

SPECIAL COMMITTEE RE LGBTQI LISTENING
(RAINBOW COMMUNION)

WARNING: BEFORE READING THIS REPORT

The nature of this report means that it makes many references to traumatic experiences, including but not limited to homophobia, transphobia, LGBTQI+ hate crime, bullying, sexual violence, homelessness, suicide and self-harm.

A list of help resources follows, including LGBTQI+ specific and youth specific help lines and mental health supports. Please make use of them or other local resources if you are experiencing re-traumatization, triggering or mental health strain as a result of reading this report.

RESOURCES FOR THOSE SEEKING SUPPORT

Egale Canada

Resources and research that provide the most reliable and up-to-date tools and information for LGBTQI2S people and communities, service providers, schools and companies. egale.ca/

ILGA World

The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association: Resources and research on the situation of LGBTQI people around the world including the annual “State Sponsored Homophobia Report” and maps on sexual orientation laws. ilga.org/

It Gets Better Campaign

In response to publicized suicides by LGBT youth, author Dan Savage initiated the It Gets Better campaign through which supportive LGBT people and allies share supportive messages through online videos. itgetsbettercanada.org/

Kids Help Phone

Children and youth ages 5 to 20 can speak with trained counsellors at Kids Health Phone (1-800-668-6868). kidshelpphone.ca/

Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans Youthline

The Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans Youthline offers free peer support for youth aged 26 and under (1-800-268-9688). youthline.ca/

Parents, Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

PFLAG is a resource for LGBT people and their families. pflagcanada.ca/

Rainbow Faith and Freedom

A global movement that confronts religious-based LGBTI discrimination and improves the human and equality rights of LGBTI people everywhere. rainbowfaithandfreedom.org/

The Hope for Wellness Help Line of Indigenous Services Canada

Offers immediate counselling to all Indigenous people across Canada. This service can be accessed toll free at 1-855-242-3310 or through online chat. The service is available in English, French, Cree, Ojibway and Inuktitut. hopeforwellness.ca/

The Veterans Affairs Assistance Service and Canadian Forces’ Member and Family Assistance Services

This 24 hour a day, seven day a week, free, voluntary and confidential service can offer counselling to people with personal or emotional issues, stress or burnout, among other issues. Call toll free 1-800-268-7708 for assistance or call the teletypewriter service at 1-800-567-5803. veterans.gc.ca/eng/contact/talk-to-a-professional and canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/guide/programs-canadian-forces/cfmap.html

NOT ALL ARE WELCOME
A Call to Confession and Healing for Harm Done

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INTRODUCTION

A CALL TO REPENTANCE

In the 1994 Committee on Church Doctrine's "Report on Human Sexuality", the authors stated that "The Church as a whole must repent of its homophobia and hypocrisy. The church is called to be a welcoming, nurturing, loving and supporting community, a true church family, where all are welcomed, nurtured, loved and supported" (A&P 1994, p. 251–74, 56).

Despite this call to repentance, The Presbyterian Church in Canada remained silent concerning the harm done for 23 more years. At the 2017 General Assembly, in the section of the joint report of the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency Committee entitled "Responding to 1994 Call to Repent of Homophobia", a recommendation was made for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to repent of homophobia and hypocrisy by establishing a special committee with specific terms of reference (A&P 2017, p. 478, 28).

Also in 2017, a motion (A&P 2017, p. 46) came from the floor of the General Assembly to direct the Moderator to write a letter of repentance to the LGBTQI community. The Moderator the Rev. Peter Bush, sent this letter at the beginning of Lent in February 2018. The letter states, "This letter of repentance is an interim response between the call of the 1994 document and the work of the Rainbow Communion" (Moderator's Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19).

Throughout this report, the Moderator's Letter of Repentance and its important role in beginning the process of repentance and informing the work of the Rainbow Communion will be referenced. The 2019 General Assembly, adopted the recommendation:

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 (A&P 2019, p. 19).

Despite these initial steps, 27 years after the Committee on Church Doctrine's recommendation, this open wound in the Body of Christ continues to impact us all and must be addressed urgently and as the work of the Spirit.

This final report draws on the 139 stories shared with the Rainbow Communion. In the interest of maintaining confidentiality, reducing speculation and mitigating additional potential harm, NO NAMES will be used in conjunction with stories told throughout the report except for those that are already on the public record and/or have given their consent in writing. Throughout the report quotations from storytellers are usually indented.

THE WORK OF THE RAINBOW COMMUNION

See Appendix 1: Terms of Reference and The Listening Process

Membership

In 2017, members of the Special Listening Committee re LGBTQI (also known as the Rainbow Communion) were named by the Assembly on nomination of the Moderator and included: The Rev. Dr. Robert 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 and Ms. Bassma Younan. The Rev. Dr. Tim Archibald resigned from the committee in 2018 and was replaced by the Rev. Michael Veenema from Port Williams, Nova Scotia. The Rev. Joseph Bae resigned from the committee in 2019 and was replaced by Mr. Robert Hayashi from Aurora, Ontario. Ms. Bassma Younan resigned from the committee in 2021 and was not replaced. To support the members of the Committee, two chaplains, the Rev. Linda Patton-Cowie and the Rev. Bill Elliott, were named in 2019.

Since June 2017, the Rainbow Communion has been preparing for listening to, and learning from, the stories of those whose voices have most often not been heard in the church. Its first task, as identified in the terms of reference, was to "create a safe and respectful environment in which confidentiality is assured, in order to encourage LGBTQI people and others:

1. to tell their stories of harm done to them within and by the church; and
2. to share their stories of God's grace experienced by them and Christian ministry performed by them, even in the midst of the challenges they have faced."

