusive of their voices, and a scandal to their understanding of the faith; and

WHEREAS, the pneumatology of the Statement on Human Sexuality with respect to the above-mentioned matters of discernment, prophetic speaking and ecclesiastical unity is not particularly robust; and

WHEREAS, language of “inclusion” and “justice” is often incendiary, offensive and aggressively divisive in its suggestion that those who affirm the church’s teaching on human sexuality are somehow unjust, inhospitable and ultimately complicit in “deep spiritual harm” or “persecution” or “oppression” or “...killings” (see, for example, Overture No. 5. 2015 sent to this Assembly from the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington (p. 575–76) and the open letter posted at pccforinclusion.org), when such a spirit is the furthest thing from the heart of most non-affirming congregations and pastors in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from the welcome experienced by homosexual persons worshipping in these congregations; and

WHEREAS, we admittedly have some ways to go in realizing the vision of the Statement on Human Sexuality for a church which repents of past antipathy to homosexuals, and offers an environment where unmarried persons (wherever they identify themselves on the straight to LGBTQ spectrum) may be transparent about their desires, and speak openly to the challenge of living sexually faithful lives in a generation where sexual gratification is idolatrously pursued as if it were the holy grail; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals (as a political/justice issue simply), without close study of questions of exegesis, theology, polity and possible practical and pastoral fallout, would be a grave disservice to the church, and an unwarranted usurpation of the role of the committees of General Assembly under whose aegis these matters naturally fall; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in “declaring truth” on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;

THEREFORE, the Session of Essa Road Church, Barrie, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which addresses current literature on the subject of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church’s prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural moment, (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that “fullness of life” which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2), and (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Barrie, without comment.

NO. 11 – SESSION OF IVY, ONTARIO**Re: Affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)**

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee, p. 268–73, 540, 46)

- WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, (A&P 1994, p. 30, 48, 56–63, 251–74); and
- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a “union in Christ” between “a man and a woman” (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889 and in confirmation of the Statement on Human Sexuality [A&P 1998, p. 42, 471; WCF XXIV.1 and Living Faith 8.2.3]); and
- WHEREAS, the General Assembly in 2002 passed a recommendation “that, through the Clerks of Assembly, it be communicated to the Government of Canada and the provincial governments of Canada that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to the position that marriage is between one man and one woman and that this position is clearly stated in our church’s doctrinal standards” (A&P 2002, p. 21, 237); and
- WHEREAS, the General Assemblies of 2003 and 2009 expressed their reservations about going in a direction affirmative of same-sex intimacy by (a) declining to commend the resource: “Listening...” to congregations and sessions for study (2003) and (b) declining to receive Overture No. 16, 2009 which sought to redefine marriage with respect to love and faithfulness rather than specifying its participants as “a man and a woman” (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545 and A&P 2009, p. 21, 526–67); and
- WHEREAS, what has not changed in the past 20 years is the validity of the arguments advanced in the Statement on Human Sexuality, for example (a) the theological significance of gender complementarity, (b) the hermeneutical significance of the Bible’s consistent negativity toward same-gender intimacy (despite ancient awareness of the complex origins of homosexual identity, the diverse kinds of homosexual relationships, and the gospel’s mandate to include various previously excluded sin-neutral groups: Gentiles, women, slaves, etc) and (c) the pastoral significance of the testimonies to liberation and abundant life discovered through disciplined sexual faithfulness and participation in Christian community; and
- WHEREAS, each of these trajectories of argument anticipated by the Statement on Human Sexuality have been helpfully developed in the intervening 20 years, by, for example (a) Christopher Roberts on the theology of gender complementarity, answering the proposals of Eugene Rogers and James Brownson, (b) Robert Gagnon, William Webb and Bernadette Brooten on exegesis and hermeneutics of the relevant biblical texts, answering the proposals of Jack Rogers and William Stacy Johnson, and (c) Richard Hays, Wesley Hill and Rosaria Butterfield, answering the proposals of Chris Glaser and Jeffrey John; and
- WHEREAS, what has changed in the past 20 years is the intensification of cultural and political pressure to regard same-sex intimacy (and other diverse forms of sexual identity and expression) as part of a normalized diversity; and
- WHEREAS, what has also changed is the move by a particular kind of church/denomination (ie. northern hemisphere, wealthy, mainline, declining) toward acceptance of homosexual practice/relationships in regard to ordination and/or marriage; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit (tethered to the Word, in Reformed theology) rarely corresponds with the Zeitgeist (the spirit of the age) but most often empowers the church to be truly prophetic in a counter-cultural mode; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity and is most surely grieved by such division as has occurred in the Anglican communion, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other denominations following the decision to extend ordination and marriage to practicing same sex partners, which has only weakened the church in its witness and mission; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit creates a particular kind of multi-ethnic community which we cherish in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and which the present drive to normalize, and even to celebrate same sex relationships, risks destroying, since many Ghanaian, Korean, Cameroonian, Arabic, Taiwanese Presbyterians etc., find such discussion alien to their interests, exclusive of their voices, and a scandal to their understanding of the faith; and

- WHEREAS, the pneumatology of the Statement on Human Sexuality with respect to the above-mentioned matters of discernment, prophetic speaking and ecclesiastical unity is not particularly robust; and
- WHEREAS, language of “inclusion” and “justice” is often incendiary, offensive and aggressively divisive in its suggestion that those who affirm the church’s teaching on human sexuality are somehow unjust, inhospitable and ultimately complicit in “deep spiritual harm” or “persecution” or “oppression” or “...killings” (see, for example, Overture No. 5. 2015 sent to this Assembly from the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington (p. 575–76) and the open letter posted at pccforinclusion.org), when such a spirit is the furthest thing from the heart of most non-affirming congregations and pastors in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from the welcome experienced by homosexual persons worshipping in these congregations; and
- WHEREAS, we admittedly have some ways to go in realizing the vision of the Statement on Human Sexuality for a church which repents of past antipathy to homosexuals, and offers an environment where unmarried persons (wherever they identify themselves on the straight to LGBTQ spectrum) may be transparent about their desires, and speak openly to the challenge of living sexually faithful lives in a generation where sexual gratification is idolatrously pursued as if it were the holy grail; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals (as a political/justice issue simply), without close study of questions of exegesis, theology, polity and possible practical and pastoral fallout, would be a grave disservice to the church, and an unwarranted usurpation of the role of the committees of General Assembly under whose aegis these matters naturally fall; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in “declaring truth” on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;
- THEREFORE, the Session of Ivy Church, Ivy, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which addresses current literature on the subject of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church’s prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural moment, (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that “fullness of life” which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2), and (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Barrie, without comment.

NO. 12 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW’S, HUNTSVILLE, ONTARIO

Re: Affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee, p. 268–73, 540, 46)

- WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, (A&P 1994, 30, 48, 56-63, 251-74); and
- WHEREAS, holy scripture is clear about God’s will for heterosexual Christian marriage in Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5,6 (Jesus said, “At the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said ‘Therefore 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'.”) and Ephesians 5:31; as well as the warning that deviating from this standard does not reflect God’s Kingdom living (Romans 1:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.); and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a “union in Christ” between “a man and a woman” (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889 and in confirmation of the Statement of Human Sexuality (A&P 1998, p. 42, 471; WCF XXIV.1 and Living Faith 8.2.3); and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly in 2002 passed a recommendation “that, through the Clerks of Assembly, it be communicated to the Government of Canada and the provincial governments of Canada that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to the position that marriage is between one man and one woman and that this position is clearly stated in our church’s doctrinal standards” (A&P 2002, p. 21, 237); and

WHEREAS, the General Assemblies of 2003 and 2009 expressed their reservations about going in a direction affirmative of same-sex intimacy by (a) declining to commend the resource: “Listening...” to congregations and sessions for study (2003), and (b) declining to receive Overture No. 16, 2009 which sought to redefine marriage with respect to love and faithfulness rather than specifying its participants as “a man and a woman” (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545 and A&P 2009, p. 21, 526-67); and

WHEREAS, what has not changed in the past 20 years is the validity of the arguments advanced in the Statement on Human Sexuality, for example (a) the theological significance of gender complementarity, (b) the hermeneutical significance of the Bible’s consistent negativity toward same-gender intimacy (despite ancient awareness of the complex origins of homosexual identity, the diverse kinds of homosexual relationships, and the gospel’s mandate to include various previously excluded sin-neutral groups: Gentiles, women, slaves, etc), and (c) the pastoral significance of the testimonies to liberation and abundant life discovered through disciplined sexual faithfulness and participation in Christian community; and

WHEREAS, what has changed in the past 20 years is the intensification of cultural and political pressure to regard same-sex intimacy (and other forms of sexual identity and expression) as part of a normalized diversity; and

WHEREAS, what has also changed is the move by a particular kind of church/denomination (i.e. northern hemisphere, wealthy, mainline, declining) toward acceptance of homosexual practice/relationships in regard to ordination and/or marriage; and

WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity and is most surely grieved by such division as has occurred in the Anglican communion, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other denominations following the decision to extend ordination and marriage to practicing same sex partners, which has only weakened the church in its witness and mission; and

WHEREAS, taking a direction to affirm and welcome practicing homosexuals or bisexuals into leadership ministry in the church does damage to all theologically recognized aspects of the nature and purpose of the church and our global unity with the church – i.e. One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church; and

WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit creates a particular kind of multi-ethnic community which we cherish in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and which the present drive to normalize, and even to celebrate same sex relationships, risks destroying, since many Ghanaian, Korean, Cameroonian, Arabic, Taiwanese Presbyterians etc, find such discussion alien to their interests, exclusive of their voices, and a scandal to their understanding of the faith; and

WHEREAS, the pneumatology of the Statement of Human Sexuality with respect to the above-mentioned matters of discernment, prophetic speaking and ecclesiastical unity is not particularly robust; and

WHEREAS, language of “inclusion” and “justice” is often incendiary, offensive and aggressively divisive in its suggestion that those who affirm the church’s teaching on human sexuality are somehow unjust, inhospitable and ultimately complicit in “deep spiritual harm” or “persecution” or “oppression” or “...killings” (see, for example, Overture No. 5, 2015 sent to this Assembly from the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington (p. 575–76) and the open letter posted at pccforinclusion.org), when such a spirit is the furthest thing from the heart of most non-affirming congregations and pastors in The

Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from the welcome experienced by homosexual persons worshipping in these congregations; and

WHEREAS, we admittedly have some ways to go in realizing the vision of the Statement on Human Sexuality for a church which repents of past antipathy to homosexuals, and offers an environment where unmarried persons (wherever they identify themselves on the straight to LGBTQ spectrum) may be transparent about their desires, and speak openly to the challenge of living sexually faithful lives in a generation where sexual gratification is idolatrously pursued as if it were the holy grail; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals (as a political/justice issue simply), without close study of questions of exegesis, theology, polity and possible practical and pastoral fallout, would be a grave disservice to the church, and an unwarranted usurpation of the role of the committees of General Assembly under whose aegis these matters naturally fall; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in “declaring truth” on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order, and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew’s Church, Huntsville, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which will address current literature on the subject of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church’s prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural moment (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that “fullness of life” which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2) and (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Barrie, without comment.

