

RAINBOW COMMUNION – SPECIAL COMMITTEE RE LISTENING (LGBTQI PEOPLE)

To the Venerable, the 145th General Assembly:

BACKGROUND AND MANDATE

Rainbow Communion is the Special Committee re Listening (LGBTQI People) established by the 2017 General Assembly. The name reflects the mission and mandate of the committee. Communion is central to our life as Christians and in a broader sense reflects the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level. Rainbow as a symbol of God's promise, has its origin in the biblical covenant with Noah and his family. It is also a term or symbol often used to represent the inclusion of the full diversity of people and emphasizing the inclusion of persons who identify as sexual and/or gender minorities.

The committee has found that it is often important to share what it is not as there are those who have made erroneous assumptions about the role and mandate of Rainbow Communion:

- Rainbow Communion is not a group that is mandated to discern the question of LGBTQI inclusion in the church.
- Rainbow Communion is not a counselling team.
- Rainbow Communion is not a place to access resources.
- Rainbow Communion is not a lobby group.

The work of Rainbow Communion is led by:

1. The Holy Spirit.
2. The terms of reference as determined by General Assembly.

The committee's origin can be found in a section of the joint report of the Committee on Church Doctrine (CDC) and the Life and Mission Agency (LMA) entitled "Responding to 1994 Call to Repent of Homophobia". This in turn grew out of a recommendation in the 1994 Report on Human Sexuality that called on The Presbyterian Church in Canada to repent of homophobia and hypocrisy by establishing a special committee with specific terms of reference. The General Assembly in 2017 agreed to establish this special committee with terms of reference that were subsequently amended at the General Assembly in 2018 and currently state:

1. The special committee shall create a safe and respectful environment in which confidentiality is assured, in order to encourage LGBTQI people and others:
 - a. to tell their stories of harm done to LGBTQI people and others within and by the church; and
 - b. to share their stories of God's grace experienced by and Christian ministry performed by LGBTQI people and others, even in the midst of the challenges they have faced.
2. The special committee shall invite LGBTQI people and others to submit their stories orally or in writing. Stories will be included in the committee's report to a future General Assembly with permission of those who have shared.
3. The special committee shall make use of relevant documents of the church, including but not limited to:
 - a. the 1994 Human Sexuality Report;
 - b. Body, Mind and Soul study document and the individual responses received by the Life and Mission Agency and the Committee on Church Doctrine to it; and
 - c. any other such documents as the committee may deem relevant.
4. The special committee shall recommend an appropriate response to the issues of homophobia, hypocrisy, heterosexism and transphobia within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.
5. The special committee shall recommend concrete actions addressing homophobia, hypocrisy, heterosexism and transphobia to the General Assembly for implementation within the church.
6. The special committee shall report its progress at each upcoming General Assembly, with a final report by or before the 2020 General Assembly.
7. The special committee shall be made up of seven members drawn from across the church. The special committee shall be reflective of the ethnic diversity of the denomination and shall include at least two members of the LGBTQI community.

8. The Assembly Council shall be instructed to support the special committee with an appropriate budget and appropriate document support.

The committee discerned that serving on the committee or participating in the Rainbow Communion Listening Process could result in being outed and would have put people under the discipline of The Presbyterian Church in Canada at risk of censure. At the 2018 General Assembly, Rainbow Communion brought forward a recommendation, that was subsequently approved, that those who are subject to the discipline of The Presbyterian Church in Canada who accept the invitation to serve on the Special LGBTQI Listening Committee or who accept the invitation to tell their stories of harm done or grace experienced, even in the midst the challenges they have faced because of homophobia, hypocrisy, heterosexism or transphobia in the church, would have potential censure with respect to The Presbyterian Church in Canada's stance on same-sex relationships suspended indefinitely in order to allow them to participate freely and honestly in the work of the Special LGBTQI Listening Committee. A Letter of Certification is provided to storytellers as well as those who have served on the committee or are deputized listeners in Rainbow Communion Listening Spaces. A record of those who have received the letter is kept with Rainbow Communion.