Its second task was “to convey to the church what it heard and experienced regarding harm done by homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy, providing an appropriate response and making recommendations for concrete actions to address the harm done for implementation in the church in its report to the General Assembly.”

In 2018 and 2019, the Rainbow Communion brought interim reports to the General Assembly with a number of recommendations and has since then been engaged in preparing a final report that was to have been presented at the General Assembly in 2020. Unfortunately, the extraordinary situation in which we have found ourselves because of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of General Assembly in 2020. Although this delay was due to the pandemic, for many people, including many of those who have told their stories to the Rainbow Communion, this has come as a great disappointment as significant decisions regarding the place of people who identify as LGBTQI within The Presbyterian Church in Canada have once again been delayed. In fact, at this time many people are continuing to experience harm and to feel unsafe, threatened and vulnerable.

It is hoped that the recommendations brought by the Rainbow Communion and adopted at General Assemblies in 2018 and 2019, have enabled the church to begin to hear about and address the tremendous amount of harm that has been done and continues to be done, to people who identify as LGBTQI and other people who have been affected. The stories of 139 people who came forward with courage trusting the Listening Space process are reflected in this report.

The Context for Listening

Although its terms of reference are clear and distinct, the Rainbow Communion had to be aware of the context in which stories were shared, both inside the church and in the wider world. Many people who contacted the Rainbow Communion were unclear or confused about its role and therefore clarification frequently needed to be provided regarding ‘what we are’ and ‘what we are not’.

The following has appeared on the Rainbow Communion website:

- 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 beyond those outlined in the mandate or provided in its reports.
- Rainbow Communion is not a lobby group.

This confusion was understandable as the Rainbow Communion did its work in the context of the church’s ongoing debate and parallel processes related to LGBTQI inclusion. In particular, there has been a lack of clarity after the 2019 General Assembly’s decision to follow “Pathway B (Inclusion)” as identified in the Special Committee of Former Moderators’ Report. Despite the Assembly’s decision, the remits which were approved by the Assembly and sent to presbyteries for consideration under the Barrier Act do not reflect the Inclusion Pathway (B) and still allow for people who identify as LGBTQI to be excluded and marginalized.

For many storytellers, the lack of clarity on these issues and in the actual process, after decades of discussion and delays, has been a source of harm in itself. In their words:

There is a perception by the public that our organization – The Presbyterian Church in Canada – is about discrimination, hatred and doing harm.

As a life-long Presbyterian, I want the General Assembly to make a decision – either way – so that I can finally decide about my support of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

I think we (the church) really need to say what it is that we believe, because there are people who just assume that the church believes what they believe and a lot of people have gone happily along assuming that their prejudices are the church’s prejudices. So, we need to be clear what it is we (the church) believe.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s website is either so bad or it is so hidden...that I couldn’t ever find – to actually try and click it – I couldn’t find anything clear on gay marriage – either way.

It seems to me that there's a lot of people in The Presbyterian Church in Canada who won't mind if the church became inclusive and welcoming but they won't mind if it doesn't either. So, they are more indifferent than concerned. I think that's the problem.

An elder left our church...because the wider church says that 'who they are' is not okay.

I'm getting married this year...I imagined that my father would do the ceremony as he's a Presbyterian minister. People tell me to wait. Wait for what? Wait for how long?! Until I'm 50?!

I actually feel that there is a conspiracy of sorts through the orchestration of endless procedural maneuverings at presbytery and at the General Assembly to avoid any movement on sexuality or our understanding of it. I find it incredibly stressful.

The last few years of unrest and upset have really shaken my faith in my denomination.

Harm Done by the Church

See Appendix 4: The Church's History Regarding Harm Against Sexual and Gender Minorities

Over centuries and even millennia, the Christian church in its many forms has not only supported but has also been the source of the fear and hatred that has fuelled shaming, marginalization, abuse, torture, rape and murder of people who in today's understanding would identify as LGBTQI. This harm continues to the present day. Scripture has been used and continues to be used, as a weapon against LGBTQI people with texts being quoted to justify harm done. For many LGBTQI people, scripture has become only a source of fear and pain rather than a source of life and grace.

As long as churches are all allowed to discriminate in this way, it gives people something to point to that's supposedly holy and sacred. Even unchurched people who were never brought up as Christian but happen to be raised homophobic, will point to religion to support their homophobic views. The Presbyterian Church in Canada – and other denominations – are responsible for validating homophobia.

Most of the time, especially outside of the church, I find it much more difficult to 'come out' as Christian than to 'come out' as lesbian. Christianity has perpetrated so much harm. I'm embarrassed that people will think I've contributed to that harm.

There are descendants and children of long-term Presbyterians who are not part of the church solely because of the church's stance on same-sex relationships.

I am frequently embarrassed to be a Christian because it is seen as a homophobic institution.

'Anti-gay' Bible passages are taken out of context.

Some ways of reading the Bible feed into homophobia.

To argue that God would exclude people from leadership simply because of who they love seems so absurd. So then to make any theological argument or biblical argument to support that feels homophobic to me.

Because I am queer, it is assumed that I am automatically condemned...and not to be saved.

The use and abuse of scripture...has been causing incredible harm because the Bible has been weaponized.

People are made to feel unworthy in the church.

I think it's partly generational that a lot of what my generation has learned in school and elsewhere...is that things are ambiguous and things are on a spectrum. And there are different ways of interpreting scripture.

Call for more humility in our handling of scripture.

There has been a misuse of the scriptures. Selective reading of the Bible leads to a loss of guidance from the Holy Spirit. Selective reading is hypocrisy.

Sincere Christians...even those who are not LGBTQI...who grew up with a traditional understanding of homosexuality are changing their minds about the church's interpretation of scripture and teachings on this matter.