NO. 13 – PRESBYTERY OF NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN

Re: Establishing a Native Ministries Endowment Fund

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice and Canadian Ministries) and Assembly Council, p. 216, 330, 24)

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, in the Confession of 1994, has acknowledged and accepted the call to the Holy Spirit to “seek opportunities to walk with Aboriginal peoples to find healing and wholeness together as God’s people”; and

WHEREAS, the National Native Ministry Council of The Presbyterian Church in Canada consisting of representation from all the Native ministries supported by the denomination coordinates and supports this journey into healing and reconciliation on the front lines and at the grass roots of this calling; and

WHEREAS, the need for and appreciation of the healing programs that the seven ministries in the council are offering and want to offer is constantly growing; and

WHEREAS, the existing sources that have funded this mandated work, from church, government, and individuals, are increasingly unstable and shrinking; and

WHEREAS, the demands of energy, time, and money that are needed to raise funds for the work, at both the national and local level, drain resources away from the healing and reconciliation work itself;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Northern Saskatchewan humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to:

1. establish a Native Ministry Endowment Fund to be invested with the consolidated fund of The Presbyterian Church in Canada,
 2. delegate the administration of the income realized from that fund annually to the National Native Ministry Council of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for support of its ministries in healing and reconciliation,
 3. direct that a tithe (10%) of all undesignated bequests to The Presbyterian Church in Canada be deposited into the Native Ministry Endowment Fund,
 4. direct that a tithe (10%) of the money realized by the national church from the disposal of property within The Presbyterian Church in Canada be deposited into the Native Ministry Endowment Fund,
 5. direct the Planned Giving office of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to assist the National Native Ministry Council in preparing materials and promoting the Native Ministry Endowment Fund as a good place to leave a legacy,
- or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 14 – SESSION OF INNERKIP, ONTARIO

Re: Study paper on Human Sexuality affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)
(Referred to Church Doctrine in consultation with the Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 268–73, 540, 46, 541, 47)

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, (A&P 1994, p. 30, 48, 56–63, 251–74); and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a “union in Christ” between “a man and a woman” (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889 and in confirmation of the Statement on human sexuality [A&P 1998, p. 42, 471; WCF XXIV.1 and Living Faith 8.2.3]); and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly in 2002 passed a recommendation “that, through the Clerks of Assembly, it be communicated to the Government of Canada and the provincial governments of Canada that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to the position that marriage is between one man and one woman and that this position is clearly stated in our church’s doctrinal standards” (A&P 2002, p. 21, 237); and

WHEREAS, the General Assemblies of 2003 and 2009 expressed their reservations about going in a direction affirmative of same-sex intimacy by (a) declining to commend the resource: “Listening...” to congregations and sessions for study (2003) and (b) declining to receive Overture No. 16, 2009 which sought to redefine marriage with respect to love and faithfulness rather than specifying its participants as “a man and a woman” (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545 and A&P 2009, p. 21, 526–67); and

WHEREAS, what has not changed in the past 20 years is the validity of the arguments advanced in the Statement on Human Sexuality, for example (a) the theological significance of gender complementarity, (b) the hermeneutical significance of the Bible’s consistent negativity toward same-gender intimacy (despite ancient awareness of the complex origins of homosexual identity, the diverse kinds of homosexual relationships, and the gospel’s mandate to include various previously excluded sin-neutral groups: Gentiles, women, slaves, etc) and (c) the pastoral significance of the testimonies to liberation and abundant life discovered through disciplined sexual faithfulness and participation in Christian community; and

WHEREAS, each of these trajectories of argument anticipated by the Statement on Human Sexuality have been helpfully developed in the intervening 20 years, by, for example (a) Christopher Roberts on the theology of gender complementary, answering the proposals of Eugene Rogers and James Brownson, (b) Robert Gagnon, William Webb and Bernadette Broton on exegesis and hermeneutics of the relevant biblical texts, answering the proposals of Jack Rogers and William Stacy Johnson, and (c) Richard Hays, Wesley Hill and Rosaria Butterfield, answering the proposals of Chris Glaser and Jeffrey John; and

WHEREAS, what has changed in the past 20 years is the intensification of cultural and political pressure to regard same-sex intimacy (and other diverse forms of sexual identity and expression) as part of a normalized diversity; and

- WHEREAS, what has also changed is the move by a particular kind of church/denomination (ie. northern hemisphere, wealthy, mainline, declining) toward acceptance of homosexual practice/relationships in regard to ordination and/or marriage; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit (tethered to the Word, in Reformed theology) rarely corresponds with the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age) but most often empowers the church to be truly prophetic in a counter-cultural mode; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity and is most surely grieved by such division as has occurred in the Anglican communion, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other denominations following the decision to extend ordination and marriage to practicing same sex partners, which has only weakened the church in its witness and mission; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit creates a particular kind of multi-ethnic community which we cherish in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and which the present drive to normalize, and even to celebrate same sex relationships, risks destroying, since many Ghanaian, Korean, Cameroonian, Arabic, Taiwanese Presbyterians etc, find such discussion alien to their interests, exclusive of their voices, and a scandal to their understanding of the faith; and
- WHEREAS, the teaching about the Holy Spirit in the Statement of Human Sexuality with respect to the above-mentioned matters of discernment, prophetic speaking and ecclesiastical unity is not particularly strong; and
- WHEREAS, language of “inclusion” and “justice” is often incendiary, offensive and aggressively divisive in its suggestion that those who affirm the church’s teaching on human sexuality are somehow unjust, inhospitable and ultimately complicit in “deep spiritual harm” or “persecution” or “oppression” or “...killings” (see, for example, Overture No. 5. 2015 sent to this Assembly from the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington (p. 575–76) and the open letter posted at pccforinclusion.org), when such a spirit is the furthest thing from the heart of most non-affirming congregations and pastors in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from the welcome experienced by homosexual persons worshipping in these congregations; and
- WHEREAS, we admittedly have yet to realize the vision of the Statement of Human Sexuality for a church which repents of past antipathy to homosexuals, and offers an environment where all persons married or unmarried (wherever they identify themselves on the straight to LGBTQ spectrum) may be transparent about their desires, and speak openly to the challenge of living sexually faithful lives in a generation where sexual gratification is idolatrously pursued as if it were the holy grail; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals (as a political/justice issue simply), without close study of questions of exegesis, theology, polity and possible practical and pastoral fallout, would be a grave disservice to the church, and an unwarranted usurpation of the role of the committees of General Assembly under whose aegis these matters naturally fall; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in “declaring truth” on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the spirit, law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;
- THEREFORE, the Session of Innerkip Church, Innerkip, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, in consultation with the Justice portfolio of the Life and Mission Agency, a reflective study paper for the use of the whole denomination to come to a deeper understanding of the issues raised in this and other related overtures, memorials and petitions, an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which addresses current literature on the subject

of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church's prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural moment, (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that "fullness of life" which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2), and (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Paris, with approval.

NO. 15 – PRESBYTERY OF PICKERING

Re: Calling the church to listen regarding human sexuality

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries) and Church Doctrine Committee, p. 268–73, 540, 46)

WHEREAS, the church is called to point others to God revealed in Jesus Christ; and
 WHEREAS, issues of human sexuality continue to be prominent in both the public sphere and a very real concern in the lives of the many individuals and congregations who, together, make up The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and
 WHEREAS, in the struggle to respond, the church, in obedience to scripture, is compelled to give voice to the biblical call to both do justice and love righteousness; and
 WHEREAS, the way to sound both those notes continues to be a matter over which there is a wide difference of opinion within the church; and
 WHEREAS, past efforts of our denomination to respond to issues of human sexuality have themselves issued a clear call for "listening" and have expressed the opinion that, should there be a "winner" in this continued conversation the only loser will be the church; and
 WHEREAS, an insistence on any one way of understanding and approaching these issues cannot help but be divisive, as evidenced the painful experience of numerous sister denominations in recent years; and
 WHEREAS, one of the strengths of our denomination has been our ability to accommodate a breadth of understanding and opinion as we wrestle together with what the Holy Spirit is saying to us in scripture; and
 WHEREAS, groups doing ministry in LGBTQ communities (e.g. New Directions) have shown a similar ability to accommodate a breadth of understanding on sexuality and gender identity as they fulfill our shared calling to point others to God revealed in Jesus Christ; and
 WHEREAS, the church can ill afford to see its resources divided and its unity fractured at such a time as this, when both the Assembly and our collective experience have told us that congregational health and vitality must be our primary concern; and
 WHEREAS, such a fracturing of the church would seem to be a denial of our Lord who calls us to speak the truth to one another in love and who prays that all his own might be one;
 THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Pickering humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to engage the church in a fresh round of "listening" through (a) developing an intentional strategy within the church's congregations and courts where we can share stories and explore the scriptures, and (b) creating a safe space for this sharing by removing any possibility of church discipline for those who come forward with their stories, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 16 – PRESBYTERY OF OAK RIDGES

Re: Encouraging dialogue on marriage and sexuality

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee, p. 268–73, 540, 46)

WHEREAS, the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, in accordance with its duty, "adopts such measures as may tend...to preserve the unity of the church" (Book of Forms section 292); and
 WHEREAS, the issues of homosexuality and same-sex marriage are particularly controversial in both church and society; and
 WHEREAS, denominations have been divided and damaged by adopting new policies on these issues, prior to establishing a strong consensus and common bond of understanding among their members; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has the responsibility and opportunity to pursue a better course by working toward unity; and
 WHEREAS, many within our denomination are currently unfamiliar with each other's views and the official stance of The Presbyterian Church in Canada;
 THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Oak Ridges humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to pursue unity and consensus within the church by encouraging presbyteries to familiarize their congregations with relevant scriptures and the official documents of The Presbyterian Church in Canada pertaining to marriage and sexuality, and to create opportunities for respectful theological dialogue with emphasis placed on points of agreement, or to do otherwise, as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 17 – PRESBYTERY OF HALIFAX AND LUNENBURG

Re: Holding General Assembly in a central location

(Referred to Assembly Council, p. 233, 24)

WHEREAS, concern has been expressed in recent years about the cost of holding the General Assembly; and
 WHEREAS, the cost of travel is a significant part of the cost of holding the Assembly; and
 WHEREAS, a large number of the people in our denomination live in southern Ontario; and
 WHEREAS, the staff of our national office are located in southern Ontario; and
 WHEREAS, the cost of meeting might be reduced if an arrangement were made with one institution for a number of consecutive years;
 THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Halifax and Lunenburg humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to consider eliminating the practice of meeting outside central or southern Ontario every five years and to consider holding the Assembly in one location in central or southern Ontario for a number of consecutive years, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 18 – SESSION OF BETHEL, RIVERVIEW, NEW BRUNSWICK

Re: Study paper on Human Sexuality affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee, p. 268–73, 540, 46)

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, (A&P 1994, p. 30, 48, 56–63, 251–74); and
 WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a “union in Christ” between “a man and a woman” (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889 and in confirmation of the Statement on Human Sexuality [A&P 1998, p. 42, 471; WCF XXIV.1 and Living Faith 8.2.3]); and
 WHEREAS, the General Assembly in 2002 passed a recommendation “that, through the Clerks of Assembly, it be communicated to the Government of Canada and the provincial governments of Canada that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to the position that marriage is between one man and one woman and that this position is clearly stated in our church’s doctrinal standards” (A&P 2002, p. 21, 237); and
 WHEREAS, the General Assemblies of 2003 and 2009 expressed their reservations about going in a direction affirmative of same-sex intimacy by (a) declining to commend the resource: “Listening...” to congregations and sessions for study (2003) and (b) declining to receive Overture No. 16, 2009 which sought to redefine marriage with respect to love and faithfulness rather than specifying its participants as “a man and a woman” (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545 and A&P 2009, p. 21, 526–67); and
 WHEREAS, what has not changed in the past 20 years is the validity of the arguments advanced in the Statement on Human Sexuality, for example (a) the theological significance of gender complementarity, (b) the hermeneutical significance of the Bible’s consistent negativity toward same-gender intimacy (despite ancient awareness of the complex origins of homosexual identity, the diverse kinds of homosexual relationships, and the gospel’s mandate to include various previously excluded sin-neutral groups: Gentiles, women, slaves, etc.) and (c) the pastoral significance of the testimonies to liberation and abundant life discovered through disciplined sexual faithfulness and participation in Christian community; and
 WHEREAS, each of these trajectories of argument anticipated by the Statement on Human Sexuality have been helpfully developed in the intervening 20 years, by, for example (a)

- Christopher Roberts on the theology of gender complementary, answering the proposals of Eugene Rogers and James Brownson, (b) Robert Gagnon, William Webb and Bernadette Brooten on exegesis and hermeneutics of the relevant biblical texts, answering the proposals of Jack Rogers and William Stacy Johnson, and (c) Richard Hays, Wesley Hill and Rosaria Butterfield, answering the proposals of Chris Glaser and Jeffrey John; and
- WHEREAS, what has changed in the past 20 years is the intensification of cultural and political pressure to regard same-sex intimacy (and other diverse forms of sexual identity and expression) as part of a normalized diversity; and
- WHEREAS, what has also changed is the move by a particular kind of church/denomination (ie. northern hemisphere, wealthy, mainline, declining) toward acceptance of homosexual practice/relationships in regard to ordination and/or marriage; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit (tethered to the Word, in Reformed theology) rarely corresponds with the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age) but most often empowers the church to be truly prophetic in a counter-cultural mode; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity and is most surely grieved by such division as has occurred in the Anglican communion, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other denominations following the decision to extend ordination and marriage to practicing same sex partners, which has only weakened the church in its witness and mission; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit creates a particular kind of multi-ethnic community which we cherish in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and which the present drive to normalize, and even to celebrate same sex relationships, risks destroying, since many Ghanaian, Korean, Cameroonian, Arabic, Taiwanese Presbyterians etc, find such discussion alien to their interests, exclusive of their voices, and a scandal to their understanding of the faith; and
- WHEREAS, the pneumatology of the Statement on Human Sexuality with respect to the above-mentioned matters of discernment, prophetic speaking and ecclesiastical unity is not particularly robust; and
- WHEREAS, language of “inclusion” and “justice” is often incendiary, offensive and aggressively divisive in its suggestion that those who affirm the church’s teaching on human sexuality are somehow unjust, inhospitable and ultimately complicit in “deep spiritual harm” or “persecution” or “oppression” or “...killings” (see, for example, Overture No. 5, 2015 sent to this Assembly from the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington (p. 575–76) and the open letter posted at pccforinclusion.org), when such a spirit is the furthest thing from the heart of most non-affirming congregations and pastors in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from the welcome experienced by homosexual persons worshipping in these congregations; and
- WHEREAS, we admittedly have some ways to go in realizing the vision of the Statement on Human Sexuality for a church which repents of past antipathy to homosexuals, and offers an environment where unmarried persons (wherever they identify themselves on the straight to LGBTQ spectrum) may be transparent about their desires, and speak openly to the challenge of living sexually faithful lives in a generation where sexual gratification is idolatrously pursued as if it were the holy grail; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals (as a political/justice issue simply), without close study of questions of exegesis, theology, polity and possible practical and pastoral fallout, would be a grave disservice to the church, and an unwarranted usurpation of the role of the committees of General Assembly under whose aegis these matters naturally fall; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in “declaring truth” on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;

THEREFORE, the Session of Bethel Church, Riverview, New Brunswick, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, in consultation with the Justice portfolio of the Life and Mission Agency, a reflective study paper for the use of the whole denomination to come to a deeper understanding of the issues raised in this and other related overtures, memorials and petitions, resulting in an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which addresses current literature on the subject of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church's prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural moment, (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that "fullness of life" which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2), and (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of New Brunswick, without comment.

