

UNREFERRED OVERTURES – 2020

Interim Report, May 2020

Note: Courts that have transmitted the following unREFERRED overtures will be given the opportunity to have them referred to a specific standing committee for consideration prior to the 2021 General Assembly.

NO. 12 – SESSION OF ST. JAMES, CHARLOTTETOWN, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**Re: Welcoming LGBTQI elders**

WHEREAS, the good governance and spiritual health of The Presbyterian Church in Canada relies in considerable measure on the effective and collegial operation of church courts; and

WHEREAS, the Book of Forms section 4 states that all are equal in ministry; and

WHEREAS, the 2019 General Assembly produced sexuality remits which, if passed by the relevant church courts, will introduce the more general ordination of LGBTQI ruling and teaching elders into The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, in 1966, The Presbyterian Church in Canada introduced an analogous new category of ruling and teaching elders into the church courts when it changed its doctrine to admit women into positions of ordained leadership; and

WHEREAS, this change of doctrine and practice was not universally embraced, leading to situations in which many female elders were made to feel unwelcome in church courts and had the validity of their participation in the work of such courts questioned; and

WHEREAS, in order to address this lack of gracious welcome to ordained women in the courts of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, it was deemed necessary in 1989 for the General Assembly pass a Declaratory Act obliging all ministers and elders to participate in the ordination of female elders; and

WHEREAS, the 2019 General Assembly has included in their sexuality remits provisions for freedom of conscience and action where proposed LGBTQI ordinations are concerned; and

WHEREAS, this freedom of conscience and action is not unlimited, but still requires ministers and elders to behave collegially with ordained LGBTQI ruling and teaching elders, as outlined by the Clerks of Assembly in the Presbyterian Connection, issue 11; and

WHEREAS, it is desirable that the church not go through a protracted season of friction regarding the nature of the welcome extended to LGBTQI elders, like it did following the introduction of female elders in 1966;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. James Church, Charlottetown, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146th General Assembly to require that all ruling and teaching elders within The Presbyterian Church in Canada extend a gracious welcome to any and all LGBTQI elders who may be ordained into our service should the relevant 2019 sexuality remits pass, offering them collegiality, support and inclusion as they assume their new roles, so that the peace of the church is maintained and support for one another as colleagues in ministry is appropriately extended, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Prince Edward Island.

NO. 13 – SESSION OF STRATHCONA PARK, KINGSTON, ONTARIO**Re: Health and dental plans for clergy couple in congregation**

WHEREAS, the congregation of Strathcona Park Church, Kingston, is being served by a clergy couple, who together provide one full-time position (shared 50/50); and

WHEREAS, part-time ministry in called positions must be 50% or more; and

WHEREAS, the policy of the Pension and Benefits Board of The Presbyterian Church in Canada regards this as two positions and requires the congregation to pay two memberships in the health and dental plan; and

WHEREAS, the congregation believes this to be an unfair and excessive cost; and

WHEREAS, clergy couples are disadvantaged if congregations are reluctant to call a clergy couple due to this extra financial burden;

THEREFORE, the Session of Strathcona Park Church, Kingston, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146th General Assembly to allow a congregation that calls a co-pastoring clergy couple to one full-time position the option of opting out of one of the two health and dental plans by such means as renegotiating with The Presbyterian Church in Canada's benefits provider in order to relieve this financial burden or at minimum to resolve to assist in this financial burden as a national church by providing support and funding through such means as Presbyterians Sharing, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Kingston.

NO. 14 – SESSION OF STRATHCONA PARK, KINGSTON, ONTARIO

Re: Maternity/paternal benefit top-up

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Maternity/Parental Leave Policy requires congregations to pay up to 27 weeks of maternity/parental leave top-up; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Maternity/Parental Leave Policy only reimburses the stipend top-up after the housing allowance has been deducted, and only reimburses the housing allowance up to \$2000; and

WHEREAS, congregations that are struggling financially may not be able to absorb the cost of a maternity/parental leave, this can be seen as discriminatory against ministers of child-bearing age;

THEREFORE, the Session of Strathcona Park Church, Kingston, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146th General Assembly to reimburse congregations 100% of the maternity/parental leave stipend and housing allowance top-up by such means as renegotiating with The Presbyterian Church in Canada's benefits provider or through such means as Presbyterians Sharing, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Kingston.