This history and the harm experienced by those who identify as LGBTQI have most often been silenced, hidden or covered up. Only in the latter half of the 20th century did The Presbyterian Church in Canada and other churches begin to recognize their role in the brutalization and demonization of people who identify as LGBTQI and begin to speak and act in different ways.

The church by its actions and inaction, speaking and silence, creates hurt, fear and distrust among LGBTQI persons who are part of the church. Deaf to the cries of hurt, fear and distrust, the church dismisses the pain experienced by LGBTQI persons. For our unwillingness to recognize the hurt and fear our actions and attitudes have caused, we are sorry and we repent. (Moderator's Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the challenge lies in suppressing authentic dialogue.

The lingering homophobia – even in those so-called affirming spaces – is reinforced by a certain level of silence.

The church has been held hostage for over 30 years...I was BORN in 1988! This is a long time to knowingly be harming people.

On coming out in the church: It was just silence...It was made clear that I was not to talk about it. It was never spoken about; that is part of the problem.

There is so much fear over even just talking about understanding homosexuality.

Gay issues remain hidden in our church. No one talks about it. Families struggle in silence. Leaders do not speak to help them.

Part of the mandate of the Rainbow Communion has been to review past reports, study guides and previous actions of the church as it began to recognize and address the harm done. In addition to the 1994 "Report on Human Sexuality" and the 2015 study guide, "Body, Mind and Soul" the following have been important references:

- the General Assembly's approval of the 1969 Report of the Board of Evangelism and Social Action which included the communication of its approval of the Government of Canada's proposed legislation to "remove homosexual acts between consenting adults in private" from the Criminal Code. Homosexual acts between consenting adults are a private matter and should not be criminalized (A&P 1969, p. 316-17);
- the General Assembly's decision in 1985 supporting a statement from the Committee on Church Doctrine making a distinction between homosexual orientation and practice;
- reports related to 1996 General Assembly decision re The Rev. Darryl McDonald;
- the 2003 Report of the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation;
- several reports of the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency responding to the overtures brought forward in 2015 concerning the fuller inclusion of LGBTQI people in the life of the church including approval of same-sex marriage and to open the doors to ordination as teaching and ruling elders for people in monogamous, long term, committed same-sex relationships; and
- the 2019 Report of the Special Committee of Former Moderators.

The Rainbow Communion is grateful to the Life and Mission Agency, the Archives and the General Assembly Office for providing the documentation required. The Rainbow Communion also wishes to commend Justice Ministries for the documentation available in the Social Action Handbook which sets out the action of the church in this and other areas so clearly.

The Rainbow Communion has also examined the more general context in Canada and globally in which the church has begun to respond to the harm done to those who identify as LGBTQI. The courage and determination of those who began to resist oppression and marginalization in the Stonewall Riots and the emergent "Gay Liberation Movement"; the deepening stigmatization caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic; the legalization of same-sex marriage

in Canada and in many other countries of the world; and the growing understanding of the implications of cisgender and transgender identities, in providing a lens through which diversity can be better understood and as grounds to prohibit further discrimination, have all impacted the experience, decisions and actions of the church. (See Appendix 5: The Struggle for LGBTQI Rights and the Church)

These changes have also been part of the context in which people have told their stories. Many people have moved between denominations and congregations because of their stand on the place of LGBTQI people in the church. People have come into The Presbyterian Church in Canada at times because of its perceived more open position and as well because of its perceived more traditional position. LGBTQI people have left the Presbyterian Church because they have felt they were not welcome. Some have gone to denominations or congregations with more open and inclusive doctrine and practice. And there are people who have left The Presbyterian Church in Canada because of a perceived more inclusive position. Again, this has changed significantly in the last 20 years and has impacted the stories we have heard.

When the church preaches a message of intolerance, people get lost – especially the young.

My relationship with The Presbyterian Church in Canada was undercut. I felt exiled and wanted to come home but is there a home for me? I was sent to a place of hiding. The church preaches love but this does not feel like love.

The thing that's become so apparent to me...and I think I knew this in my head and should have known but now I'm living it...the church is so far away from the 'trans' world.

The church has lost gays...and LGBTQI people...and young people overall. I would not bring my child to an anti-gay church.

There are so many young people who wanted to go into ministry but see that the official church policy opposes and excludes them...either as people who identify as LGBTQI or as allies.

I can't open myself to a church that isn't open to me.

In the church, it is not a bunch of people getting up at General Assembly and walking out. It's people here...And they are becoming disillusioned and walking out the doors and never coming back...and they are great people.

My life experience has taught me that when organizations make LGBTQI persons the 'other' or 'second class' or 'censored' they create a climate in which discrimination and harassment can exist and even thrive.

I think what sucks about being a minority is that the voice of the minority is never enough. The voice of the oppressed can never overcome the oppressor but really, it's the oppressed that needs to take the initiative to make things better for themselves because that really is power.

The current stance means that families are not welcome to participate in the church as a whole family. The church is also a fractured family within itself.

THE STORIES

A Precious Gift

Of course, the heart of the work of the Rainbow Communion has been the gathering of stories from people across the country. Most stories were told in a covenanted face-to-face Listening Space with two listeners, at least one of whom was a member of the Rainbow Communion committee. Other listeners were "deputized" and held to the same level of confidentiality as the committee members through a Covenant of Care. The majority of listening spaces and submissions were received between May 15, 2018 and June 15, 2019. In total, the Rainbow Communion heard 139 stories.