NO. 19 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW'S, MONCTON, NEW BRUNSWICK

Re: Study paper on Human Sexuality affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee, p. 268–73, 540, 46)

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, (A&P 1994, p. 30, 48, 56–63, 251–74); and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a "union in Christ" between "a man and a woman" (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889 and in confirmation of the Statement on Human Sexuality [A&P 1998, p. 42, 471; WCF XXIV.1 and Living Faith 8.2.3]); and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly in 2002 passed a recommendation "that, through the Clerks of Assembly, it be communicated to the Government of Canada and the provincial governments of Canada that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to the position that marriage is between one man and one woman and that this position is clearly stated in our church's doctrinal standards" (A&P 2002, p. 21, 237); and

WHEREAS, the General Assemblies of 2003 and 2009 expressed their reservations about going in a direction affirmative of same-sex intimacy by (a) declining to commend the resource: "Listening..." to congregations and sessions for study (2003) and (b) declining to receive Overture No. 16, 2009 which sought to redefine marriage with respect to love and faithfulness rather than specifying its participants as "a man and a woman" (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545 and A&P 2009, p. 21, 526–67); and

WHEREAS, what has not changed in the past 20 years is the validity of the arguments advanced in the Statement on Human Sexuality, for example (a) the theological significance of gender complementarity, (b) the hermeneutical significance of the Bible's consistent negativity toward same-gender intimacy (despite ancient awareness of the complex origins of homosexual identity, the diverse kinds of homosexual relationships, and the gospel's mandate to include various previously excluded sin-neutral groups: Gentiles, women, slaves, etc.) and (c) the pastoral significance of the testimonies to liberation and abundant life discovered through disciplined sexual faithfulness and participation in Christian community; and

WHEREAS, each of these trajectories of argument anticipated by the Statement on Human Sexuality have been helpfully developed in the intervening 20 years, by, for example (a) Christopher Roberts on the theology of gender complementary, answering the proposals of Eugene Rogers and James Brownson, (b) Robert Gagnon, William Webb and Bernadette Brooten on exegesis and hermeneutics of the relevant biblical texts, answering the proposals of Jack Rogers and William Stacy Johnson, and (c) Richard Hays, Wesley Hill and Rosaria Butterfield, answering the proposals of Chris Glaser and Jeffrey John; and

WHEREAS, what has changed in the past 20 years is the intensification of cultural and political pressure to regard same-sex intimacy (and other diverse forms of sexual identity and expression) as part of a normalized diversity; and

- WHEREAS, what has also changed is the move by a particular kind of church/denomination (ie. northern hemisphere, wealthy, mainline, declining) toward acceptance of homosexual practice/relationships in regard to ordination and/or marriage; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit (tethered to the Word, in Reformed theology) rarely corresponds with the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age) but most often empowers the church to be truly prophetic in a counter-cultural mode; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity and is most surely grieved by such division as has occurred in the Anglican communion, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other denominations following the decision to extend ordination and marriage to practicing same sex partners, which has only weakened the church in its witness and mission; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit creates a particular kind of multi-ethnic community which we cherish in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and which the present drive to normalize, and even to celebrate same sex relationships, risks destroying, since many Ghanaian, Korean, Cameroonian, Arabic, Taiwanese Presbyterians etc, find such discussion alien to their interests, exclusive of their voices, and a scandal to their understanding of the faith; and
- WHEREAS, the pneumatology of the Statement on Human Sexuality with respect to the above-mentioned matters of discernment, prophetic speaking and ecclesiastical unity is not particularly robust; and
- WHEREAS, language of “inclusion” and “justice” is often incendiary, offensive and aggressively divisive in its suggestion that those who affirm the church’s teaching on human sexuality are somehow unjust, inhospitable and ultimately complicit in “deep spiritual harm” or “persecution” or “oppression” or “...killings” (see, for example, Overture No. 5. 2015 sent to this Assembly from the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington (p. 575–76) and the open letter posted at pccforinclusion.org), when such a spirit is the furthest thing from the heart of most non-affirming congregations and pastors in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from the welcome experienced by homosexual persons worshipping in these congregations; and
- WHEREAS, we admittedly have some ways to go in realizing the vision of the Statement on Human Sexuality for a church which repents of past antipathy to homosexuals, and offers an environment where unmarried persons (wherever they identify themselves on the straight to LGBTQ spectrum) may be transparent about their desires, and speak openly to the challenge of living sexually faithful lives in a generation where sexual gratification is idolatrously pursued as if it were the holy grail; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals (as a political/justice issue simply), without close study of questions of exegesis, theology, polity and possible practical and pastoral fallout, would be a grave disservice to the church, and an unwarranted usurpation of the role of the committees of General Assembly under whose aegis these matters naturally fall; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in “declaring truth” on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;
- THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew’s, Moncton, New Brunswick, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, in consultation with the Justice portfolio of the Life and Mission Agency, a reflective study paper for the use of the whole denomination to come to a deeper understanding of the issues raised in this and other related overtures, memorials and petitions, resulting in an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which addresses current literature on

the subject of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church's prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural moment, (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that "fullness of life" which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2), and (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of New Brunswick, without comment.

NO. 20 – PRESBYTERY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

Re: Review Book of Forms, Appendix I re minister-in-association

(Referred to Clerks of Assembly, p. 275–76, 31)

WHEREAS, Appendix I of the Book of Forms presents a policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, which offers to "Ministers in good and regular standing, who are not called by or appointed to a congregation," (Appendix I, preamble) the privilege to be in association within the life of a congregation; and

WHEREAS, Appendix I does not offer clear guidelines of how a minister-in-association might relate to the pastoral charge, the session and the incumbent minister, so that gifts may be shared to support the ministry in building up Christ's church; and

WHEREAS, Appendix I does not include the possibility of the incumbent wishing to make changes in terms of association, since the policy states only that "should the session and the minister-in-association wish to change the terms of the agreement, the changes are to be submitted to the presbytery for approval"; and

WHEREAS, a periodic review of the relationship of a minister-in-association within a charge would encourage a healthy and collaborative relationship for the building up of Christ's church, Appendix I does not include the possibility of a review of terms by the presbytery on a periodic basis, such as when a new minister is called to the charge, or when presbytery holds visitations within that charge, as the policy only refers to the establishment of terms of association at the time when a minister without a charge wishes to associate;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of New Brunswick, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to review Appendix I to:

1. offer clarity regarding the relationship of a minister-in-association with the session and incumbent,
 2. to change the following: "Should the session and the minister-in-association wish to change the terms of the agreement, the changes are to be submitted to the presbytery for approval" to "Should the incumbent, the session and/or the minister-in-association wish to change the terms of the agreement, the changes are to be submitted to the presbytery for consideration and approval.",
 3. include within this policy a periodic review of terms of association by the presbytery, such as when a new minister is inducted and/or during presbytery visits to the charge where there is a (are) minister(s)-in-association,
- or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 21 – PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN HAN-CA

Re: Study paper on Human Sexuality affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries) in consultation with Church Doctrine Committee, p. 541, 47, 268–73, 540, 46)

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, (A&P 1994, p. 30, 48, 56–63, 251–74); and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a "union in Christ" between "a man and a woman" (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889 and in confirmation of the Statement on Human Sexuality [A&P 1998, p. 42, 471; WCF XXIV.1 and Living Faith 8.2.3]); and

- WHEREAS, the General Assembly in 2002 passed a recommendation “that, through the Clerks of Assembly, it be communicated to the Government of Canada and the provincial governments of Canada that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to the position that marriage is between one man and one woman and that this position is clearly stated in our church’s doctrinal standards” (A&P 2002, p. 21, 237); and
- WHEREAS, the General Assemblies of 2003 and 2009 expressed their reservations about going in a direction affirmative of same-sex intimacy by (a) declining to commend the resource: “Listening...” to congregations and sessions for study (2003) and (b) declining to receive Overture No. 16, 2009 which sought to redefine marriage with respect to love and faithfulness rather than specifying its participants as “a man and a woman” (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545 and A&P 2009, p. 21, 526–67); and
- WHEREAS, what has not changed in the past 20 years is the validity of the arguments advanced in the Statement on Human Sexuality, for example (a) the theological significance of gender complementarity, (b) the hermeneutical significance of the Bible’s consistent negativity toward same-gender intimacy (despite ancient awareness of the complex origins of homosexual identity, the diverse kinds of homosexual relationships, and the gospel’s mandate to include various previously excluded sin-neutral groups: Gentiles, women, slaves, etc) and (c) the pastoral significance of the testimonies to liberation and abundant life discovered through disciplined sexual faithfulness and participation in Christian community; and
- WHEREAS, each of these trajectories of argument anticipated by the Statement on Human Sexuality have been helpfully developed in the intervening 20 years, by, for example (a) Christopher Roberts on the theology of gender complementary, answering the proposals of Eugene Rogers and James Brownson, (b) Robert Gagnon, William Webb and Bernadette Brooten on exegesis and hermeneutics of the relevant biblical texts, answering the proposals of Jack Rogers and William Stacy Johnson, and (c) Richard Hays, Wesley Hill and Rosaria Butterfield, answering the proposals of Chris Glaser and Jeffrey John; and
- WHEREAS, what has changed in the past 20 years is the intensification of cultural and political pressure to regard same-sex intimacy (and other diverse forms of sexual identity and expression) as part of a normalized diversity; and
- WHEREAS, what has also changed is the move by a particular kind of church/denomination (ie. northern hemisphere, wealthy, mainline, declining) toward acceptance of homosexual practice/relationships in regard to ordination and/or marriage; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit (tethered to the Word, in Reformed theology) rarely corresponds with the Zeitgeist (the spirit of the age) but most often empowers the church to be truly prophetic in a counter-cultural mode; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity and is most surely grieved by such division as has occurred in the Anglican communion, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and other denominations following the decision to extend ordination and marriage to practicing same sex partners, which has only weakened the church in its witness and mission; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit creates a particular kind of multi-ethnic community which we cherish in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and which the present drive to normalize, and even to celebrate same sex relationships, risks destroying, since many Ghanaian, Korean, Cameroonian, Arabic, Taiwanese Presbyterians etc, find such discussion alien to their interests, exclusive of their voices, and a scandal to their understanding of the faith; and
- WHEREAS, the pneumatology of the Statement on Human Sexuality with respect to the above-mentioned matters of discernment, prophetic speaking and ecclesiastical unity is not particularly robust; and
- WHEREAS, language of “inclusion” and “justice” is often incendiary, offensive and aggressively divisive in its suggestion that those who affirm the church’s teaching on human sexuality are somehow unjust, inhospitable and ultimately complicit in “deep spiritual harm” or “persecution” or “oppression” or “...killings” (see, for example, Overture No. 5. 2015 sent to this Assembly from the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington (p. 575–76) and the open letter posted at pccforinclusion.org), when such a spirit is the furthest thing from the heart of most non-affirming congregations and pastors in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from the welcome experienced by homosexual persons worshipping in these congregations; and

