

SPECIAL COMMITTEE RE LISTENING (LGBTQI PEOPLE)

PURPOSE

The General Assembly in 2018 established the Special Committee re Listening (LGBTQI People) upon the recommendation arising from the work of the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency Committee in preparing to respond to the overtures regarding sexuality.

The special committee, over the next few years, is to create a safe and respectful environment in which confidentiality is assured in order to encourage LGBTQI people to tell their stories of harm done to them and to share their stories of God's grace experienced by them. Each year the committee is to report to the General Assembly with a final report being presented by 2020.

REPORT SUMMARY

The Special Committee re Listening (LGBTQI People) through a time of discernment selected a name that would be welcoming and to reflect its mandate and purpose. It chose "Rainbow Communion". This year the committee has met to plan its work and to prepare the Listening Process. It is recommending revisions to two sections of its terms of reference. It is making arrangements to hear people who wish to share these experiences of harm from May 2018–June 2019.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Terms of Reference (p. 295–97)

There are two revisions to the special committee's terms of reference that are being proposed. The first change notes that relatives, friends, co-workers, members of congregation, ecumenical colleagues and others may also have stories to share with the committee. The second recommendation is asking that the issues of hypocrisy, heterosexism and transphobia be added along with the issue of homophobia as the special committee prepares a response on these issues for the church.

Recommendation No. 1

That the terms of reference of the Special Committee re LGBTQI People and The Presbyterian Church in Canada be modified to read as:

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.

Recommendation No. 2

That the terms of reference of the Special Committee re LGBTQI People and The Presbyterian Church in Canada be modified to read as:

4. The Special Committee shall provide an appropriate response to the issues of homophobia, hypocrisy, heterosexism and transphobia within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Understanding Fear and the Threat of Censure (p. 297)

For the LGBTQI members of the committee, their acceptance of the invitation to serve, and to ensure that the committee's demographic requirements were met, meant that they put themselves at risk of censure as they self-identify. The climate in the church to date has been one of "don't ask – don't tell", but with the establishment of this special committee it is now asking LGBTQI people to tell their story and an opportunity is provided to reveal their identity. For this reason, the Rainbow Communion is recommending that for those who serve on the committee and those who come to tell their stories, censure and discipline with respect to The Presbyterian Church in Canada's stance on homosexuality would be suspended indefinitely.

Recommendation No. 3

That those who are subject to the discipline of The Presbyterian Church in Canada who accepted the invitation to serve on the Special Committee re Listening (LGBTQI People) 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 committee.

Listening Process (p. 298–99)

The Rainbow Communion has developed a listening process whereby those who graciously offer to speak with the Rainbow Communion will be able to do so by whatever means is best for the storyteller. A safe and respectful environment will be created whereby the stories are received through face-to-face meetings, written submissions (letter or email), video conference or by phone. Stories that are recorded and kept will be done only with the express consent of the individual. The storyteller(s) will determine the method of recording such as video recording, audio recording or note-taking by the listeners. There may be those who do not wish to have a record of their story kept, but simply need a space to be heard. Where consent for the keeping of records is provided, the Rainbow Communion will maintain a secure and confidential database of the number of storytellers, demographic data (age range and province) and the content of the stories. The location for the listening space will be determined in consultation with the storytellers according to what they would consider to be a safe, welcoming and respectful space.

The Rainbow Communion will be collecting stories from May 15, 2018 to June 15, 2019.

Recommendation No. 4

That individuals and groups be encouraged to tell their stories of harm done by homophobia, hypocrisy, heterosexism and transphobia, and to share stories of grace received in the midst of challenges in The Presbyterian Church in Canada through the listening process developed by the Rainbow Communion until June 15, 2019.

Robert Faris and Sue Senior
Co-Conveners