NO. 15 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW'S, TWEED, ONTARIO

Re: Revise Living Faith in light of contemporary challenges

WHEREAS, it has come to our attention that the booklet Living Faith, a Statement of Christian Belief was printed in 1984. Knowing how thoroughly and deliberately church committees work, especially in matters relating to the issue of faith, it can safely be assumed that work on this delicate subject took years to complete. All this suggests that this important document is close to 40 years old; and

WHEREAS, during that period tremendous changes have taken place: politically – The Berlin Wall; economically – the 2008 financial collapse, sociologically – estrangement from religion, and coupled with that, youth abandoning the “faith of the fathers”, theologically – new insights on life eternal, and last but not least, environmentally: climate change which may have ominous consequences for all of life;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew's Church, Tweed, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146th General Assembly, in the light of these life-threatening, mind-altering and spirit-deadening times, to initiate a revision of Living Faith so that it remains a contemporary statement, an important tool to speak loud and clear to a society in flux, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Kingston.

NO. 16 – PRESBYTERY OF EASTERN HAN-CA

Re: Establishing a theologically autonomous new synod

WHEREAS, Korean congregations from 1967 onwards entered into a mutual covenant with The Presbyterian Church in Canada for the reason that our theological and doctrinal beliefs, expression of faith and worship, and governance were in consonance with those of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, these beliefs of The Presbyterian Church in Canada are found in our subordinate standards – the Westminster Confession of Faith adopted in 1875 and 1889, the Declaration Concerning Church and Nation of 1954, and Living Faith (and its translations) adopted in 1998; and

WHEREAS, each minister and elder ordained in The Presbyterian Church in Canada has vowed to accept and uphold the teaching and doctrine contained in our subordinate standards, and under the continual illumination and correction of the Holy Spirit speaking in scriptures; and

WHEREAS, the decisions and recommendations made at the 2019 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada indicate a departure in the beliefs, character and identity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and now presents itself to be a different denomination from the one with which we first entered into mutual covenant; and

WHEREAS, this change in the nature of our denomination is clearly evident in Remits B and C of the 2019 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, which are in contradiction to our subordinate standards; and

WHEREAS, this change in the nature of our denomination is not only evident in the proposals outlined in Remits B and C, but are rather symptomatic of the wider departure in beliefs of our denomination as evidenced in the statement by the convener of the Special Committee re Implications of Option B (Inclusion) and adopted by the 2019 General Assembly without objection, “In truth we differ theologically on many things; the role of scripture, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the place of children, of women and the priorities of the church” (A&P 2019, p 49), much of which also contradicts our subordinate standards (our beliefs on scripture – Westminster Confession of Faith I, XIV.i, XIV.ii, XVIII.ii, XIX, XXI.v; Living Faith 1.3, 1.4, 5, 8.1.5; our

beliefs on the virgin birth – Westminster Confession of Faith 8.2; Living Faith 3.2.1; our beliefs on the resurrection – Westminster Confession of Faith VIII.iv, XIII.i, XXXII; Living Faith 2.1.4, 3.5.1, 3.5.2, 10.4; and

WHEREAS, this departure from the subordinate standards by many in the denomination is not without a damaging effect and impact upon Han-Ca congregations and greatly undermines the evangelism and the public witness of Han-Ca congregations within the Korean-Canadian community, and poses a real and significant challenge for the pastoral ministry of current members, some of whom have expressed the intent to withdraw membership and leave The Presbyterian Church in Canada because of the change in the nature of the denomination as evidenced in the remits; and

WHEREAS, the continued movement away from the subordinate standards of The Presbyterian Church in Canada that were the basis of our covenant with the denomination, despite the unambiguous opposition of the Han-Ca Presbyteries' congregations, has functioned to silence the collective voice of the ethnically Korean congregations with a largely dominant-culture denomination, and threatens the existence of our congregations as we currently stand; and

WHEREAS, the provision for liberty of conscience and liberty of action in the remits does not mitigate the aforementioned threats and challenges to the healthy ministry of the congregations within the Han-Ca Presbyteries because of the denominationally sanctioned departure from the subordinate standards; and

WHEREAS, the liberty of conscience and action provided in the remits is not clearly defined and, according to the Book of Forms, cannot be guaranteed in perpetuity, and may be removed by a subsequent declaratory act, similar to Declaratory Acts of 1982 and 1989 (Book of Forms 11.2) in regards to women's ordination;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Eastern Han-Ca humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146th General Assembly to create a safeguarded, guaranteed and permanent place with the theological separation in the form of a theologically and doctrinally autonomous synod where congregations that uphold the existing subordinate standards in the Han-Ca Presbyteries and elsewhere can continue to be fully participating members in covenant with The Presbyterian Church in Canada just as the Presbyteries of Eastern and Western Han-Ca were formed on the basis of a distinct and separate language and culture in order that the ordained ministers, ruling elders and congregations could fully participate in the denomination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