- WHEREAS, we admittedly have some ways to go in realizing the vision of the Statement on Human Sexuality for a church which repents of past antipathy to homosexuals, and offers an environment where unmarried persons (wherever they identify themselves on the straight to LGBTQ spectrum) may be transparent about their desires, and speak openly to the challenge of living sexually faithful lives in a generation where sexual gratification is idolatrously pursued as if it were the holy grail; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals (as a political/justice issue simply), without close study of questions of exegesis, theology, polity and possible practical and pastoral fallout, would be a grave disservice to the church, and an unwarranted usurpation of the role of the committees of General Assembly under whose aegis these matters naturally fall; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in “declaring truth” on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and
- WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;
- THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Western Han-Ca, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, in consultation with the Justice portfolio of the Life and Mission Agency, a reflective study paper for the use of the whole denomination to come to a deeper understanding of the issues raised in this and other related overtures, memorials and petitions, resulting in an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which addresses current literature on the subject of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church’s prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural moment, (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that “fullness of life” which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2), and (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 22 – PRESBYTERY OF WINNIPEG

Re: Establishing a Native Ministries Endowment Fund

(Referred to Assembly Council and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 216, 330, 25)

- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, in the Confession of 1994, has acknowledged and accepted the call to the Holy Spirit to “seek opportunities to walk with Aboriginal peoples to find healing and wholeness together as God’s people”; and
- WHEREAS, the National Native Ministry Council of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, consisting of representation from all the Native ministries supported by the denomination, coordinates and supports this journey into healing and reconciliation on the front lines and at the grass roots of this calling; and
- WHEREAS, the need for and appreciation of the healing programs that the seven ministries in the council are offering and want to offer is constantly growing; and
- WHEREAS, the existing sources that have funded this mandated work, from church, government, and individuals, are increasingly unstable and shrinking; and
- WHEREAS, the demands of energy, time, and money that are needed to raise funds for the work, at both the national and local level, drain resources away from the healing and reconciliation work itself;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Winnipeg humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to:

1. establish a Native Ministry Endowment Fund to be invested with the consolidated portfolio of The Presbyterian Church in Canada,
 2. delegate the administration of the income realized from that fund annually to the National Native Ministry Council of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for support of its ministries in healing and reconciliation,
 3. direct that a tithe (10%) of all undesignated bequests to The Presbyterian Church in Canada be deposited into the Native ministry endowment fund,
 4. direct that a tithe (10%) of the money realized by the national church from the disposal of property within The Presbyterian Church in Canada be deposited into the Native Ministry Endowment Fund,
 5. direct the Planned Giving office of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to assist the National Native Ministry Council in preparing materials and promoting the Native Ministry Endowment Fund as a good place to leave a legacy,
- or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 23 – PRESBYTERY OF CALGARY-MACLEOD, ALBERTA

Re: Gay and lesbian candidates for ministry and same-sex marriages

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 248, 16)

WHEREAS, the Reformed tradition confesses salvation by grace alone through Christ alone, accepted by faith alone and not by any claim of human action or identity which makes some more acceptable to God than others; and

WHEREAS, we all hear God's call to live out our faith in God by following Jesus' commandment to love God with heart, mind, strength and soul and our neighbours as ourselves; and

WHEREAS, no one among us can ever live out Jesus' commandment perfectly and so we all stand together in need of God's mercy and forgiveness, whatever our sexual orientation; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has sought to offer to all welcoming, respectful and safe communities in its congregations through the leadership and decisions of the General Assembly (i.e. the report of the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation [A&P, 2003, p. 526–47] and the Leading with Care Policy); and

WHEREAS, this intention is betrayed by the lack of welcome offered to at least some gay and lesbian members of our church through the resistance to recognize God's call to those who have gifts for the ministry of Word and Sacraments and through the inability to bless or marry same sex couples in committed relationships; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has allowed presbyteries and sessions the ability to discern calls to ministry, assessing the gifts and faith of candidates within their pastoral jurisdiction, and has also given sessions the responsibility to determine who appropriately is to be married with each congregation or pastoral charge; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada falls short of its calling to be a means of grace and to live out the love of God and neighbour we profess when it continues to deny gay and lesbian members of our church the right and responsibility to participate fully in its ministries and also to withhold from them God's blessing and support in their relationships;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Calgary-Macleod humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to prepare declaratory legislation which enables presbyteries and sessions to consider for certification gay and lesbian candidates for ministry and which enables sessions to give permission for the celebration of marriage for gay or lesbian couples who come under their pastoral care, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 24 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW'S, KITCHENER, ONTARIO

Re: Full inclusion of all persons regardless of sexual orientation

(Referred Church Doctrine Committee and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 248, 16)

WHEREAS, it is 20 years since The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted a statement on human sexuality in 1994; and

- WHEREAS, it has been twelve years since the 2003 reception and adoption of the report of the Special Committee re Sexual Orientation (A&P 2003, p. 526ff); and
- WHEREAS, the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation's recommendation that the Life and Mission Agency and the colleges of the church continue to study questions of human sexuality was adopted in 2003; and
- WHEREAS, knowledge and the study of issues of human sexuality, both scripturally and scientifically, has changed significantly over the last 20 years; and
- WHEREAS, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered (LGBT) people are fully included in our Canadian society and discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibited throughout Canada in private and public sector employment, marriage, housing, services provided to the public and publicity; and
- WHEREAS, ecumenical partners of The Presbyterian Church in Canada such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the United Church of Canada and the Church of Scotland have developed nuanced and affirming theological positions on matters of human sexuality over this period; and
- WHEREAS, more and more congregations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognize and celebrate the diversity of their membership with the inclusion of LGBT people in full participation in congregational activities and leadership; and
- WHEREAS, many LGBT people within The Presbyterian Church in Canada struggle with the ambiguity of their position within the church and the lack of pastoral affirmation and hospitality they experience in light of the 1994 Report on Human Sexuality and its interpretation; and
- WHEREAS, those who are living in, or who may live in a committed same sex relationship, feel called by God to serve as ordained ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and
- WHEREAS, Christian organizations that used to seek to change people's sexual orientation such as Exodus International and New Direction Ministries have recognized and apologized for deep spiritual harm and psychological damage done to LGBT people by not affirming their innate sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity; and
- WHEREAS, in the residential school apology we confessed the "sin of trying to change someone's fundamental nature"; and
- WHEREAS, the assessment of the scientific and medical communities is that largely sexual orientation and gender identity is not a matter of choice or lifestyle, but a factor in place prior to birth; and
- WHEREAS, our Leading with Care Policy ensures that congregations, groups and organizations within The Presbyterian Church in Canada will ensure "a safe place for all"; and
- WHEREAS, the anti-LGBT stance of the Christian church in its many worldwide forms has resulted in approval of, or collaboration in, the persecution of LGBT persons, leading to verbal, psychological and physical assaults and killings; and
- WHEREAS, the teachings of Jesus require that acceptance and inclusiveness of oppressed or persecuted minorities is central to the gospel message;
- THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew's Church, Kitchener, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to affirm that The Presbyterian Church in Canada is fully inclusive of every person regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity in all aspects of church life, calling and relationship as a matter of justice and hospitality; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington, without comment.

NO. 25 – SESSION OF KNOX'S GALT, CAMBRIDGE, ONTARIO

Re: Revising and reforming the diaconate

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee (Ministry and Church Vocations) and Order of Diaconal Ministries, p. 248, 16)

- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada currently has two models of the diaconate in place: an older reformed model of congregational deacons that sit on a deacons' court to oversee the financial fabric of the church, and a newer model of the Order of Diaconal Ministries that historically evolved from the deaconess movement in the turn of the 20th century; and

history within The Presbyterian Church in Canada as a missional function of the church and a departure from a shared ecumenical vision; and

WHEREAS, deacons in the wider church tend to work within churches, church-related institutions and secular organization that help the most needy, marginalized and vulnerable persons, and in The Presbyterian Church in Canada there are no guidelines or criterion for those wishing to pursue a call outside of the church; and

WHEREAS, there is no clear vision for how this bridging ministry plays out between the church and the world in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, either for those placed in the church or for those placed outside of the church; and

WHEREAS, other denominations require specialized training for their deacons along with a core component of theological education, and The Presbyterian Church in Canada requests and M.Div.; and

WHEREAS, an M.Div. does not adequately prepare persons for employment in their chosen field or competency to work in the church in highly specialized ministry, especially in vocations that require certification and registration to practice (i.e. chaplaincy, social work, counselling, etc.); and

WHEREAS, the Church of Scotland allows for the designation after their deacons' name (DCS) to signify their ordination;

THEREFORE, the Session of Knox's Galt Church, Cambridge, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to:

- a) critically evaluate the function of both diaconal offices in the church and evaluate if there should be a convergence into one diaconal office overseen by presbytery, thereby fully transitioning to the newer diaconal model established by the deaconesses of our church, that encompasses ministry that extends far beyond financial oversight in the church, and
- b) allow diaconal ministers to use the term "deacon" in their public ministry, thereby allowing them to identify with a biblical office and a shared ecumenical term, and
- c) ordain diaconal ministers; that is, set them in an order of ministry that extends back to the deacons of the early church, so that they may share in ordination with elders, minister of Word and Sacrament and congregational deacons, and
- d) critically evaluate the purpose and function of a religious order of a modern-day, Reformed church and consider implementing spiritual formation and an invited rule of life as core spiritual practices that better distinguish it as a religious order, and
- e) establish clear guidelines and criteria for persons who wish to pursue a call outside of the church, and
- f) re-establish this office as a missional office of the church that focuses on caring for the most needy, marginalized and vulnerable persons, and create a vision for how this bridging ministry plays out between the church and the world, both for those who are placed in the church and for those placed outside of the church, and
- g) re-evaluate the educational requirements and consider allowing persons to enter into professional offices that fully equip and certify them for ministry in areas of healing, justice, and discipleship, with one year of core theological training at seminary, and
- h) to consider allowing a designation after one's name as a credential other than M.Div.,

or do otherwise, as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington, without comment.

NO. 26 – SESSION OF ST. PAUL'S, SAULT STE. MARIE, ONTARIO

Re: Affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 248, 16)

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals, which would deem presbyteries competent to adjudicate in the matter, and lead to a diversity of practice across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, would fail to recognize the role of a General Assembly in "declaring truth" on an issue which relates directly to our understanding of the authority of scripture in the life of the church, and our understanding of the very God, who in scripture is revealed as both architect of this created order, and powerful redeemer of those ensnared in all manner of sin; and

WHEREAS, any change in the doctrine and practice of our church around the ordination and marriage of practicing homosexuals by way of a declaratory act of one General Assembly is contrary to the law and practice of the church (which requires church-wide consultation through the Barrier Act), and would be a violation of the democratic impulse and virtue of balance enshrined in our Presbyterian polity;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. Paul's Church, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, an appendix to the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) which affirms the original content/intent of that report, and which addresses current literature on the subject of same-sex intimacy and relationships, with particular attention to (a) what it means to be faithful to the Word, the Holy Spirit and the church's prophetic vocation, in this particular cultural movement, (b) what it means concretely to form gospel communities which are truth-telling and love-embodiment, and where women and men, of whatever orientation or sex-history, may find that "fullness of life" which is promised as much to the unmarried, as to the married (Living Faith 8.2.2) and, (c) what it means for a Presbyterian polity to navigate disunity in ways that are responsible to scripture, as our supreme standard, and to our vows at ordination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Algoma and North Bay, with approval.

NO. 27 – SESSION OF GLENVIEW, TORONTO, ONTARIO

Re: Health and dental plan membership options

(Referred to Pension and Benefits Board, p. 248, 16)

WHEREAS, churches in various parts of Canada find it most difficult and expensive to provide benefits plans for individual or small numbers of their staff; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada offers medical, dental and long term disability benefits to the following groups: clergy; staff at the national office; staff at Presbyterian churches across Canada who work 20 hours per week or more, and to retired clergy, diaconal ministers and former national staff; and

WHEREAS, all congregational employees working 20 hours per week must be on the plan or none can be on the plan; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada national benefits plan currently available for congregational staff is restrictive in its application, not permitting an opting out for staff already covered by other benefits plans; through other employment or through their spouse's plan; and

WHEREAS, if staff are covered by other benefits plans, congregations cannot enroll employees that do not have other benefit plans in The Presbyterian Church in Canada plan; and

WHEREAS, the problem primarily impacts those in lower paying positions; and

WHEREAS, the staff in churches are predominately women, thus the non opting out clause interpretation, limits those staff with no other benefits to being able to access the national Presbyterian Church in Canada benefits plan; and

WHEREAS, the annual cost of The Presbyterian Church in Canada package is expensive reflecting the costs for a relatively small population currently using the benefits plan; and

WHEREAS, the larger the pool of participants the lower the unit cost is, a sound cost/benefit; and

WHEREAS, the current restrictive nature of the interpretation of the 1998 overture discourages churches from using the national Presbyterian Church in Canada benefits plan thus reducing the pool of covered benefit participants and reducing the likelihood of the benefits plan premiums to be reduced closer to the industry norm;

THEREFORE, the Session of Glenview Church, Toronto, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to permit opting out for church workers who are already members of another benefits plan while permitting access to The Presbyterian Church in Canada benefits plan for any other eligible staff in a congregation, or other agency related to The Presbyterian Church in Canada, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of East Toronto, with approval.