MEMBERSHIP

In 2017, members of the special committee were named by the Assembly on nomination of the Moderator and included:

The Rev. Dr. Bob Faris and Ms. Sue Senior (co-conveners), the Rev. Dr. Tim Archibald, the Rev. Joseph Bae, the Rev. Dr. Jean Morris, Ms. Sydney O'Brien, Ms. Bassma Younan. When the Rev. Dr. Tim Archibald moved to Calgary in July 2018 to take up a call to be the senior minister at St. Andrew's Church, Rainbow Communion was left with no representative from Atlantic Canada. Tim offered his resignation from the committee but agreed to remain as a deputized listener. In November 2018, the Rev. Michael Veenema from Canning, Nova Scotia, agreed to serve on the committee.

THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

Over the past year, the committee had two face-to-face meetings, two teleconferences and one videoconference. Members of the committee responded to invitations to make presentations about the work of Rainbow Communion to national church committees, synods, presbyteries, sessions, congregational committees, Canada Youth and church camps. The committee has also begun the process of gathering and examining the considerable documentation from the General Assembly office from previous relevant studies and reports.

The primary focus of the committee's work this year has been to create safe and respectful spaces wherein people's stories have been shared through face-to-face meetings, written submissions (letters or emails), video conferences and by phone. We have ensured that the stories are recorded and kept according to the written expressed wishes of the storytellers.

CLARIFYING TERMINOLOGY AND VOCABULARY

Over the past two years in conversations, communications and during listening, the committee has recognized that there is a need for clarity around terminology related to gender identity, sexual orientation or attraction and related topics. A list that includes vocabulary that appears in the terms of reference of the committee as well as other phrases that are significant to this work is provided below. It is important to note that the terms of reference specifically employ the use of the acronym LGBTQI which has been adopted by The Presbyterian Church in Canada to refer to gender and sexual minorities. As with all terminology, there are a variety of definitions that can be found and these terms continue to evolve.

THE LISTENING PROCESS

The committee wishes to thank all those who have graciously and generously shared their stories and have put their trust in the process established by Rainbow Communion so that the church may better identify and understand its homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy and continue to work towards healing and reconciliation in the future. Many storytellers have referenced the Moderator's Letter of Repentance written in February 2018 to have been an encouragement to tell their stories and have found great hope in it as a starting point to build toward an honest, just and welcoming relationship with LGBTQI people in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

These stories are at the heart of the mandate of Rainbow Communion and the call of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to repent of its homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy. We have heard stories from coast to

coast, from people ranging in age from youth to seniors, from different ethnicities, and representing a spectrum of gender and sexual identities.

The sharing usually occurs face-to-face but also has happened by video, by phone and in written form by letter or email. When the sharing is face-to-face, two listeners will meet with the person who is telling their story. At least one of the listeners is always a member of Rainbow Communion and the second may be a deputized listener, invited and trained by the committee. All listeners are required to complete police reference checks and are bound by a Covenant of Care adhering to the Leading with Care Policy. All listeners, together with the storytellers, must also sign a listening covenant at the time of the sharing. The storyteller is welcome, and even encouraged, to bring a companion who might be emotionally and/or spiritually supportive and with whom the storyteller can debrief afterwards.

Storytellers are encouraged to consider a few prompting questions before preparing their story to share. These include open-ended questions such as:

- What would you like to tell us about your experience within The Presbyterian Church in Canada as it relates to homophobia/transphobia/heterosexism/hypocrisy?
- How does it feel to consider God's call to serve knowing the church's stance on same-sex relationships?
- Why do you feel it is important for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to hear your story at this time?
- If seeking reconciliation, what form might it take?
- How do you define and think of homophobia/transphobia/heterosexism/hypocrisy and do you have any suggestions on what the church could do to address it?
- We also ask if people have sufficient support as they leave the conversation.

With the storyteller's consent, the conversation is audio recorded and stored on a secure server and then transcribed. These audio recordings and other stories will be used by the committee to help form the basis of its final report. Then these stories will be stored and eventually archived according to the wishes of the storyteller. The storyteller can withdraw or revise their consent at any time before the final report is published.

The full listening process, including the Rights of the Storyteller, is available in the Welcome and Consent brochure available on-line at presbyterian.ca/listening or in hard copy.