Storytellers came from every province and represented a wide range of age, gender, ethnicity and theological perspectives. They also represented a wide variety of associations with The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Some had left or had been forced to leave The Presbyterian Church while others were actively involved with the church at a variety of levels. Over half told their story primarily through their experience of identifying as a sexual or gender

minority. Others told their story primarily through their experience of identifying as a partner, a family member, a friend, an ex-partner, a work colleague, a minister, an elder or a member of a church community. As the stories unfold throughout the report it is important to remember the lives and people behind them. One storyteller emphasized that, “The church has to realize that they are talking about real, live, living, people.”

The Rainbow Communion holds these stories as a precious gift. Many people have told their stories at significant risk to themselves in relation to their place in the church. The decision to tell their story represented an act of courage and trust as they revealed vulnerability and pain. One storyteller’s fear was made apparent when they shared, “Though you’ve done everything possible to make this a safe space for me, as far as I’m concerned, there’s no safe place in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.”

Recommendation No. RCL-001

That the gratitude of the General Assembly be extended to all who have told their stories as part of the Special Listening Committee re LGBTQI (Rainbow Communion).

As was identified in the Rainbow Communion’s second interim report, many storytellers expressed their gratitude for being able to tell their stories after having been silent or after having been silenced, in the church.

Our church offered prayers and public appreciation for the Rainbow Communion.

This is real people telling real stories and not just an intellectual discussion. Let the church see my Rainbow family.

The Rainbow Communion work is a kind of ‘Denominational Confession’ that we must repent and change.

The church laid a foundation of God’s love and grace for storytellers long before ‘the sexuality topic’ became an issue.

To be able to partake and participate in this Listening Space...where I am able to be my genuine self...there’s nothing quite like it.

It was the only time that I ever felt that the church was listening...really listening...and that I had anything to say of value.

I think it will be helpful for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to hear people’s stories and get a sense of what it’s like to be gay in the church.

Continue these types of spaces because there are still a lot of people who are afraid to even talk about it.

The Rainbow Communion’s Listening Spaces are gathering the truth that needs to be heard to pave the way for reconciliation.

The listening process developed by the Rainbow Communion is fair and compassionate. It feels like the church is embarked on a process of reconciliation.

I am grateful for the work of the Rainbow Communion and The Presbyterian Church in Canada for listening and being willing to receive my story.

It is gratifying to be able to share my story.

The Rainbow Communion is an opportunity for LGBTQI to move away from a place of invisibility to be seen and heard.

The fact that you’re being so intentional about this process including informed consent; it shows that there’s a lot of care and a lot of thought. I can see the effort that’s been put in.

The Rainbow Communion itself is in communion as a body of Christ.

I appreciate that the Rainbow Communion has given a voice to those of us not normally heard or invited to speak.

I'm appreciative of the opportunity to be heard after so many years of feeling invisible. My dream is that my voice is heard.

Thank you, Rainbow Communion, for your extra degree of care and sensitivity in choosing this place to meet. It's certainly a safer place than any church.

The Moderator's Letter of Repentance

Many identified the encouragement they felt with the publication of the Moderator's Letter of Repentance in 2018 but equally many identified their ongoing frustration and anger at the lack of action on the part of the church to address the harm done and to prevent harm from continuing.

The Moderator's Letter of Repentance helped, and it was so powerful to hear it read in a church by many former Moderators at an event held at church.

I was shocked that there was a Letter of Repentance written. I was shocked but thrilled and overjoyed. It was really emotional for me when all of the Moderators and ministers read it out loud in our church. It was awesome. And they did a good job, too. I think it was a good start in acknowledging that the Presbyterian Church has hurt people...and that it was important to say that clearly. So now, that was words...and enough is enough. Let's get on with the business of inclusion. I think that's really the next piece that will require a lot of attention, resources and dialogue.

I found it to be affirming when my pastor read the Letter of Repentance out loud in our church.

The church's arrogance is that it seems to think that it can acknowledge harm done and then somehow life just goes on. I'm still learning to forgive the church. I know that I will feel better when I can forgive.

If you really want to make reparations. If you really want to make the 'apology' worth something...then ordain me. Just ordain me! I am available next Sunday and I've already got the church picked out.

It is not enough to just say that you 'are sorry' (re Moderator's Letter of Repentance). Policies need to be changed so that everyone can come to know that they are loved by God.

The Letter of Repentance had no action. We can't just say we are sorry.

I have a fractured relationship with The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its vapid inconsequential apology. My relationship is with God and with my community.

The Content of the Report

This final report of the Rainbow Communion grows out of the experiences reflected in these stories. The stories and the recommendations that emerge from them are a call to the church to become a community of love characterized by God's grace and to leave behind the phobias and the hypocrisy which have disfigured it.

What we heard from storytellers included accounts of harm done as well as suggestions on how the church can address harm done and also ensure that harm does not continue. Consequently, the report will follow this pattern and will draw its conclusions and recommendations from these themes:

1. Identifying Harm Done
2. Responding to Harm Done
3. Ensuring that Harm Will Not Continue

In addition to harm done, many storytellers provided accounts of grace received in the midst of the challenges they have faced. The stories revealed a vast number of people who have selflessly and courageously contributed – and continue to contribute – to the life and mission of the church despite the barriers they have experienced.

IDENTIFYING HARM DONE

The 2018 Moderator's Letter of Repentance began to articulate something of the pain that has been experienced by people who identify as LGBTQI and who have been harmed by The Presbyterian Church in Canada at all levels. This was a message that the church was not accustomed to hearing.