NO. 28 – PRESBYTERY OF CAPE BRETON

Re: Fees charged by financial institutions

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 248, 16)

WHEREAS, churches pay fees to banks in Canada on bank accounts; and
WHEREAS, charges are levied for all transactions in a business account; and
WHEREAS, for small churches with a limited income this represents funds that can be used in more deserving ways; and
WHEREAS, the major banks in Canada charge similar fees to any organization regardless of their purpose, (profit, not-for-profit, community or charitable); and
WHEREAS, there is a “community” account available but allowable activity on that type of account is not sufficient to be helpful to a church that is active fifty-two weeks a year;
THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Cape Breton humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to approach the major banks in Canada and financial lending institutions and request a reduction in fees to charitable and not-for-profit organizations, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 29 – SESSION OF KNOX, ST. CATHARINES, ONTARIO

Re: Review biblical texts that speak to homosexual relationships

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 248, 17)

WHEREAS, we honour Jesus Christ as Lord of our church, and want to witness to his lordship in every area of life; and
WHEREAS, one significant area of life relates to our sexuality; and
WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, in the report of the Church Doctrine Committee adopted by the 118th General Assembly concluded that, “The church, in faithfulness to God speaking in the scriptures, will...call homosexual brothers and sisters in Christ to abstain from homosexual genital activity”; and
WHEREAS, some members of our denomination who are attracted to the same sex find such an ethical conclusion a hard but helpful discipline for their lives, while others of our denomination who are attracted to the same sex find such an ethical conclusion creates tension between their self-identity and desire for intimacy on the one hand, and their desire to be faithful Christian believers on the other; and
WHEREAS, our church acknowledges that our interpretation of scripture is fallible and thus in constant need of revision; and
WHEREAS, as Christians we want to be both true to scripture and to care for those who suffer for whatever reasons, including homosexual ones; and
WHEREAS, the weight of the objection to homosexual genital relationships in the 1992 Church Doctrine Committee report lay in the exegesis of the biblical texts that speak negatively of homosexuality; and
WHEREAS, the possibility of reversing the church’s teaching on this highly sensitive issue needs to be thoroughly examined;
THEREFORE, the Session of Knox Church, St. Catharines, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to direct the Church Doctrine Committee to review how The Presbyterian Church in Canada has formerly addressed the issue of homosexual relationships, and in particular to study the traditional exegesis of the biblical texts that speak to this issue, alongside the various revisionist readings of those texts that have been suggested in recent decades, so to prepare a report that will guide the church on this contentious issue, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Niagara, with approval.

NO. 30 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW’S, BARRIE, ONTARIO

Re: Full inclusion of all persons regardless of sexual orientation

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 248, 17)

WHEREAS, there is one true God whom to know is life eternal, and whom to serve is joy and the mystery of human existence is that we belong to God and have been made in the divine image (Living Faith 2.2.1); and

- WHEREAS, the teachings of Jesus challenged the people of his time, and us today, to think critically about the exclusion of those previously considered unacceptable such as women (under certain conditions), lepers, eunuchs (a form of gender variance in Jesus' time, see Matthew 19:11), gentiles, and Samaritans; and
- WHEREAS, we commit to seek to read the scriptures under the continual illumination and correction of the Holy Spirit; and
- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada historically has been on the forefront of advocating for the decriminalization of same sex relationships and for full justice for all, out of our gospel conviction of equality for all (Galatians 3:28); and
- WHEREAS, recent biblical scholarship within the Reformed tradition such as the work of Jack Rogers (Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality), Beverly Harrison (Making the Connections), James Brownson (Bible, Gender, Sexuality) and Chris Glaser (Uncommon Calling) has concluded that there are faithful ways of reading scripture that affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people in committed relationships; and
- WHEREAS, many LGBT people within The Presbyterian Church in Canada struggle with the ambiguity of their position within the church where an unresolved tension and inconsistency exists between who they experience themselves to be but, at the same time, being considered barred from living who they are, and required to be celibate not as a matter of choice but of rule; and
- WHEREAS, the imposition of permanent involuntary celibacy even in ordained ministry was rejected during the Reformation; and
- WHEREAS, ecumenical partners of The Presbyterian Church in Canada such as The Presbyterian Church (USA), The Anglican Church of Canada, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, The United Church of Canada and The Church of Scotland have developed nuanced and affirming theological positions on matters of human sexuality and committed relationships in recent years; and
- WHEREAS, the assessment of the scientific and medical communities as well as the recognition of The Presbyterian Church in Canada's statement on human sexuality is that sexual orientation and gender identity are not only a matter of choice or lifestyle, but also factors in place prior to birth; and
- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognizes that homosexual orientation is not a sin (Social Action Handbook, p. 35); and
- WHEREAS, it is 20 years (1994) since The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted a statement on Human Sexuality, and twelve years (2003) since the reception and adoption of the report of the Special Committee re Sexual Orientation (A&P 2003, p 526ff); and
- WHEREAS, LGBT people are fully included in our Canadian society and discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibited throughout Canada in private and public sector employment, marriage, housing, services provided to the public and publicity, in part due to the historic justice advocacy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and
- WHEREAS, more and more congregations and presbyteries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognize and celebrate the diversity of their membership with the inclusion of LGBT people in full participation in congregational activities and leadership and discern the fruit of the Spirit and a call from God in them and their relationships; and
- WHEREAS, those who are living in, or who may live in a committed same sex relationship feel called by God and show gifts for ministry to serve in ordained and diaconal ministries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and
- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada consists of a diversity of people and perspectives that may vary on biblical interpretation and Christian praxis while maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3);
- THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew's Church, Barrie, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to:
- cease ecclesial discipline in the courts of the church against ordained ministers of word and sacraments, diaconal ministers and elders where such discipline is based on such ministers and elders being in committed, faithful relationships with people of the same sex, and
 - prepare through the Life and Mission Agency of the General Assembly, in consultation with Justice Ministries a declaratory statement for the General Assembly that affirms that The Presbyterian Church in Canada is fully inclusive of every person regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity in all aspects of

church life, including calling, designation, ordination, and marriage equality as a matter of justice and hospitality;
 or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.
 Transmitted by the Presbytery of Barrie, without comment.

NO. 31 – SESSION OF VALLEYVIEW COMMUNITY, CALGARY, ALBERTA
Re: Affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 248, 17)

- WHEREAS, the Session of Valleyview Community Church, Calgary desires that those who identify themselves as LGBTQ be included in the life and ministry of the church through experiencing the conviction of the Holy Spirit for their sins, forgiveness in Jesus Christ, and the restoration of the image of God in their lives; and
- WHEREAS, we wish to emphasize and clarify that this desire is not an attempt to exclude people from the church but an expression of concern to ensure that any efforts to include people in the church actually do so; and
- WHEREAS, we acknowledge that for many who identify themselves as LGBTQ, the experience of growing up in, or seeking help from the church has not been a gracious, merciful, pastoral experience and there has been a great deal of pain and anger and some tragedy as a result; we are saddened by this reality and regret that it has been that way; and
- WHEREAS, some are responding to this situation by advocating that the church affirm same sex orientation and desire as normative and bless same-sex relationships as being according to God's intention and design; and
- WHEREAS, we believe this response, though well intentioned, actually excludes people from the means by which one becomes a part of the body of Christ, and also, then how they would continue to function as a member of the body of Christ; and
- WHEREAS, we understand that this response is based, in part, on revisionist interpretations of the scriptural prohibitions against same-sex behaviour and relationships; and
- WHEREAS, these revisionist interpretations assert that such scriptural prohibitions apply only to same sex behaviour and relationships that are characterized by "violence or rape" or instances where actions are pursued which are not according to one's "nature"; and
- WHEREAS, revisionist interpretations assert that scripture does not prohibit same sex behaviour and relationships which are based on love, respect and mutual consent and commitment; and
- WHEREAS, we consider this qualification of same sex behaviour and relationships to be a theological statement which asserts that human efforts and abilities (e.g. how loving and how committed one can be) are the deciding factors in what determines what behaviours and lifestyles are righteous before God; and
- WHEREAS, these determining factors for righteousness originate from ourselves, the implication is that our standing before God can be determined by self-righteousness, instead of the righteousness of Christ Jesus that is graciously imputed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit; and
- WHEREAS, scripture reveals that it is only Christ's righteousness which can fulfill the requirements of being a faithful covenant partner with God, and outside of Christ's righteousness we are all considered to be unfaithful covenant partners and under the penalties of covenant violation; and
- WHEREAS, we re-emphasize our prior concern that the response of affirming qualified same sex orientation, desire, activity and relationships as normative, though well intentioned, actually excludes those who identify as LGBTQ from full inclusion in Christ and his body; and
- WHEREAS, our Lord Jesus instructed his disciples in John 15:4, and thus his church, and those who would become part of it, to "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."; and
- WHEREAS, remaining in Jesus involves accepting and trusting in his righteousness to include us in his body and not our own works and qualities, and we bear fruit by responding in gratitude and reforming our lives and relationships in accordance with the righteousness of Christ that has been given to us; and

WHEREAS, Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh; the same Word which spoke the creation into existence and ordered its structure and continues to order and uphold its existence, the same Word which spoke the law to Moses; and the same Word that spoke to Israel through the prophets; and

WHEREAS, we acknowledge there is a harmony and continuation in the Word of God in creation, in the law, and in Jesus Christ, which not only prohibits same sex activity, but reveals that sexual relationships are intended to be consummated in a life-long marriage covenant between a man and woman; and

WHEREAS, we confess that each person, as affected by sin, must confront the contrast between their own orientation and desires and what being obedient to what God's word for marriage and sexuality would require of them; and

WHEREAS, the role of the church is to assist and encourage people as they seek to be obedient to God's word for marriage and sexuality, through an honest recognition and confession of how we all fail in this obedience, through extending grace and mercy and assurance of forgiveness in Christ, and surrounding each other in Christian community where we are held accountable to the sanctification the Holy Spirit desires to work in us;

THEREFORE, The Session of Valleyview Community Church, Calgary, Alberta, humbly overtures the Venerable, 141st General Assembly to affirm and uphold the 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality, or to do what the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Calgary-Macleod, without comment.

NO. 32 – SESSION OF GRACE, WEST HILL, TORONTO, ONTARIO

Re: To uphold marriage as between one man and one woman

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 248, 17)

WHEREAS, all mankind is born with a sinful nature in which we all struggle throughout our lives (Romans 6–7); and

WHEREAS, our loving Heavenly Father, in his purpose to redeem creation unto himself, sent his son Jesus Christ to die for all sinners (1 Peter 3:18, Romans 6:10–11) and so to save us by his grace alone (Ephesians 2:8–9), because his love for us is too great to leave us in our sins (Romans 6:1–14); and

WHEREAS, we are commanded to repent of our sins (Matthew 4:17, 2 Peter 3:9) and that our Lord himself grants us the ability to repent (Acts 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25); and

WHEREAS, as Christians we are called by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to influence society by being the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13–16); and

WHEREAS, God's good plan for marriage between one man and one woman, as well as experiencing sexual intimacy, is clearly defined in his word (Genesis 2:24) and is repeated and reinforced in the New Testament by our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 10:6–9, Matthew 19:4–5) and the apostolic writings (Ephesians 5:31), as are sexual sins, including homosexuality, (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10) and the consequences of sexual sin (1 Corinthians 6:18); and

WHEREAS, to willingly continue in behaviour from which our Lord has commanded us to abstain can only be seen as unrepentant sin and as such can only have damaging consequences to us as individuals, to society and to the church; and

WHEREAS, all ordained elders and ministers of the Word in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, as well as candidates for these offices, must uphold and be “bound only to Jesus Christ the church's king and head; the scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God” and are “to follow no divisive course, but to seek the peace and unity of Christ among his people”;

THEREFORE, the Session of Grace Church, West Hill, Toronto, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to:

- continue, as a unified voice, to uphold our historic and biblical stance that marriage is designed by God as a holy covenant between one man and one woman exclusively, and
- encourage the faithful to lovingly care for all persons and, if any unrepentant sin is found within the Church, with all gentleness, humility and prayer correct that brother or sister until repentance is attained, for such is our calling from God,

or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Pickering, without comment.