Those who wish to share their stories and have contacted Rainbow Communion by June 15, 2019, will have their stories heard and included.

EMERGING THEMES

Gratitude

Something we have heard often is the gratitude people feel toward The Presbyterian Church in Canada for creating the space to allow them to tell their stories. Many people have felt that their stories needed to remain hidden. For people who maintain a deep commitment to the church and its gospel message, they have believed that telling their stories would compromise their place in the church. This has led to years and decades of deep pain and hurt. For many people the listening process has provided a first step to being able to tell their story and to begin a new relationship with others in the church. For others who have felt the need to leave the church because of the depth of brokenness of the relationship created by homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and/or hypocrisy, this listening process has allowed them to have a place to tell their story where they believe the church is listening.

The Importance and Pain of Church Community

We have been struck by the depth of commitment to the church of many of those who are telling their stories. For many, the church is their primary community, a community of friends who are followers of Jesus. There is a sense of belonging, but also a longing to be able to be honest and open with these friends. For some people, the church has been their home and the home of their families for generations. There is a deep fear that to be honest and open about one's own identity would break these bonds and the pain would be too much to bear. This has sometimes led to self-destructive behaviour including substance abuse, self-harm and even to contemplating or actually taking one's own life.

Trauma and Barriers to Healing

We have also heard that this fear and pain impacts a whole network of people. Spouses, children, parents, other family members, friends, fellow church members, and members of the wider community are impacted by this brokenness.

Some people are afraid to reach out to or support LGBTQI people for fear of the stigma attached to being labelled as LGBTQI. Others have experienced harm and ridicule when they have been mistaken to be LGBTQI. Of grave concern is that some LGBTQI people have been deeply traumatized by attempts to change their orientation through so-called conversion or reparative therapy and that these programs are still being recommended and are seen by some to be a helpful pastoral response to LGBTQI people in the church.

This has created a context in which we cannot reach out pastorally to one another because of fear, suspicion, rejection, trauma and/or hatred. In this context it has been difficult to know how to offer pastoral support and welcome to LGBTQI people and it has been difficult – if not impossible – for LGBTQI people to know how to offer their gifts and participate fully in the life of the community.

NEXT STEPS

In the coming year, we will continue to reflect on the stories that we have received. In fulfillment of the committee's mandate we will bring recommendations to the General Assembly in 2020 for concrete actions addressing homophobia, hypocrisy, heterosexism and transphobia for implementation within the church. However, as people have found the courage to tell their stories it has become clear that the need for rebuilding broken communities and relationships and to respond pastorally to those who have been harmed cannot wait for another year. It is evident that steps need to be taken now to create more welcoming and respectful spaces within congregations and other parts of the church so that all are able to tell their stories without fear and everyone can begin to walk in a more honest and pastoral way with one another.

Recommendation No. 1 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods and other bodies of the church be urged to give public expression to the Moderator's Letter of Repentance and to seek ways to live out that repentance for harm done, and that continues to be done, to LGBTQI people and others as a result of homophobia, hypocrisy, transphobia and heterosexism in The Presbyterian Church in Canada including developing discussion spaces with leadership drawn from a diversity of people.

Recommendation No. 2 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That the Life and Mission Agency develop and gather resources to strengthen our ability to provide appropriate support to congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods and other bodies of the church in developing models of pastoral care that recognize the gifts of all and encourage mutual support and care for those who have been harmed by homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy.

The report on Human Sexuality, Committee on Church Doctrine, 1994 concluded that:

- The implications of this report for pastoral care are far-reaching and deserve much more careful consultation and consideration than your committee has been able to give them. No Christian position on human sexuality can be considered definitive until such implications have been carefully and prayerfully thought through.
- In 2003 The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirmed that homosexual orientation is not a sin (A&P 2003, p. 526–47, 26, 34, 37–41, 43–45) and that studies have not revealed any scriptural, scientific or pastoral basis or justification for programs to change a person's sexual orientation (A&P 2003, p. 526–47, 26, 34, 37–41, 43–45).

Rainbow Communion was formed as a further step in responding pastorally by listening to the stories of those harmed. As stated above, of particular concern has been hearing of the painful and long-lasting trauma inflicted on those who were counselled to seek conversion or reparative therapy.