God calls the church to be a welcoming community where we welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us. In our hypocrisy the church offers welcome to heterosexual people but often shuns people who do not identify as heterosexual. In this homophobic environment, the church is often an unsafe place for people to name their sexual identity and orientation. For the church and our congregations failing to be safe and welcoming places, we are sorry and we repent. (Moderator's Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

THE PAIN OF CHURCH COMMUNITY

One of the emerging themes that the Rainbow Communion identified in the second interim report was "The Importance and Pain of Church Community". For many who told their stories, their depth of commitment to the church is evident. For them, the church is their primary community, a community of friends who are followers of Jesus. There is a sense of belonging but there is also a longing to be able to be honest and open with these friends and those in pastoral leadership.

Despite this sense of belonging, however, they have also experienced pain, which has challenged their trust in other members of the church and the church as an institution. For others, the pain of what they have experienced in the church has been so profound and destructive that whatever sense of belonging and care they may have once experienced has been shattered and they see the church only as a place where they have been deeply wounded and betrayed.

I struggle to define homophobia (and transphobia), because I think the people who most need to understand what it feels like to be the subject of homophobia are too afraid of being called homophobic to listen. It feels like homophobia has become a slur, even though it should be a word that helps us shed light on the truth.

Bullying, hatred and silence, have led to emotional and physical pain and personal struggle, which sometimes have led people to attempt or commit suicide. The church has not offered and continues to fail to offer care to those who face this struggle and pain. For our failure to offer tender care to the hurting, we are sorry and we repent. (Moderator's Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

Throughout the listening process, one of the greatest fears that was articulated again and again was that to be honest and open about one's own identity would break the bonds of community and friendship. That pain would be too much to bear. This has led to a sense of alienation and invisibility for many who identify as LGBTQI and has sometimes led to self-destructive behaviours including substance abuse, self-harm and even to contemplating or actually taking one's own life.

I started to spiral again. I was high functioning at work, church and community and I 'passed' as 'straight' but I would get home and crash and...shut down...and imagined how I might be able to just quietly die.

I drank in response to the secrecy that I had to maintain because I knew that the church would disapprove of me if I ever came out. I had to be secretive about my identity and about my drinking.

When (name withheld) came out to his grandfather, the patriarch of the family, a Bible was thrown at his head and he was told he wasn't welcome in their family. He was a kid out of home, became addicted to substances and exploited in the sex trade. He experienced a fatal overdose.

Secrecy, Hiding and Isolation

Many storytellers recounted that as long as they conform to a heterosexual, cisgender and binary understanding of who we are as human beings and children of God, they are welcome in the church. Those people who do not fit into that world quickly realize that they must not expose their differences in any way. Many people expressed that from a very early age, the part of them that was different had to remain hidden and they had to be silent. They could not be themselves. They had to pretend to be someone that they were not. Storytellers often expressed that the message they receive is, "God loves you but...". They are not like other people and so they are not fully welcome in the church.

Heterocentrism and heteronormative activity is sometimes just as toxic and just as hurtful as homophobia because it removes identity...it's another mechanism of removing a person...You can't see your place in the institution.

Sometimes we say to each other, 'We're the most heterosexual gays we know', because we just really try hard to conform to be that.

Heterosexism makes your identity invisible.

Our parents said to my (gay) sibling, "You're welcome in our house but don't talk about your (partner) while you are here."

The 'bystander effect' can kill with their silence.

There are a lot of years that I've lost to a theology that was shaming and I think I was vulnerable to that because I wanted to be a dad more than anything else in the world.

I could not even consider coming out before I graduated from university. Sexuality and gender identity were never talked about in my church. This omission left me isolated and confused.

And so, I am trying my darndest to conceal my sexuality. I remember it was around that time that I would pray to God to make me bisexual and I would meet Him halfway.

I dated women...even though I was aware that I was gay...in order to pass as straight. That led to some very difficult and painful breakups. I'm sorry for any hurt that I caused those women.

I could not tell anyone that I am gay. If I told my mother, she might want...she might need...to talk to her minister about it. I know the way some ministers in our church like to gossip about others. The word would get around pretty fast.

I did not tell anyone I was gay for fear of a life of loneliness and having no one at all.

I (LGBTQI) think that I function as a minister very well in the church...yet, I still feel vulnerable and isolated. In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, we are 'talked about' but not 'talked with'. It is the deadliness of silence that also forces people to live in secrecy.

While there is 'safety' in being alone...it leads to loneliness, which is not healthy.

I thought that being gay meant living a life of loneliness; having a life of emptiness...of no love.

I had friends who were allies leave the church because they heard homophobic language being used in the fellowship hour when they were getting their cup of coffee. They heard people talking behind them about how people who are LGBTQI don't belong in the church. In some ways I wish they would have stayed to stand with me and help call out this kind of behaviour or engage with those members of the congregation who said those things. Now it's just up to me and it's exhausting.

I just wonder how many people throughout 'trans history' have ever been able to have a conversation like this and instead just leave and never return. I had many formative learning experiences in the church but church was to remain a place where my mask stayed on.

My so-called 'gay lifestyle' is about being perpetually tired!

It is tiring...exhausting to live a lie over years and years.

I felt such great loneliness...especially when there was no Presbyterian Church in Canada minister available to support me.

It was a difficult time for the congregation in that some of the fairly vocal elders chose to leave and expressed that it was because we (same-sex couple and their family) were welcomed to be part of the congregation. Some of them came back to worship with the congregation but won't serve with me on session.

For 27 years I was in the closet. My biggest fear is to grow old alone.

When I came out to my parents it was horrible. There were tears and yelling and more tears and more yelling. It has been over ten years of separation from them – and especially with my father.

There have been many family arguments about gay relatives, conversion therapy and 'praying the gay' away.

To the church's credit in 2016 (in response to the Orlando, FL, Pulse Nightclub massacre) they posted a prayer but their first version had no mention of the LGBTQI community.