NO. 33 – SESSION OF BRIDLEWOOD, TORONTO, ONTARIO**Re: Addressing issues of human sexuality**

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 248, 17)

- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has wisely provided the means by which concerns may be presented to its courts; and
- WHEREAS, there is intent by some members and presbyteries to request the church's official affirmation of same sex intimacy, the ordination of practicing homosexuals, and the marriage of same sex couples; and
- WHEREAS, such inclusive affirmation would be a flagrant denial of the church's historical position that scripture is the only infallible rule of faith and manners; and
- WHEREAS, this historical position is supported by the principal subordinate standard, the Westminster Confession of Faith (Chapter XXIV), and also by Living Faith (8.2.3); and
- WHEREAS, all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (1 Timothy 3:16–17); and
- WHEREAS, scripture clearly and repeatedly states that sexuality is a gift from God, and all sexual relations are to be confined to the marriage of a man and a woman – (all others being considered unnatural and immoral); and
- WHEREAS, the eternal God of truth has declared that his word will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8), and no one is to add or subtract from it and reject its eternal relevance; and
- WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit has been provided to the church so its members can be taught God's will and enabled to apply it in their daily living; and
- WHEREAS, it is the Holy Spirit who unites believers to live harmoniously in accordance with the revealed will of God for the church, and this unity is based on truth not compromise; and
- WHEREAS, all people are born with a sinful disposition, regardless of sexual orientation, and require the transforming power of God to bring abundant life, and power over temptations and weaknesses of many kinds; and
- WHEREAS, anger, disrespect, and animosity within the church, aimed at those who hold opposing views, grieves a holy God, and ought not to be; and
- WHEREAS, tolerance of others' beliefs and lifestyles, as promoted by human opinions and cultural norms – must never be the goal within the church, rather, compassion and justice must be based on principles in scripture; and
- WHEREAS, as John Stott stated, "without the wholesome positive teaching of the Bible on sex and marriage, our perspective on the homosexual question is bound to be skewed" (*Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*, p. 344); and
- WHEREAS, scripture urges believers not to allow the world to squeeze them into its mould (Romans 12:1–2) by following the culture's standards and practices, but to regard their bodies as gifts to be used in God-honouring ways, in dependence on his power to live in single purity and married faithfulness; and
- WHEREAS, challenging the authority of God and being proud of such defiance resulted in Satan's downfall, yet, as the father of lies (John 8:44) he continues to promote sin as a pleasure and a right, and to suggest God could not possibly say unreasonable things (Genesis 3); and
- WHEREAS, the numerous and notable talents and resources of homosexuals in the church may be regarded as needed and useful, scripture declares "obedience is better than offerings" (1 Samuel 15:22), and it is the Holy Spirit who works through obedient servants; and
- WHEREAS, the apostle Paul rejoiced to announce that former practicing homosexuals in the church in Corinth had renounced their immoral lifestyle and been transformed by the grace and power of God (1 Corinthians 6:9–11), thus proving the possibility and reality of change not necessarily of orientation, but of obedience to God through his power in an individual; and
- WHEREAS, the cost of discipleship may be very high and may involve pain, loneliness, ridicule, misunderstanding, etc., it is what God may allow therefore, the believer must be prepared to obey God and leave the consequences with him; and
- WHEREAS, the church must strive to support members who do not practice in spite of their homosexual orientation, to do otherwise would only increase the hurt and exclusion caused

by insensitive believers who judge the weaknesses of others while ignoring their own obvious or hidden faults; and

WHEREAS, God values each individual and does not have favourites, only intimates, nor does he categorize sins as humans tend to do, therefore the church needs prayerfully to focus on a holy God who condemns all sin and offers forgiveness and cleansing to all who truly repent; and

WHEREAS, a vital relationship with Christ is essential to deal with life's many challenges, and especially with the strong and emotional sexual issues regardless of one's orientation; and

WHEREAS, regular fervent prayer, and diligent study of scripture applied to daily living, and reliance on the Holy Spirit to instruct and empower, are the means by which believers can grow in grace to spiritual maturity and usefulness in the church; and

WHEREAS, society has rejected absolutes in favour of moral relativism and the church is in danger of doing likewise, thus creating a difficult and complex dilemma; and

WHEREAS, the Book of Forms section 292 states that the General Assembly "in general, adopts such measures as may tend to promote true godliness, to repress error and immorality, to preserve the unity of the church, and to advance the kingdom of Christ throughout the world";

THEREFORE, the Session of Bridlewood Church, Toronto, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to call for strong support of biblical standards for faith and practice; repentance for sins against God and fellow believers; and prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit in all the discussions and decisions relating to this critical issue; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Pickering, without comment.

NO. 34 – PRESBYTERY OF MONTREAL

Re: Prepare a statement re end of life issues

(Referred to Special Committee re Prepare a Statement re End of Life Issues, in consultation with Church Doctrine Committee and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 249, 17)

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court of Canada has struck down the criminal code prohibition against physician assisted suicide; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court of Canada has declared that Canadians have a right to medical assistance in ending their lives in situations of a grievous disease and intolerable (to the person) suffering; and

WHEREAS, the Province of Quebec has passed legislation that grants residents of the province the right to "medical aid in dying", which means the right to have one's life ended by a physician in situations where a person is facing an incurable disease and unbearable suffering; and

WHEREAS, the legislation passed by the Quebec legislature will require all hospitals and palliative care centres to establish protocols for providing "medical aid in dying" and informing every ("dying") patient of her or his right to such aid; and

WHEREAS, the decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada and the Quebec Legislature express, and will result in, a profound cultural transformation around our understandings of life, death and human dignity, and cannot possibly be construed merely in terms of particular individuals' freedom and intention to approach death in her or his own way; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada (in 1968, 1994, 1995 and 1996) has adopted reports that powerfully and faithfully resist the logic of physician assisted death and "medical aid in dying", and

WHEREAS, the scriptural, theological and cultural analyses provided in these reports have by no means been superseded by events and cultural developments in the last twenty years; and

WHEREAS, the Holy Spirit (tethered to the Word, in Reformed theology) rarely corresponds with the Zeitgeist (the spirit of the age) but more often empowers the church to be prophetic in a counter-cultural mode; and

WHEREAS, there is profound cultural pressure to embrace and accept the logic that underwrites the recent decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada and the Quebec Legislature (which logic emphasizes the notion of absolute autonomy, the medicalization of death, and confused ideas of human dignity); and

WHEREAS, many members, friends and adherents of congregations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada may be unfamiliar with or uncertain about the church's teaching on questions of palliative care, euthanasia and physician assisted suicide;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Montreal humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to prepare, through the Committee on Church Doctrine, a concise statement and explanation of the church's teaching on palliative care, euthanasia and physician assisted death, and that this be circulated (with a covering letter from the Moderator) to each session and congregation of the denomination, via its presbyteries, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 35 – SESSION OF DUFF'S CHURCH, PUSLINCH, ONTARIO

Re: Full inclusion in the church of all persons regardless of sex orientation and gender identity

(Referred to Church Doctrine Committee and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 249, 17)

WHEREAS, it is twenty years since The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted a statement on Human Sexuality in 1994; and

WHEREAS, it has been twelve years since the 2003 reception and adoption of the report of the Special Committee re Sexual Orientation (A&P 2003, p. 526ff); and

WHEREAS, the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation's recommendation that the Life and Mission Agency and the colleges of the church continue to study questions of human sexuality was adopted in 2003; and

WHEREAS, knowledge and the study of issues of human sexuality, both scripturally and scientifically, has changed significantly over the last twenty years; and

WHEREAS, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered (LGBT) people are fully included in our Canadian society and discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibited throughout Canada in private and public sector employment, marriage, housing, services provided to the public and publicity; and

WHEREAS, ecumenical partners of The Presbyterian Church in Canada such as The Presbyterian Church (USA), The Anglican Church of Canada, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, The United Church of Canada and the Church of Scotland have developed nuanced and affirming theological positions on matters of human sexuality over this period; and

WHEREAS, more and more congregations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognize and celebrate the diversity of their membership with the inclusion of LGBT people in full participation in congregational activities and leadership; and

WHEREAS, many LGBT people within The Presbyterian Church in Canada struggle with the ambiguity of their position with the church and the lack of pastoral affirmation and hospitality they experience in light of the 1994 Report on Human Sexuality and its interpretation; and

WHEREAS, those who are living in, or who may live in a committed same sex relationship, feel called by God to serve as ordained ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, Christian organizations that used to seek to change people's sexual orientation such as Exodus International and New Direction Ministries have recognized and apologized for deep spiritual harm and psychological damage done to LGBT people by not affirming their innate sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity; and

WHEREAS, in the residential school apology we confessed the "sin of trying to change someone's fundamental nature; and

WHEREAS, the assessment of the scientific and medical communities is that largely sexual orientation and gender identity is not a matter of choice or lifestyle, but a factor in place prior to birth; and

WHEREAS, our Leading with Care Policy ensures that congregations, groups and organizations within The Presbyterian Church in Canada will ensure "a safe place for all"; and

WHEREAS, the anti-LGBT stance of the Christian church in its many worldwide forms has resulted in approval of, or collaboration in, the persecution of LGBT persons, leading to verbal, psychological and physical assaults and killings; and

WHEREAS, the teachings of Jesus require that acceptance and inclusiveness of oppressed or persecuted minorities is central to the gospel message;

THEREFORE, the Session of Duff's Church, Puslinch, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly, to affirm that The Presbyterian Church in Canada

is fully inclusive of every person regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity in all aspects of church life, calling and relationship as a matter of justice and hospitality, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington, without comment.

NO. 36 – PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN HAN-CA

Re: Establishing a Native Ministries Endowment Fund

(Referred to Assembly Council and Life and Mission Agency Committee, p. 249, 17)

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, in the Confession of 1994, has acknowledged and accepted the call to the Holy Spirit to “seek opportunities to walk with Aboriginal peoples to find healing and wholeness together as God’s people”; and

WHEREAS, the National Native Ministry Council of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, consisting of representation from all the Native ministries supported by the denomination, coordinates and supports this journey into healing and reconciliation on the front lines and at the grass roots of this calling; and

WHEREAS, the need for the appreciation of the healing programs that the seven ministries in the council are offering and want to offer is constantly growing; and

WHEREAS, the existing sources that have funded this mandated work, from church, government, and individuals, are increasingly unstable and shrinking; and

WHEREAS, the demands of energy, time, and money that are needed to raise funds for the work, at both the national and local level, drain resources away from the healing and reconciliation work itself;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Western Han-Ca humbly overtures the Venerable, the 141st General Assembly to:

1. establish a Native Ministry Endowment Fund to be invested with the Consolidated Fund of The Presbyterian Church in Canada,
2. delegate the administration of the income realized from that fund annually to the National Native Ministry Council of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for support of its ministries in healing and reconciliation,
3. direct that a tithe (10%) of all undesignated bequests to The Presbyterian Church in Canada be deposited into the Native Ministry Endowment Fund,
4. direct that a tithe (10%) of the money realized by the national church from the disposal of property within The Presbyterian Church in Canada be deposited into the Native Ministry Endowment Fund,
5. direct the Provisionaries (Planned Giving) office of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to assist the National Native Ministry in preparing materials and promoting the Native Ministry Endowment Fund as a good place to leave a legacy;

or do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

NO. 37 – SESSION OF GRACE CHURCH, ORLEANS, ONTARIO

Re: Process for a congregation leaving the denomination

(Referred to Clerks of Assembly in consultation with Trustee Board, Assembly Council, and Pension and Benefits Board, p. 249, 17)

WHEREAS, it is understood that the trustees of a local congregation hold the real property of a congregation in trust for that congregation; and

WHEREAS, the local congregation is the body which pays the mortgage, monthly bills, does the maintenance of the building and property, and over time invests all the time and energy into the maintenance of its witness in the community; and

WHEREAS, according to the current law and practice of the church upon dissolution of a congregation the real property and assets vest in the Trustee Board of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, there is no present provision whereby a congregation dissenting from a majority decision within The Presbyterian Church in Canada can withdraw from The Presbyterian Church in Canada and expect to keep its property; and

WHEREAS, the potential for legal battles over property is likely to be lengthy, costly and a poor witness to the world; and

WHEREAS, other Reformed bodies including the Presbyterian Church (USA) have made allowance for “gracious dismissal” of dissenting congregations whereby the withdrawing congregations are able to retain the title to their property and assets; and

NO. 11 – SESSION OF VALLEYVIEW, CALGARY, ALBERTA**Re: Develop a Reformed confessional hermeneutic**

(Referred to Committee on Church Doctrine, p. 246, 16)

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is united in agreement to be guided on matters pertaining to conducting meetings, the operation of its courts, and proper procedure for decision making by the Book of Forms, it, nevertheless in its confessions and procedures, has no formal guidelines adopted, such as an agreed-to Reformed confessional hermeneutic (see an example of such a confessional hermeneutic in Dr. Gordon Spykman's *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*, p. 128–133), which might create agreement, and provide guidance on matters pertaining to the interpretation and application of the scriptures; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada declares in its subordinate standard Living Faith that scripture is to be “the rule of faith and life...the standard of all doctrine by which we must test any word that comes to us from church, world or inner experience” and further, that we are to “subject to its judgment all we believe and do”; and

WHEREAS, Western culture now reflects a secular humanistic, post-modern worldview derived from Enlightenment philosophy, most noticeably in issues relating to anthropology, epistemology and soteriology, and Canadian society is following this trend; and

WHEREAS, this has resulted in the issue of human sexuality and orientation persistently presenting itself to The Presbyterian Church in Canada since 1987; and

WHEREAS, the contradictory appeals to scripture with regards to this issue, due to lack of a common Reformed confessional hermeneutic guiding The Presbyterian Church in Canada, have revealed that the scriptures cannot fully function as the only rule for faith and life in a unifying manner for our denomination; and

WHEREAS, without a common Reformed confessional hermeneutic in place, The Presbyterian Church in Canada will only experience further contradictory appeals to scripture, resulting in deep dividedness on many issues, and a regular practice of setting scripture to the side, as we make our collective decisions, define our identity in the midst of Canadian culture and outline our mission as Christ's body in the world;

THEREFORE, the Session of Valleyview Community Church, Calgary, Alberta, humbly overtures the Venerable, 142nd General Assembly to consider pausing the current discussion and study on human sexuality and orientation, and deferring any recommendations stemming from this issue, in order to focus on the development and adoption of an explicitly Reformed confessional hermeneutic, or do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted with disapproval from the Presbytery of Calgary-Macleod.