Recommendation No. 3 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada reaffirm its statements that homosexual orientation is not a sin and that studies have not revealed any scriptural, scientific or pastoral basis or justification for programs to change a person's sexual orientation and therefore acknowledge that any form of conversion or reparative therapy is not a helpful or appropriate pastoral response to those who identify as LGBTQI.

VOCABULARY FOUND IN THE TERMS OF REFERENCE:

LGBTQI

An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning or intersex.

Lesbian

Refers to a woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determine orientation.

Gay

The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, lesbian is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the term gay to describe themselves. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determine orientation.

Bisexual

A person who experiences attraction to both men and women. Some bisexual people use this term to express attraction to both their own sex and/or gender, as well as to people of a different sex and/or gender.

Transgender

A person who does not identify either fully or in part with the gender associated with the sex assigned to them at birth – often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions. Transgender has its origin in the Latin-derived prefix trans-, meaning “across from” or “on the other side of”. which is the opposite of cis, meaning “on this side of”. In the case of gender, trans- describes that the gender identity is not aligned with the assigned sex.

This is a broad term that can reflect a spectrum of experiences. Many transgender individuals take steps to express their gender identity by changing their style of dress and mannerisms, taking hormone therapy, and/or undergoing gender-affirmation surgery. However, the extent to which they do, if at all, is a personal decision unique to the individual.

The Trans Umbrella

The term trans is frequently used as an umbrella term for a variety of other terms, including transgender and transsexual and can also refer to terms like genderqueer, agender, bigender, Two Spirit, etc.

The reality is that for many people their experience of their own gender identity may not align with social expectations based on the sex assigned to them at birth, nor with any gender options available within a binary system.

Queer/Questioning

Queer

A term used by some people to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, queer is still sometimes disliked by LGBTQI individuals.

Questioning

Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

Intersex/differences of sexual development (DSD)

Refers to individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from hormonal, chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. Medical professionals often assign a gender to the individual and proceed to perform surgeries to ‘align’ their physical appearance with typical male or female sex

characteristics beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child is able to give informed consent. Formerly the medical terms hermaphrodite and pseudo-hermaphrodite were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate. Some intersex people identify with their assigned sex, while others do not, and some choose to identify as intersex. Intersex people may or may not identify as trans or transgender.

Homophobia

Fear and/or hatred of lesbian or gay individuals, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination or acts of violence towards anyone who is lesbian or gay. In other words, any aversion to those that are not heterosexual.

Transphobia

Fear and/or hatred of transgender individuals, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination or acts of violence towards anyone who is or is assumed to be transgender, thought to be transgender, or whose gender expression doesn't conform to traditional gender roles.

Heterosexism is the assumption that heterosexuality is the social and cultural norm as well as the prejudiced belief that heterosexuals, or "straight" people, are socially and culturally superior to LGBTQI people. Heterosexism is the systemic bias which favours heterosexuals and heterosexuality. It stems from the idea that male and female roles, thoughts and expressions are separate and distinct. A common example of heterosexism is assuming that everyone is straight.

Hypocrisy

Behaviour that contradicts what an individual or group claims to believe or feel.

ADDITIONAL VOCABULARY ARISING FROM STORIES SHARED**Ally**

An ally is someone who believes in the dignity and respect of all people and takes action by supporting and/or advocating with groups experiencing social injustice.

Asexual

Refers to an individual who does not experience sexual attraction. There is considerable diversity among asexual people; each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy or sexual abstinence, which are chosen behaviours, in that asexuality is a sexual orientation that does not necessarily entail either of those behaviours.

Attraction

Often referred to as sexual orientation, this classifies a person's potential for emotional, intellectual, spiritual, intimate, romantic, and/or sexual interest in other people, often based on their sex and/or gender. Attraction may form the basis for aspects of one's identity and/or behaviour.

Biological Sex

Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that define if a person is male, female, or intersex. Based on one's biological characteristics including: chromosomes, genes, hormones, internal and external sex organs, and secondary sex characteristics. Infants are assigned a sex at birth based on their perceived traits. Sex is often conflated or interchanged with the word gender, which is more social than biological, though there is some overlap.