I had a comfortable position in that I had employment and I wasn't going to lose my paying job or my life status because of this (being gay). Can you imagine how people in ministry may feel or worry about what the church would do to them?

I'm burying a part of myself and I never want anybody to feel like this.

I can guess that many other LGBTQI+ members of our Presbyterian Church have had to carefully respond to people who were so concerned about defending themselves as not being homophobic...that they weren't able to listen to the realities that we face as queer people.

I did not come out for fear that my father's career as a Presbyterian minister would be jeopardized.

I remember when a Youth Group clergy leader announced that, "It would be unhealthy to support a gay lifestyle".

Either trying to fit in by 'acting straight' or becoming invisible/disappearing was the name of the game. For me, disappearing was easier to do than trying to live out a heteronormative life.

Fear, Sadness and Depression

Even at a very early age, this recognition begins to engender feelings of deep isolation, sadness, depression, loneliness, of not being seen or heard, of fear, of being terrified, of having secrets revealed and of being "outed". These feelings are often deepened when people realize that this is not a choice but rather a discovery about themselves. This experience often leads to feelings of disgust and shame and subsequently, to fear and hatred being internalized.

The biggest challenge in discovering that I identify as lesbian...was really myself. I had a destructive internalized script and a lot of fear around telling my family.

Rather than anyone in particular in my life holding me back, it was mostly myself...because of how I was raised.

It would have been great if I could have embraced the lesbian part of myself but I do think that my experience in the Presbyterian Church meant that I wasn't ready to open that door for a very long time.

Most of the time I feel alone in this world and in the church...and each and every person I meet involves a weighing of possibilities: Can I trust this person? Are they pro or anti-gay? Pro-church or anti-church? And will this be the person who figures it out and turns me in?

Being gay was something that I always had to be very...very careful about. Careful in terms of who I told and under what circumstances...simply because I knew from experience that if I came out, I would most likely be abandoned.

I endured an abusive relationship with an opposite-sex partner even though I was gay. He knew that I was gay – and he also knew that I was terrified to be 'come out' – and threatened to tell people if I ever left him.

People expressed concern and fear that they might be ostracized by their congregations or from the church if they served with the Special Listening Committee/Rainbow Communion.

I was afraid of what might happen if non-affirming church groups found out that I had attended Pride events with my LGBTQI sibling.

I am aware of a deeply closeted church leader who was terrified of being outed, after a chance encounter with me...because I identify as gay.

Because of The Presbyterian Church in Canada's policies, a youth did not feel safe coming out. That secrecy and delay caused harm to them.

As a minister who finally acknowledged that I was gay, I went into a deep depression without any place to safely talk about what was happening and the implications.

Often my boyfriend would say that he despised his sexuality and that he wished he could just marry an unattached female in the congregation. It was a painful dilemma and was destructive of our love.

I started to develop a deep sense of shame and guilt...and spent most of Sundays during my teenage years blasting loud rock music on my 'Walkman' in the back stairwell after the church service – just so I could avoid interacting with anyone and feel worse about myself.

Internalized homophobia is probably the greatest challenge in one's coming out process and mine was mountain high. It is with greater sadness, though, that I acknowledge that it has been difficult for me to reconnect and participate in the church community again, particularly the Korean church.

Back in the 1980s, it was a big struggle for me...because I knew automatically that if you were gay, you were presumed to be damaged...and there was basically no hope for you.

I was always aware that if you were a little too 'sporty', a little too aggressive, a little too 'independent or capable'...that the 'dyke' label is going to be stuck on you. I actually pushed back against the lesbian label or even acknowledging I was lesbian because I seemingly fit the stereotype too well. (Very athletic, loved to build things, outdoorsy, preferred short hair, etc. etc.) Because of that, I kept burying my orientation down deeper and deeper and could not be truthful with myself or with others. Stereotypes are really harmful...even if they happen to align.

When you do not have gay role models, I think that really propagates a sense of being unnatural and having this thing that is unwanted.

The church did harm to me as an LGBT person. It is devastating to me that I will never get back the years of my life that I have lost to self-hatred. I can't imagine that I will get enough counselling to keep me from feeling a deep sense of my wrongness and lack of worthiness.

I didn't want to have these feelings (attraction to men) and obviously as I got older, they got stronger and I started really hating myself for it. And...at the same time, hating God for it, because if I wasn't supposed to have these feelings...if I wasn't supposed to be a gay man...why was I made this way? Why were my prayers not answered?

Even though I was aware that I was likely gay, when one of my best friends came out to me, I treated him horribly. It was one way to divert attention away from me.

I knew, from as long as I can remember, that I was a lesbian...but I just kept burying it. Secrets make you sick.

And so, I was conflicted. I was ashamed...a deep, deep, deep shame because I had this secret that I knew that I couldn't share. Throughout my life everybody always says, 'Just be yourself.' And that, was the one thing that I couldn't be...was myself.

I completely burnt out twice...one of the things that contributed to my burnout was the mental activity of always having to repress myself and also living with constant fear and anxiety.

The exclusionary practices of homophobia, hypocrisy and heterosexism meant that my (adult child) eventually succumbed to crippling invisible depression. So, it was on a long, long journey of practically smelling death in our house every day. And you know, we did not talk to anybody at the church about it.

Living in a Cisgender and Straight World

For many storytellers, these feelings are engendered by or reinforced by, the actions of the church. In the experience of many, the only acceptable understanding of family to which they are exposed in the church is within heterosexual marriage. Same-sex attraction or a non-binary experience of gender is seen to be an aberration to God's creation, to be sinful. Hymns, prayers, sermons, even announcements, use language which privileges and celebrates an exclusively heterosexual and/or gender binary view of creation. There are no examples or models of other possibilities; in fact, anything else is seen to be sinful and outside of God's plan. Often it is understood that being Christian is defined as being heterosexist, homophobic or transphobic.

