July 26, 2019

TO: Clerks of Synods
FROM: Stephen Kendall, Principal Clerk
RE: 2019 General Assembly Referrals

Dear Clerks of Synods,

Please find below, the General Assembly referrals for your attention and action. Electronic copies of the referrals letters and the documents noted for study and report are available online at presbyterian.ca/referrals.

1. STUDY AND REPORT

1.1 Life and Mission Agency Committee, Recommendation No. 7 (A&P 2019, p. 320, adopted, p. 14)
That the proposed policy and procedures for addressing harassment in the church be sent to sessions, ministry boards, presbyteries, synods, camps, colleges and standing committees for study and report to the Life and Mission Agency by February 15, 2020.

The proposed policy is found at A&P 2019, p. 316–20 and at presbyterian.ca/referrals.

2. INFORMATION/ACTION

2.1 Committee to Advise with the Moderator, Recommendation No. 3 (A&P 2019, p. 201, adopted, p. 12)
That the thanks of the Assembly be extended to the congregations, individuals, presbyteries, synods, organizations and international and ecumenical partners who warmly welcomed and graciously offered hospitality to the Rev. Daniel Cho.

2.2 Assembly Council, Recommendation No. 1 (A&P 2019, p. 204, adopted, p. 33)
That congregations, presbyteries, colleges and committees of the church be commended for the ways they have engaged with the strategic plan and be encouraged to continue with its use.

2.3 Assembly Council, Recommendation No. 2 (A&P 2019, p. 205, adopted, p. 33)
That all church courts be encouraged to have their official records (especially session minutes and church registers) copied to microfilm for security and preservation purposes and digitized if desired, by contacting the Archives.

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius.

The report on repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery is found at A&P 2019, p. 368–77 and at presbyterian.ca/referrals.

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That The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirms that all doctrines, policies and practices based on or advocating for superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust.

The report on repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery is found at A&P 2019, p. 368–77 and at presbyterian.ca/referrals.

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada seek to engage in relationships with Indigenous peoples that reflect the principles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the basis for right relationships.

The report on repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery is found at A&P 2019, p. 368–77 and at presbyterian.ca/referrals.

That members and courts be encouraged to study the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius in order to understand the contemporary ramifications of concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples in Canada, including how this is reflected in The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s mission and ministry with Indigenous people.

The report on repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery is found at A&P 2019, p. 368–77 and at presbyterian.ca/referrals.

2.8 Special Committee re Listening, Recommendation No. 1 (A&P 2019, p. 486, adopted, p. 19)
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.

2.9 Special Committee re Listening, Recommendation No. 3 (A&P 2019, p. 486, adopted, p. 46)
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.

3. LEGISLATION
3.1 Remits A, B and C (2018) were approved and the Book of Forms has been amended as follows:

3.1.1 Remit A: Book of Forms section 176.1.10 regarding equalizing ministers:
176.1.10 Equalizing ministers: Where there are more elders than ministers on the constituent roll of a presbytery, the presbytery may, on an annual basis, add to the constituent roll ministers from the appendix to the roll, who are serving as interim moderators, to act as equalizing ministers.

3.1.2 Remit B: Book of Forms section 252 regarding deposition of ministers:
252. It belongs to the presbytery to depose ministers of Word and Sacraments from the ministry. (see sections 345–380 on disciplinary cases, section 441, Appendices A–64 and A–65).

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Remit C: Book of Forms sections 365–76 regarding censure:

365. The censures of the church are admonition, rebuke, suspension from church privileges or office, removal from membership or office and deposition, all of which are pronounced by the moderator in the name of the court.

366. Administering censure is a ministerial act, performed by the authority of the court, and should be carried out with solemnity, in meekness, and with love and tenderness.

367. Admonition consists in solemnly addressing the offender, placing the offence before the offender and exhorting them to greater circumspection. It is administered in private.

368. Rebuke is a higher form of censure resorted to after conviction or confession of one or more serious offences. It may, if the court deems it necessary, be administered in public.

369. Suspension from church privileges is the removal of particular privileges of membership such as voting or participation at the Lord’s Table. It may be for a longer or shorter period of time and is added to rebuke, when the court deems it necessary, in order to impress the offender with the gravity of the offence and to give public testimony against the offence. The privileges are automatically restored at the end of the suspension.

369.1 Suspension of an office-bearer from particular privileges of church membership will include suspension from office.

370. Suspension from office is the removal of responsibilities attending an elected or appointed position. It is either with or without limit of time. Any privileges or duties temporarily removed are automatically restored at the end of the suspension. (see Appendices A–69 and A–70)

370.1 Suspension from office does not necessarily include suspension from other privileges of church membership.

370.2 When a suspension is of a minister, the presbytery shall send notice of this action to all the presbyteries of the church.

371. Removal from membership is the removal of a professing member’s name from the session’s roll of professing members.

372. Removal from office is removal of a member or minister from a particular office and applies to function in that office.

372.1 An elder removed from office ceases to function as an elder but may be re-elected to serve depending on the terms for restoration.

372.2 A minister removed from office ceases to hold office in a particular ministry and therefore the removal from office involves the dissolution of the pastoral tie and the placing of their name on the appendix to the roll. The presbytery shall send notice of this action to all the presbyteries of the church.

372.3 A member of a congregation removed from elected office within a congregation may be eligible for re-election depending on the terms for restoration.

373. Deposition is the removal of an individual from the office of elder or minister and follows upon the confession or conviction of one or more of the following offences: heresy; wilful, flagrant, or shameless immorality; a scandalous life; persistent and wilful refusal to submit to the courts of the church; or the pursuit of an obstinately divisive course within the church. Upon deposition, an elder is no longer considered an elder of the church and a minister is no longer considered a minister of the church. (see sections 252, 375, 441, Appendices A–67 and A–68)

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373.1 Deposition of a minister necessitates the dissolution of the pastoral tie and the removing of the minister’s name from the roll of presbytery. The sentence of deposition is read before the congregation, and the pastoral charge is declared vacant, except in the case where there is more than one minister on staff and the one position is declared vacant.

373.2 The presbytery shall send notice of deposition to all the presbyteries of the church.

374. Deleted 2018

374.1 Deleted 2018

375. When a minister or an elder in good standing, renounces the oversight of this church by joining another Christian body, or withdraws from the Christian church, their action is noted in the record of the court having jurisdiction, and their name is removed from the roll. In the case of a minister, a notice shall be sent to all presbyteries. If a charge is pending against them, it may still be prosecuted. If the body that they join is non-Christian, they may, with due notice, be declared no longer a minister or elder of the church, or be deposed, as the court may determine necessary in the interests of the honour of Christ and the Church. (see sections 252, 373, 441)