NO. 12 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW'S, PARRY SOUND, ONTARIO**Re: Policy for a congregation wishing to leave the denomination**

(Answered by Clerks of Assembly, Rec. No. 2, 2016, p. 281–83, 23, 246, 25)

WHEREAS, the issue of the role and discipline of actively homosexual persons in the church has consistently been before The Presbyterian Church in Canada since 1987; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has over the course of that time been significantly divided on various statements, studies and decisions presented to and/or approved by the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the expenditure of the resources of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in terms of time, finances, cost to relational harmony, membership and spiritual energy has been extensive; and

WHEREAS, numerous overtures have been submitted to the General Assembly related to these topics; and

WHEREAS, it appears that, whatever future decisions are made related to the issues involved, significant and damaging division will remain; and

WHEREAS, such sharp, damaging and prevailing division neither honours nor glorifies Jesus Christ nor provides vital and winsome witness to the gospel; and

WHEREAS, the spirit of the discussion and the amended motion re Lachine at the 1998 General Assembly was to allow dissenting congregations to continue independently their mission and ministry in graciousness and without significant cost, penalty nor acrimony; and

WHEREAS, there is no present provision whereby a congregation dissenting from a majority decision with The Presbyterian Church in Canada can withdraw from The Presbyterian Church in Canada and expect to retain possession of its property and assets; and

WHEREAS, legal battles over property and assets are likely to be lengthy, costly to our resources of time, gifts, talent and treasury; and

WHEREAS, such legal proceedings and the publicity resulting thereof will be a poor witness to society and to the world; and

WHEREAS, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has made allowance for “gracious dismissal” of dissenting congregations whereby congregations may withdraw and become members of other denominations in the Reformed tradition, and be able to retain the title to their property and other material assets; and

WHEREAS, the development of a gracious process to divide, dismiss or dissolve churches in consultation with their members which exercises consistency, pastoral responsibility, transparency and compassionate witness should be our desire;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew’s Church, Parry Sound, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to consider establishing a means for “gracious dismissal” of congregations which might in good conscience either be unable to continue wholeheartedly within The Presbyterian Church in Canada unless significant changes as advocated by some overtures (e.g. Overtures Nos. 4 and 23, 2015) are made, or be unable to accept the changes in doctrine or discipline as advocated by these overtures, or do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Barrie.

NO. 13 – SESSION OF ST. PAUL’S, LEASKDALE, ONTARIO

Re: Request more time for human sexuality discussion

(Referred to Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 246, 25)

WHEREAS, the resources of the *Body, Mind and Soul* study guide have been available to us for only four months; and

WHEREAS, we, the session, have read the resource and discussed it at some length but are far from feeling like we’ve had a full discussion and exchange of thoughts and experiences on the matter; and

WHEREAS, we have yet to engage our congregation in discussions on the matter at hand, nor have they had opportunity to engage the resources provided; and

WHEREAS, the resource provided could only ever, at best, be considered a partial voice to the Christian Church in the discernment process around this issue; and

WHEREAS, we acknowledge that for some this matter appears to be one of systemic tragic injustice and therefore, are pressing that the currently held position be reversed as quickly as possible even though, such a move, quick or slow, would be a complete reversal of what has been the stated orthodox Christian position for 2000 years; and

WHEREAS, the Session of St. Paul’s, Leaskdale, when faced with having to directly address this matter five years ago gave ourselves a full 12 months to discuss and study the matter simply among ourselves; and

WHEREAS, a hasty or premature decision reached before full and adequate discussion would ultimately prove unhelpful and potentially crippling to the church;

THEREFORE the Session of St. Paul’s, Leaskdale, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to provide more time, even a comprehensive schedule such as adopted by the Anglican Church of Canada, to congregations, sessions and presbyteries for study, discussion and reflection on the matter of affirming same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBT individuals to ministry of Word and sacrament or to do otherwise, as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Pickering.

NO. 14 – PRESBYTERY OF MONTREAL

Re: Indigenous spirituality and defer Native Ministries Endowment Fund

(Not received, p. 246, 25)

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been involved for many years in reflection about theological arrogance in relation to Aboriginal people in Canada, and the ways in

- concerns the provision of “permanent ongoing funding for projects that promote Indigenous healing and reconciliation, culture, language and spirituality”; and
- WHEREAS, the Assembly Council briefing notes from November 2015 intimate that No. 3 of these seven areas (taking up Nos. 48, 60 and 61 of the TRC’s Calls to Action) concerns Indigenous Spirituality explicitly, in that the churches are being called upon to “educate clergy, laity and candidates for ministry to respect in its own right, Indigenous Spirituality as ‘a valid form of worship equal to their own’”; and
- WHEREAS, this stated objective goes considerably beyond what the TRC actually calls for in No. 60, which is merely to “respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right” (“tis a consummation devoutly to be wished); and
- WHEREAS, the invitation to promote Indigenous spirituality and the invitation to teach that the Indigenous spirituality is a valid form of worship equal to our own calls into question what the scripture and our subordinate standards teach concerning Jesus Christ the only way; and
- WHEREAS, the church must be ever on guard against forms of syncretistic Christianity, in which we move beyond the inevitable and necessary reality of contextualization, toward an articulation of faith that neglects or contradicts essential elements of our faith in Christ, particularly his singular Lordship; and
- WHEREAS, the intention of Assembly Council, as suggested by the briefing notes of November 2015, is to formulate recommendations on how the church will implement TRC Calls to Action by calling on the expertise of the [Assembly Council] Executive in collaboration with Justice Ministries”; and
- WHEREAS, the theological and cultural issues at play here are beyond the mandate and resources of the Executive and Justice Ministries; and
- WHEREAS, such sensitive and profoundly important theological issues are within the purview of the Committee on Church Doctrine;
- THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Montreal humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to:
1. refer to the Committee on Church Doctrine the matter of whether Christians can accept that Indigenous Spirituality is, in its own right, a valid form of worship equal to our own, and request that the committee produce two statements offering:
 - a. a doctrinal statement outlining those areas in which appreciation of Indigenous Spirituality can be articulated from a Reformed perspective, and also the limits upon the ability of Christians to affirm Indigenous Wisdom teachings and ways which conflict with our theological affirmations,
 - b. a statement defining the worship practices which Presbyterian members, and ruling and teaching elders may participate in or lead without syncretism, and which practices must be regarded as contrary to the teaching of Christian faith, and
 2. defer any decisions about the creation of an Endowment Fund for Native Ministries until after the Committee on Church Doctrine has reported back and these matters have been decided by the Assembly,
- or to do otherwise, as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

NO. 15 – SESSION OF COTES DE NEIGES, MONTREAL, QUEBEC

Re: Extending time for human sexuality responses

(Referred to Committee on Church Doctrine and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 246, 37)

- WHEREAS, the issue of human sexuality is a complex one with great emotional charge; and
- WHEREAS, some of the new directions being proposed and discussed involve not only a change in the historic perspective on the issue of gender and human relationships, but also a significant change in the historic readings of, and approaches to the Bible; and
- WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada places great value on the local lay leadership of individual congregations entrusted to sessions of elders, and has continued to seek and to encourage the informed involvement of the laity in the governance process at all levels; and
- WHEREAS, pushing too quickly ahead to the decision making stage without the sufficient time required for the appropriate ground level discussions risks making the issue even more divisive than it already is; and
- WHEREAS, the feedback deadlines have come so quickly after the Moderator’s pastoral letters in November 2015 and January 2016, and the availability of the study guide, that many

congregations did not have a chance to engage the issue properly, much less to provide informed feedback; and

WHEREAS, it would be very difficult for the Committee on Church Doctrine and Justice Ministries, within a mere matter of weeks (between February 15 and March 15), to bring the best of their skill in an atmosphere of open discussion about what will likely be a large number of deeply thought out submissions; and

WHEREAS, it would be far better to take another year to properly receive feedback on the study guide, and to carefully craft the documents that will guide our ongoing discussions;

THEREFORE, the Session of Cote des Neiges, Montreal, Quebec, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to provide an extended opportunity for responses to the documents on human sexuality, thereby allowing individuals and congregations a longer lead time to respond, and providing the Committee on Church Doctrine and Justice Ministries the additional time required to thoughtfully do the work entrusted to them on this pivotal issue, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Montreal.

NO. 16 – SESSION OF COTES DES NEIGES, MONTREAL, QUEBEC

Re: Process for a congregation wishing to leave the denomination

(Answered by Clerks of Assembly, Rec. No. 2, 2016, p. 281–83, 23, 247, 38)

WHEREAS, any decision that is made about the issue of human sexuality, even the decision to keep the status quo, will likely place some congregations in untenable positions of having to compromise their own convictions in order to continue within The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, there is currently no provision within the policies and processes of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, whereby a congregation dissenting from a majority decision can peaceably withdraw; and

WHEREAS, we do not want any congregation to have to make the hard choice between either foregoing its convictions, or walking away from the historic buildings and resources that have become central to their ministry in their local community; and

WHEREAS, a carefully prepared process of “gracious dismissal” would help to avoid divisive legal battles and the waste of kingdom resources; and

WHEREAS, the experience of other Christian denominations has shown that a refusal of this process has great potential for marring the testimony of the body of Christ; and

WHEREAS, several Christian denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (USA) have already been able to craft workable processes for “gracious dismissal” that allow dissenting congregations to retain title to their property and assets; and

WHEREAS, with The Presbyterian Church in Canada, a precedent for something akin to “gracious dismissal” was already present in the spirit of the amended motion concerning the congregation in Lachine, that was accepted by the 1998 General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, it would likely be much more difficult to peaceably negotiate the details of a “gracious dismissal” process after the fact, once a decision about human sexuality was made; and

WHEREAS, the fear of the outcome of the discussion and of losing congregational property and assets will make it increasingly tempting for individuals to decrease their contributions at a time when they are much needed, and for congregations to slow or even to stop altogether the investment of time and resources in the maintenance of properties and buildings which they fear might be lost; and

WHEREAS, the fear of losing assets or historic property risks bringing the unhelpful intensity to the debate; and

WHEREAS, a clearly laid out process would help allay the fears of congregations who fear that theirs might be a minority position, and could keep them involved and participating in the discussion;

THEREFORE, the Session of Cote des Neiges, Montreal, Quebec, humbly overtures the Venerable, 142nd General Assembly to act quickly, even as the discussions are ongoing, to map out a process for the “gracious dismissal” of dissenting congregations, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Montreal.

denominational assets between the two resulting denominations) the resulting minority group to form a new denomination with, in such a way that neither side be disenfranchised, preserving mutual respect and good will, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Westminster.