Biphobia

Fear and/or hatred of bisexuality, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination or acts of violence towards anyone who is or is assumed to be bisexual or experiences attraction to multiple sexes and/or genders can be the target of biphobia. Bisexual people face a number of false stereotypes and misunderstanding from those who do not identify as bisexual such as: are promiscuous, are unable to remain monogamous or must be with both male and female partners simultaneously.

In addition, bisexuality is often misunderstood as a phase or a confused state, with the expectation that a bisexual person will come out as “truly” gay or straight at a later point. Bisexual people are often told to “choose one” gender.

Cisgender

Refers to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. Without access to the word cisgender, people have often resorted to language like “real/normal men and women”. Cisgender has its origin in the Latin-derived prefix cis-, meaning “on this side of”, which means the opposite of trans-, meaning “across from” or “on the other side of”. In the case of gender, cis- describes the alignment of gender identity with assigned sex.

Closeted

Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming out

For most people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex, the process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one’s life, and the sharing of the information with others. Sometimes referred to as disclosing by transgender individuals. Coming out can also apply to the family and friends of LGBTQI youth or adults when they reveal to others their connection to an LGBTQI person. There are many different degrees of being out: Some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves.

Conversion or reparative therapy

Conversion therapy, or reparative therapy refers to the pseudoscientific practice that attempts to change the sexual orientation of bisexual, gay and lesbian individuals to heterosexual using psychological or spiritual interventions.

The Canadian Psychological Association opposes any therapy with the goal of repairing or converting an individual’s sexual orientation, regardless of age. Scientific research does not support the efficacy of conversion or reparative therapy. Conversion or reparative therapy can result in negative outcomes such as distress, anxiety, depression, negative self-image, a feeling of personal failure, difficulty sustaining relationships, and sexual dysfunction. There is no evidence that the negative effects of conversion or reparative therapy counterbalance any distress caused by the social stigma and prejudice these individuals may experience.

Gender

A set of social, psychological, and/or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as man, woman, a mixture of both, or neither.

Gender binary

The concept that there are only two genders, man and woman, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies the assumption that gender is biologically determined. Does not take into account intersex individuals.

Gender identity

One’s deeply held core sense of being a girl/woman, boy/man, some of both, or neither. One’s gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old.

Heterosexual

A person who experiences attraction to people of a different sex and/or gender. Also referred to as “straight”.

Homosexual

An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the generally preferred terms, gay, lesbian or queer.

Intersectionality

A lens of analysis of social relations and structures within a given society. The concept of intersectionality recognizes how each person simultaneously exists within multiple and overlapping identity categories (including but not limited to: ability, attraction, body size, citizenship, class, creed, ethnicity, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion). The ways in which an individual experiences systemic privilege and oppression are impacted by the interplay of these identity categories, depending on how they are valued by social institutions.

Lifestyle

A term often used negatively to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQI that makes assumptions about the way in which LGBTQI individuals live differs significantly from the rest of society.

Out

Generally describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQI in their private, public, and/or professional lives. Sometimes, individuals are outed by others who they may have already come out to. Outing an LGBTQI person without their consent is disrespectful and potentially dangerous for the LGBTQI individual. Some people who are transgender prefer to use the term disclose.

Preferred Gender Pronouns

A preferred gender pronoun, or PGP – sometimes called proper gender pronoun – is the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual personally uses and would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. In English, the third person singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, so some individuals may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. In English, individuals use they and their as gender-neutral singular pronouns. Others use ze (sometimes spelled zie) and hir or the pronouns xe and xer.

Sexual orientation

Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. While sexual behaviour involves the choices one makes in acting on one's sexual orientation, sexual orientation is part of the human condition. One's sexual activity does not define one's sexual orientation; typically, it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Straight

See “heterosexual”

Two Spirit

An English umbrella term that reflects the many words used in different Indigenous languages to affirm the interrelatedness of multiple aspects of identity – including gender, sexuality, community, culture and spirituality. Two Spirit people were often accorded special status based upon their unique abilities to understand and move between masculine and feminine perspectives, acting as visionaries, healers and medicine people. Some Indigenous people identify as Two Spirit rather than, or in addition to, identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.

Sources

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