NO. 17 – SESSION OF PARKWOOD CHURCH, OTTAWA, ONTARIO

Re: Constitution of two synods on the basis of marriage definition

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada was formed in 1875 as a union of several branches of the Reformed and Presbyterian Church, all of which held the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only rule of faith and life and subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith as the principal subordinate standard; and

WHEREAS, the peace of The Presbyterian Church in Canada was threatened within the first decade of its union by a dispute over marriage – specifically, a dispute over who one was permitted or not permitted to marry; and

WHEREAS, the resolution of that dispute entailed an amendment to the basis of subscription to the Westminster Confession, permitting liberty of conscience on one of the clauses concerning marriage; and

WHEREAS, the peace of The Presbyterian Church in Canada is at present threatened once again by a dispute over marriage – specifically, a dispute over who one should be permitted or not permitted to marry; and

WHEREAS, the unity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada is also at present threatened by a dispute over ordination – specifically, a dispute over who a session is permitted to ordain and admit as an elder and who a presbytery is permitted to ordain and induct or install; and

WHEREAS, this dispute over ordination affects the very nature of a session or a presbytery as a mutually submissive and collegial body of *presbuteroi* at the heart of the Presbyterian understanding and practice of authority within the church; and

WHEREAS, the preservation of the peace and unity of Christ throughout the church is part of the solemn obligation undertaken by all ministers and elders as a vow at ordination; and

WHEREAS, the 2019 General Assembly sent to presbyteries under the Barrier Act a remit (Remit B) asserting that “The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds two parallel definitions of marriage” without offering any basis in either the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the principal standard or in the Westminster Confession of Faith or in Living Faith as subordinate standards for such an assertion; and

WHEREAS, the 2019 General Assembly sent to presbyteries under the Barrier Act a remit (Remit C) affirming among other things that certain individuals may be ordained as ministers and elders provided that “liberty of conscience and action regarding participation” in such ordinations be granted to ministers and elders, without offering any basis in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the principal standard or in the Westminster Confession of Faith or in Living Faith as subordinate standards for such provision, nor providing

any basis on which to reconcile such a provision with the recognized principles and practice of Presbyterian Churches as laid down generally in “The Form of Presbyterian Church Government”; and

WHEREAS, the 146th General Assembly on the basis of returns from presbyteries may find itself to be in a position to consider and adopt the changes inherent in Remits B and C, 2019 without having offered to the presbyteries or received from the presbyteries their concurrent opinions or judgements on the real and likely effect and impact of such changes on the peace and unity of Christ throughout the church resulting from such a change of doctrine not rooted in the confessional standards of the church and such a change in polity not rooted in the principles of presbyterial church government; and

WHEREAS, considered and substantive available legal opinion suggests that the continuing freedom for ministers and churches to hold and practice marriage on a different basis than that embraced by civil society may best be preserved by ensuring that the doctrine confessed and the discipline exercised by and for ministers and sessions is ordered in and by a consistent and cohesive ecclesiastical framework; and

WHEREAS, it is incumbent upon all ministers and elders of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to devote time, talent, and treasure to the furtherance of Christ’s gospel in and for the world, undistracted and unhindered by the diversion and diffusion of further efforts and energies directed at resolving a fundamental impasse on two irreconcilable definitions of marriage and by implication those deemed eligible for ministry; and

WHEREAS, the scriptures testify that Paul (without John Mark) and Barnabas (with John Mark) parted company for a time when their disagreement over the eligibility of John Mark as a candidate for missionary service led them to a sharp disagreement (Acts 15: 39), and yet later the same Paul eagerly sought the same John Mark’s help “because he is helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Timothy 4: 11);

THEREFORE, the Session of Parkwood Church, Ottawa, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146th General Assembly to propose and initiate a restructuring of The Presbyterian Church in Canada designed:

1. to bring together as one synod those ministers, sessions, congregations and presbyteries holding the present confessed doctrine of marriage defined as the union of one man and one woman and who affirm that those eligible for ordination as either elders or ministers are expected to teach and to practice no other definition of marriage; and
2. to permit ministers, sessions, congregations and presbyteries who wish to hold and practice a different doctrine of marriage defined as the union of two adult persons and who affirm that those eligible for ordination as either elders or ministers may teach and practice such a definition of marriage be brought together as a separate synod;

thus enabling two synods to be constituted, each with ministers, sessions, congregations and presbyteries mutually accountable within their respective ecclesiastical frameworks; both synods to share in the present resources of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and to co-operate where common cause is affirmed or can be found and affirmed, in the furtherance of Christian witness, while preserving with integrity confessional fidelity and presbyterial polity; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly in its wisdom deems best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Ottawa.