At church, there is no sign or evidence of any sexuality other than heterosexual.

Heterosexism is the assumption that 'non-heterosexual' is bad.

Heterocentrism and heteronormative activity is sometimes just as toxic and just as hurtful, because it removes identity. It's another mechanism of removing a person because you can't see your place in the institution.

The church assumes that non-heterosexual equals bad.

I could only imagine a certain future for myself which was heterosexual. There were a lot of unspoken expectations around what my life would look like...even if they didn't feel right to me.

There was no sermon on sexuality. There were never any sermons on anybody outside the heterosexual norm. It's as though LGBTQI people don't even exist...that I don't exist.

In my church there is a lack of opportunity for real dialogue about different opinions. What the minister believed...that was what the congregation was told to believe.

My Mom was worried about me that I wasn't interested in boys and I overheard my Aunt say to her, "She's just a late bloomer. Just wait until she comes around."

I would say I have gone through some mourning because there won't be the wedding that I dreamed of for my kids...and there won't be the grandchildren I dreamed of. But I may be wrong.

It often feels like that the only thing that matters in this world is males and females procreating. That is rooted in heterosexism.

I noticed that people often assume that a non-hetero pair are NOT a couple.

I've had a much harder time with the male-dominant, heterosexist church than homophobia related problems.

I remember as a teenager, while I was coming to terms with my sexuality, same-sex marriage was being debated in Parliament. On more than one occasion I heard from the pulpit how wrong same-sex marriages would be for Canada.

When my kid said they were gay, I thought, 'Oh my goodness, you've picked up a lifestyle that's going to be more difficult...people look at you differently. They ostracize you. You won't have the same opportunities.' This is because that was the way my mother taught me to deal with my (gay) brother.

People were not considered to be a 'real' member until married and having kids...despite having a strong faith.

I read the notes in a paper that was shared with a church and with The Presbyterian Church in Canada for the Body, Mind and Soul study. The writer commented on same-sex marital unions as follows:

...those relationships should not be called marriages. It's not discriminatory to an orange to say it is not an apple. An orange is a very nutritious comestible but it is not an apple. Such couples sometimes engage in linguistic contortions in deciding who will be called the husband and who the wife.

When I read those comments, I once again felt a sense of hopelessness and...perhaps even about my place in the church. How can we see each other as children of God when some people see us as so completely alien to the human experience?

More people than we realize identify as LGBTQI. It is just assumed that everyone is heterosexual.

My family could only imagine a certain future for myself which was heterosexual. A lot of unspoken expectations around what my life would look like.

It's not only being directly discriminated against...but it can also be just assuming that everyone is straight...and having that as a default. It can be hard on people (like me) because of having to explain yourself all the time.

Showing over-affirmation for heterosexual couples and families...and none for LGBTQI couples...shows them that they have no future in the church.

Avoiding tokenism is wanting to have a person in the room, not the 'gay person' in the room.

If a church says it's affirming or welcoming without changes to the heteronormative language, culture, hymns and imagery...it's just lip service and tokenism.

“Pray the Gay Away”

Many people are told or hope that this is only a phase and that someday they will grow out of it or that they could change it. In fact, people are taught about the possibility and are encouraged to “pray the gay away”.

When I sought help to reconcile my awareness that I was gay, I was given Bible passages condemning homosexuality to carry with me to combat any ‘urges’. All that did was drive me further into the closet.

My son knew of no one else that was gay and apparently, he prayed and prayed and prayed that God would take this from him...but He didn't.

I began to realize that I was gay and at the time I believed it was wrong...as many Christians go through. And so, I went through the whole ‘pray away the gay’ stage for years. Every night from age 16 until I was 19, every night...just really begging God to turn me straight.

I prayed when I was in high school that God would change me and I didn't really want to be that way. It was difficult.

I was deeply conflicted as a gay man...who was married to a woman. When I was a seminary student I tried to ‘pray the gay away’. It didn't work either.

I fell in love with my best friend in high school. I prayed and prayed and prayed...“God, don't let me be gay. I don't want it. Don't let me be gay.”

I prayed so hard for God to change me.

I tried so hard to ‘pray the gay away’. I was carrying three separate identities that were not integrated: my Korean identity, my gay identity and my family identity.

I felt an intense self-loathing once I realized that I was gay. Much of that was due to the ‘evangelical’ influence in my life. I ended up hating God for it; I tried so hard to ‘pray the gay away’.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Change Efforts (SOGICE)

Regardless of the distinction that was made in 1985 (A&P 1985, p. 240–41, 31), that homosexual orientation in and of itself is not sinful and that it is only when one acts on these feelings that sin is committed, many recounted that sin is still associated with being who one is.

There are people who grew up in the church that were told that they don't deserve God's love and/or that they are going to hell.

This is how it works...that if someone is gay, it's because something 'went wrong' and they need to be made 'straight'.

Church encourages homophobia and fosters spaces that reinforce the notion that being gay is a sin. I wasn't homophobic until I was connected to The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

In the more extreme cases, homosexuality is associated with demon possession and people are told that it needs to be exorcised.

They felt it was demonic. They were trying to free me from the demonic possession that was causing me to have the attraction. So that stuff is kind of traumatizing.

Other people have been counselled to participate in so-called "reparative" or "conversion" therapy, what is now called "sexual orientation and gender identity change effort" (SOGICE), so that they could be changed into being heterosexual or into aligning their gender identity and expression with that assigned to them at birth.