NO. 20 – SESSION OF FIRST HUNGARIAN, VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA
Re: Congregational vote re sexual orientation and process for leaving the denomination

(Referred to Clerks of Assembly, p. 247, 38)

WHEREAS, thirteen sessions and three presbyteries made overtures to the 2015 General Assembly affirming The Presbyterian Church in Canada's current stance regarding human sexuality, as compared to three sessions and three presbyteries desiring substantial change to the current stance; and

WHEREAS, Overture No. 37, 2015 made by the Session of Grace Church, Orleans, Ontario, re process for a congregation leaving the denomination, demonstrates that some congregations will wish to leave the denomination should changes be made to church doctrine related to sexuality; and

WHEREAS, the Report on Human Sexuality that was adopted by the 1994 General Assembly and the 1998 General Assembly affirmed the polity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada involving the case with the congregation of St. Andrew's, Lachine in the Presbytery of Montreal and the 2005 General Assembly rejected the ordination of practicing homosexuals; and

WHEREAS, unanimous consensus on the issue of sexuality seems unlikely in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and change is likely to cause the loss of congregations; and

WHEREAS, in other denominations, where same sex ordination was adopted, change was followed by costly court cases and disgraceful conflict between former colleagues; and

WHEREAS, in 1925 each congregation held a congregational vote to affirm their desire to join the newly formed United Church of Canada or continue Presbyterian; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is an asset rich denomination with buildings more than adequate for all existing congregations; and

WHEREAS, a process that is likely to result in the disenfranchisement of some congregations is undesirable, being a poor witness of Christ's love to the world;

THEREFORE, the Session of First Hungarian Church, Vancouver, British Columbia, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to consider requiring every congregation to hold a congregational vote on the issue of same sex marriage or ordination, and establish a means of graciously dismissing (a process to equitably divide and/or share the denominational assets between the two resulting denominations) the resulting minority group to form a new denomination with, in such a way that neither side be disenfranchised, preserving mutual respect and good will, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Westminster.

NO. 21 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW'S, DARTMOUTH, NOVA SCOTIA

Re: Ministry and eldership of and performing marriage of those in same gender relationships

(Referred to Committee on Church Doctrine and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 247, 38)

WHEREAS, biblical scholars hold a wide variety of insights with respect to biblical interpretation; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada consists of a diversity of persons and perspectives that vary because of differing biblical interpretations; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada seeks to maintain the unity of Christ's Church in a spirit of love and mutual respect; and

WHEREAS, the Reformed tradition confesses salvation by grace alone through Christ alone, accepted by the gift of faith alone and not by any claim of human action or identity which makes some persons more acceptable than others; and

WHEREAS, many would agree with the scholar, Walter Wink, when he writes that, "The Bible only knows a love ethic which is constantly being brought to bear on whatever sexual mores are dominant in a given country, culture and/or period"; and

WHEREAS, those living in, or who may live in a faithful, committed same gender relationship, may feel called by God to serve as an elder or ordained minister in The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, the teachings of Jesus emphasize the acceptance and inclusiveness for oppressed and persecuted minorities;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew's, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to seek a means whereby presbyteries and sessions may be permitted to consider for certification for the ministry of Word and sacrament or the diaconate or for election as ruling elders persons who are in committed, faithful relationships with persons of the same gender and further to empower sessions to grant permission for the celebration of marriage of persons of the same gender who are under their pastoral care, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Halifax and Lunenburg.

NO. 22 – SESSION OF WESTMINSTER-ST. PAUL'S, GUELPH, ONTARIO

Re: Preparing a statement on Indigenous Spirituality

(Not received, p. 247, 38)

WHEREAS, God is revealed in scripture as the one God, beside whom is no other, and demands from the people of faith their exclusive worship (Exodus 20:1–6, Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 40:25, 45:18, I Corinthians 8:4–6); and

WHEREAS, the temptation to syncretize the faith with other faiths is a perennial one for God's people, described throughout the scriptures, together with the serious consequences this incurs (Leviticus 10:1–2, Deuteronomy 6:10–15, I Kings 19:15–18, II Kings 17:7–17, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, I Corinthians 10:14–22; Revelation 14:9–11); and

WHEREAS, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and the salvation of God provided to us through the reconciling ministry of Jesus is held in scripture to be unique (John 6:53–68, John 14:6, Acts 4:10–12, Colosians 1:15–23, Hebrews 1:1–4); and

WHEREAS, the subordinate standards of our church enshrine this understanding of the uniqueness of God and of Jesus: eg. "There is one true God whom to know is life eternal, whom to serve is joy and peace. God has created all that is (Living Faith 1.1). Jesus is the Mediator through whom God has come to us and through whom we come to God (Living Faith 3.4.1). Salvation comes from God's grace alone received through faith in Christ (Living Faith 3.6.1). Faith is...trust in God, involves personal repentance of sin, acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and commitment to him as Lord. It includes assent to the truth of the gospel (Living Faith 6.1.1)", (see also Westminster Confession of Faith II.1–2, VIII.2, XXI.1, 2 and 6); and

WHEREAS, the pluralistic religious context in which we live, and our recognition of the manifold evidences of the common grace of God in peoples of other faiths and of none, by no means detract from the fact we are "compelled" to bear witness to Christ, as it says in our subordinate standard Living Faith, "Some whom we encounter belong to other religions and already have a faith...We recognize that truth and goodness in them are the work of God's Spirit, the author of all truth. We should not address others in a spirit of arrogance...[Yet] we witness to God in Christ as the Way, the Truth, the Life, and invite others to accept from him the forgiveness of God. We are compelled to share this good news" (Living Faith 9.2.1–2); and

WHEREAS, the 2008 General Assembly dealt with a recommendation from the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee which proposed that the prayer of Overture No. 3, 2008 requesting reaffirmation of "the exclusiveness and uniqueness of the saving work of Christ" be not granted (A&P 2008, p. 260) by adopting this amended motion instead: "That in the interests of clarity the Assembly affirm its commitment to the doctrine of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ" and that this be the answer to Overture Nos. 3, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 20, 2008, (A&P 2008, p. 22); and

WHEREAS, the 2015 General Assembly dealt with a recommendation from the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee which proposed that the committee's terms of reference be changed to add the words: "to encourage Presbyterians to acknowledge, understand and appreciate other faith traditions..." (A&P 2008, p. 287) by adopting the amended wording "to acknowledge, understand and appreciate the strengths of other faith traditions..." (A&P 2015, p. 28) after a debate which highlighted the great lack of

WHEREAS, institutional chaplaincy is the only recognized category of ministry within which an ordained minister of The Presbyterian Church in Canada who otherwise would be entitled to sit as a member of a presbytery cannot be placed on the constituent roll of the presbytery without the approval of a denominational committee;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of East Toronto humbly overtures the Venerable, the 143rd General Assembly to revise section 176.1 of the Book of Forms to allow ordained ministers serving as institutional chaplains to be treated in the same way as all other ordained ministers who serve in agencies not directly responsible to The Presbyterian Church in Canada, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

NO. 6 – SESSION OF INNERKIP, INNERKIP, ONTARIO

Re: Legislation re congregations wishing to leave the denomination

(Referred to Committee on Church Doctrine in consultation with Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 540–41, 38)

WHEREAS, scripture brings instances where partners in the gospel who have served the Lord with great effect experienced a “sharp disagreement that they parted company” (Acts 15:39) to serve in distinct and separate ways; and

WHEREAS, there are lessons from history relevant in facing present challenges to the unity of the church amid the current divergence of conviction on matters of the church’s understanding of scriptural authority and interpretation pertaining to issues of human sexuality and the bearing of such issues on practices surrounding marriage and ministry; and

WHEREAS, within the history of The Presbyterian Church in Canada there are precedents of both union (1875) and disruption (1925) among the visible church; and

WHEREAS, it would be ironic if a denomination that largely owes its very existence to non-concurring congregations in 1925 being able to keep their buildings, would then say to current non-concurring congregations in the present disputes that they are not able to keep their buildings; and

WHEREAS, the history of The Presbyterian Church in Canada around 1925 informs us that deep scars of bitterness, anger and factions existed for many decades following 1925, which should inform us that there is a better way to agree to disagree with more amicable terms which would honour the reputation of Christ and his gospel, rather than going down the road of protracted litigation, repeating the failures of our history; and

WHEREAS, we are called as Christians in such circumstances to be gracious and loving rather than litigious and unloving, while affirming the spiritual unity of the one invisible and universal church which is the body of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, congregations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada are collectively the employer of the Pension Plan, and the potential of an exodus of large numbers of congregations leaving the denomination may put the plan in jeopardy, there would need to be established a just and fair compensation to the Pension Plan in the event that a congregation would leave the denomination, or consideration of a separate multi-employer pension plan; and

WHEREAS, the United Church of Canada is currently restructuring in a manner that will require an Act of Parliament and Acts in the Provincial Legislatures to be implemented, it is apparent that changes to the rules around our own Trustee Board are not insurmountable; and

WHEREAS, there are several denominations that have made amendments to the Acts of Parliament related to them in the last 15 years, it appears that such amendments are not prohibitive to The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, the answer provided to Overture No. 7, 2015 and Nos. 4, 5 and 7, 2016 re “gracious departure” found in the 2016 A&P, pages 281ff failed to address many of the concerns cited in those overtures.

WHEREAS, the development of a gracious dismissal process to divide, dismiss or dissolve churches in consultation with their members which exercise consistency, pastoral responsibility, transparency and compassionate witness should be our desire;

THEREFORE, the Session of Innerkip Church, Innerkip, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 143rd General Assembly to (a) commission a study to draw from ecclesiastical and civil history and law both Canadian and otherwise insights which would aid in enabling the church, should present differences prove irreconcilable, to part company in a gracious and charitable manner, ensuring that the larger part of resources of time, talent, and treasure would be devoted to enabling all professing believers to further

the fulfillment of the great commission, rather than expended and squandered on attempting to reconcile sharply divergent understandings of scriptural authority and interpretation pertaining to issues of human sexuality which bear on practices affecting marriage and ministry; and (b) call for the drafting of such legislation ecclesiastical and civil as may be required to effect a gracious and charitable separation should such become sadly necessary, or to do otherwise, as the General Assembly in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Paris.

NO. 7 – SESSION OF ARABIC, MONTREAL, QUEBEC

Re: To table amendments on same sex marriage for ten years

(Referred to Committee on Church Doctrine in consultation with Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 540, 14)

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has spoken thoughtfully, faithfully and pastorally on matters of human sexuality in its 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality (A&P 1994); and
 WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted Living Faith as a subordinate standard in 1998, which defines marriage as a “union in Christ” between “a man and a woman” (in continuity with the Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in 1875 and 1889) and in confirmation of the Statement on Human Sexuality (A&P 1998); and
 WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a part of the Reformed churches, which as a whole do not accept or recognize same sex marriage; and
 WHEREAS, the understanding of a family as per the Book of Genesis is between a man and a woman represented by Adam and Eve; and
 WHEREAS, the Book of Genesis mentions that the Lord created man and woman to multiply and fill the land and that is the only image and example of a family in the eyes of God; and
 WHEREAS, there is no biblical reference whatsoever to indicate that same sex relation is permitted or accepted, even as an exception; and
 WHEREAS, the church is the place to receive all people: faithful and sinners; we have to accept everyone regardless of his/her situation; we must contain all but not accept their behaviour, we love the sinners but hate and condemn the sin; and
 WHEREAS, the other Arabic speaking churches, that is, the Orthodox and Catholic churches, strongly oppose same sex marriage; and
 WHEREAS, we as an Arabic congregation strongly oppose same sex marriage, we cannot accept it: biblically, culturally or socially; such a move will have an extremely negative impact on our congregation that we are not prepared to accept; and
 WHEREAS, this issue will have a severe impact on the unity of the Presbyterian Church and could mean the end of The Presbyterian Church in Canada as we know it presently;
 THEREFORE, the Session of the Arabic Church, Montreal, Quebec, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 143rd General Assembly, to table the proposed amendments for a period of ten years in order to maintain the unity and continuity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, or do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Montreal.

NO. 8 – PRESBYTERY OF WINNIPEG

Re: Housing allowance benefit for non-ordained church workers

(Referred to Assembly Council in consultation with Life and Mission Agency Committee (Canadian Ministries, Ministry and Church Vocations) and Financial Services, p. 220, 14)

WHEREAS, there are persons who are not ordained as ministers of Word and Sacraments serving congregations and missions of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in roles which have “traditionally” been held by ministers of Word and Sacraments, and the number of such non-ordained persons fulfilling “traditionally” ordained roles is expected to rise; and
 WHEREAS, these persons are functioning in ministerial roles with ability and grace; and
 WHEREAS, the advice given by the Financial Services department of the Presbyterian Church offices is to not ask the Canadian Revenue Agency to recognize these non-ordained persons as “ministers” for tax purposes; and
 WHEREAS, that than means these persons do not benefit from the clergy housing tax deduction, meaning these persons are required to pay taxes on the housing portion of their stipend or on the fair rental value of the manse in which they live; and