NO. 18 – PRESBYTERY OF HAMILTON

Re: Non-interim moderators as equalizing ministers

WHEREAS, the 2019 General Assembly did approve a change to the Book of Forms section 176.10 to allow for equalizing ministers who are on the appendix and who are serving as interim moderators; and

WHEREAS, the criteria of having those chosen as being interim moderators does not fit all presbyteries; and

WHEREAS, many of those ministers on the appendix to the roll of the Presbytery of Hamilton are not interested in being interim moderators; and

WHEREAS, the Presbytery of Hamilton has those ministers on the appendix who are involved in congregational life through committee work, such as visitation, missions, futures and ministry; and

WHEREAS, the committees of the presbytery are very involved with vacant and replanting congregations and can represent congregations and their needs;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Hamilton humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146th General Assembly to allow individual presbyteries to choose those ministers on the appendix whose are involved in presbytery committees to be equalizing ministers, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Hamilton.

NO. 19 – SESSION OF CHEYNE CHURCH, STONEY CREEK, ONTARIO

Re: Establishing traditional and affirming entities within the denomination

WHEREAS, since 2014 many studies, overtures, and debates focusing on LGBTQI matters have revealed a deeply divided denomination; and

WHEREAS, despite many serious attempts to resolve these deep divisions, the numerous dissents and expressions of profound pain at the 2019 General Assembly demonstrate that these separations remain and discussion across the church indicates that they could even be deepening; and

WHEREAS, although Remits B and C, adopted at the 2019 General Assembly, were intended to bridge these differences, they do not effectively do so for many in our denomination; and

WHEREAS, whether Remits B and C are adopted or defeated, these divisions will continue to dominate our denomination; and

WHEREAS, it will be difficult for presbyters with different understandings of the biblical view on marriage to be mutually responsible to and submissive to one another; and

WHEREAS, whether Remits B and C are adopted or defeated, a significant number of members, regardless of their theology, may consider leaving, causing great pain, reducing many congregations' viability, and decreasing resources for ministry, mission, and Presbyterian Sharing; and

WHEREAS, the changes proposed through Remits B and C do not safeguard either ecclesiastically or civilly the freedom of conscience and action as indicated by the variation in how the terms are defined in the opinion of the General Assembly clerks in "Presbyterian Connections" (September 2019), in the opinion from the legal firm Kuhn LLP, and in the opinion from the legal firm Miller Thomson LLP; and

WHEREAS, congregations need to be guaranteed a permanent place in The Presbyterian Church in Canada where they can continue to do ministry in an ecclesiastical structure that safeguards a shared understanding of key Christian doctrines such as the authority of scriptures, the virgin birth, the resurrection, holy living and heterosexual marriage that are affirmed in our subordinate standards to which all our ministers and elders subscribed at their ordinations; and

WHEREAS, it is essential to help both those who hold an affirming position regarding human sexuality and those who hold a traditional position regarding human sexuality to be able to obey the way they believe God is calling them to lovingly serve the LGBTQI community, to perform marriages, and to conduct ordinations, even although those ways are very different; and

WHEREAS, the concept of restructuring The Presbyterian Church in Canada underlying Pathway C of the former Moderators' report was supported by numerous dissenters to the Pathway B decision at the 2019 General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the spirit embodied in the Pathway C restructuring allows for a large number of people within our denomination to maintain their understanding of scripture's authority and to respect those who differ; and

WHEREAS, a Pathway C restructuring permits a possible combined pension plan, while acknowledging that the theological positions of the affirming stream and the traditional stream are too different to expect a harmonious continuation without a definite legal separation;

THEREFORE, the Session of Cheyne Church, Stoney Creek, humbly overtures the 146th General Assembly to create a process and legislation that will graciously restructure The Presbyterian Church in Canada to form two separate entities – Affirming and Traditional – embracing the spirit of Pathway C of the Special Committee of Former Moderators' report allowing each congregation to choose to follow their understanding of God's will within a legally separate entity, which should protect the civil liability of the leadership who continue to follow their vows, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Hamilton.

NO. 20 – PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN HAN-CA

Re: Establishing a partner denomination

WHEREAS, Korean congregations from 1967 onwards entered into a mutual covenant with The Presbyterian Church in Canada for the reason that our theological and doctrinal beliefs, expression of faith and worship, and governance were in consonance with those of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, these beliefs of The Presbyterian Church in Canada are found in our subordinate standards – the Westminster Confession of Faith adopted in 1875 and 1889, the Declaration Concerning Church and Nation of 1954, and Living Faith (and its translations) adopted in 1998; and

WHEREAS, each minister and elder ordained in The Presbyterian Church in Canada has vowed to accept and uphold the teaching and doctrine contained in our subordinate standards, and under the continual illumination and correction of the Holy Spirit speaking in scriptures; and

WHEREAS, the decisions and recommendations made at the 2019 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada indicate a departure in the beliefs, character and identity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and now presents itself to be a different denomination from the one with which we first entered into mutual covenant with; and

WHEREAS, this change in the nature of our denomination is clearly evident in Remits B and C of the 2019 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, which are in contradiction to our subordinate standards; and

WHEREAS, this change in the nature of our denomination is not only evident in the proposals outlined in Remits B and C, but are rather symptomatic of the wider departure in beliefs of our denomination as evidenced in the statement by the convenor of the Special Committee re Implications of Option B (Inclusion) that was received without objection, “In truth we differ theologically on many things; the role of scripture, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the place of children, of women and the priorities of the church” (A&P 2019, p. 49), much of which also contradicts our subordinate standards (our beliefs on scripture – Westminster Confession of Faith I, XIV.i, XIV.ii, XVIII.ii, XIX, XXI.v; Living Faith 1.3, 1.4, 5, 8.1.5; our beliefs on the virgin birth – Westminster Confession of Faith 8.2; Living Faith 3.2.1; our beliefs on the resurrection – Westminster Confession of Faith VIII.iv, XIII.i, XXXII; Living Faith 2.1.4, 3.5.1, 3.5.2, 10.4; and

WHEREAS, this departure from the subordinate standards by many in the denomination is not without a damaging effect and impact upon Han-Ca congregations and greatly undermines the evangelism and the public witness of Han-Ca congregations within the Korean-Canadian community, and poses a real and significant challenge for the pastoral ministry of current members, some of whom have expressed the intent to withdraw their membership and leave The Presbyterian Church in Canada because of the change in the nature of the denomination as evidenced in the remits; and

WHEREAS, the continued movement away from the subordinate standards of The Presbyterian Church in Canada that were the basis of our covenant with the denomination, despite the unambiguous opposition of the Han-Ca congregations, has functioned to silence the collective voice of the ethnically Korean congregations and threatens the existence of our congregations as we currently stand; and

WHEREAS, the provision for liberty of conscience and liberty of action in the remits does not mitigate the aforementioned threats and challenges to the healthy ministry of the congregations within the Han-Ca Presbyteries because of the denominationally-sanctioned departure from the subordinate standards; and

WHEREAS, the liberty of conscience and action in the remits cannot be guaranteed in perpetuity, according to the Book of Forms, and as evidenced in the history of that provision for the ordination of women which was granted in 1966 and revoked in 1982; and

WHEREAS, the joint petition of Western and Eastern Han Ca Presbyteries to the 2017 General Assembly called for unity and expressed our desire to work with the denomination on moderate changes on the matters of human sexuality; and

WHEREAS, we, as Presbyterians, passionately love The Presbyterian Church in Canada, its mission and its ministry and in spite of our differences both culturally and theologically, we would prefer to remain one body and a part of The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, in the face of potential passage of Remit B and C under the Barrier Act, the Presbytery of Western Han-Ca, together with other traditionally orthodox congregations cannot accept the proposed changes in doctrine regarding the definition of marriage, nor the proposed practices of ordination as voiced in Remits B and C (2019) therefore feel we are being forcefully pushed to the edge of adoption of changes of doctrine and practice of the church or calling for a separation; and

WHEREAS, the Presbytery of Western Han-Ca concludes that it is in the best interests of Korean congregations, sympathetically with other traditional-orthodox congregations, to seek departure from our beloved denomination, and we do so with great sadness, and in the interests of enabling the mission of all congregations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada,

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Western Han-Ca humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146th General Assembly to consider creating a partner or sister denomination (name to be determined), releasing the Han Ca congregations and other traditional-orthodox congregations who wish to leave The Presbyterian Church in Canada because of the understanding of the biblical and theological differences that divide us, this new partner or sister denomination would share common resources including the Presbyterian Pension Plan, enabling all congregations in their mission and ministries according to their theological convictions, and to consider our cry and prayer on this subject seeking the immediate action of this Assembly; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.