I had a relative whose only response to our family member who had 'come out'...was to provide them with materials about conversion therapy.

I am not able to be my full authentic self, due to my family's stance on LGBTQI inclusion. I have to hold back and stay away from certain conversations. Their response to me is just to hand me books to read to change my mind.

Attempts at conversion therapy were just a fruitless endeavour that simply increased my despair. As a (closeted gay) Christian who feared eternal damnation...I was desperate to do something. I voluntarily partook in 'reparative' therapy to try to cure my homosexuality. This was my 'Hail Mary'...last chance...in my mind to avoid roasting over the fiery pits of hell forever. They held out hope that I would become straight. They said that I could deny my feelings...switch them off and switch them on to being a 'straight person'.

During my time with Exodus...(so-called gay conversion therapy) there was no real sense of grace there. It was all condemnation. No grace at all. Since then, I know who I am and I know to whom I belong. And nothing I do – Romans 8:29 – “nothing separates me from God's love.” No matter what I do. It's there. And for me, that passage became a new lodestone.

It's a pervasive thought of allies in the church...and outside the church...that they want to help but they want to help by 'fixing' us and even if it's not to completely remove our sexuality, they at least want to make us more 'palatable' to our society. They want to help carve out a little place in the world where we can exist. But I don't want my own little place, I want to be part of the world.

As the Rainbow Communion listened to stories, it became clear that SOGICE programs were still being recommended in Presbyterian congregations. The harm done by so-called conversion or reparative therapy is so damaging that it was important for the Rainbow Communion to bring a related recommendation in its second interim report in 2019. The Assembly adopted the following recommendation:

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. (A&P 2019, p 46, 345)

The Dilemma of Conflicting Identities and Leading Double Lives

For many storytellers, these feelings and experiences meant that they are put in an impossible dilemma of having to choose between their identity as LGBTQI and their Christian identity. This has consequences for both dimensions of

their lives. They cannot be “out” as LGBTQI in the church but neither can they be “out” as Christian in their life outside the church. In many cases instead of living authentically and fully, they are forced to live a double life.

Because of my position in the church, I am afraid to be seen as endorsing homosexuality in any way...even though I identify as gay myself.

I did my best to create a ‘conformity plan’ when I wanted a peaceful, uneventful life with an absence of violence...and to ‘pass’ as heterosexual.

My experience of being gay and Christian has been that I wasn’t allowed to be both. I could only be ‘either / or’.

Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell

For those who are LGBTQI, the message they receive in the church is that they will never be fully welcome as a part of the Body of Christ. Where there is slightly more tolerance, many people feel they live in a church version of “don’t ask, don’t tell”. No one is going to condemn you as long as you are not obvious or do not make it uncomfortable for others in the congregation.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ place.

When people ask me, ‘Are you Christian?’, I still don’t know what to say because so many people have been hurt. Our theology is causing trauma.

To stick a gay man back in the closet after they’ve come out...that’s brutal and...you just don’t do that to people.

My boyfriend instructed me that I had to sit in the back row of the church and not acknowledge him. No eye contact, no exchange of smiles. I could not attend coffee hour after service. My boyfriend – a church leader – was fearful of being disclosed as a gay man and so that fear and secrecy extended to our relationship.

I feel that the only place I need to be protective of my queer sibling is in the church. That’s where I feel there’s a threat of harm. I do not feel the need to protect them anywhere else.

It’s especially hard to identify as a ‘gay Christian’ because you feel like both sides of your identity are hurting people.

I feel like I can’t be myself around everybody when I’m at church.

It was getting harder to hold these two things together...One part of my life is to be open and transparent and...to also keep a secret whenever I was involved and connected to the church.

Entering a ‘straight’ marriage as a gay man was basically an attempt at a form of ‘conversion therapy’. The marriage did end eventually.

I love my church family but I’ve always felt I’ve had to hide a part of myself. I could never be open about my relationships for fear of judgement and hostility.

I have to juggle conflicting parts of my life. There are times when I am not able to be truthful about this huge part of my life when I’m in certain church circles.

I put on a mask to be someone else so that everything can be ‘just so’. But it’s a mask. It’s not the real me. I am not being honest to those around me.

As a gay young Presbyterian adolescent, my plan was to marry a woman, have a bunch of kids, get divorced and then have a secret relationship with a man...but always secret, secret, secret. And then, no one could ever say, ‘He’s gay.’ That was the one thing that at all costs needs to be hidden. Honestly, that was my plan for years, because I could not see any other way to be.

When I look back on my time growing up in the church...what I learned was how to pretend to be good and how to learn to look the way that people are expecting me to look and behave. The church taught me how to put on a mask and that everything's fine, that I'm a good person. I'm a good girl and I'm part of a good family and we are all nice and isn't everything wonderful.

The silence that comes from 'don't ask, don't tell' leads to loneliness and depression.

Dissonance

Many spoke about this leading to a complete disconnect between their spiritual life and their life as a person who identifies as LGBTQI. This was described as soul destroying. If they choose to remain in the church, a community which has in many cases nurtured and loved them and brought them to faith, they have to deny a fundamental part of who they are. In some way they have to live with the belief that as a person who identifies as LGBTQI they can never fully be loved by God or by the community of faith. Consequently, they live a lie and a double life that has far-reaching and destructive consequences.

I ended up living a fractured life. Even though I knew that I was gay, I entered a marriage to someone of the opposite gender, because of the expectations of my faith, family and church...But my heart was never in it.

Literal interpretation of scripture is part of how the oppression of LGBTQI people happens...even within our own brains. It has been crushing my humanity and like turning me into a very one-dimensional person for a long time. When you're so afraid of missteps or being different or being identified or targeted, then you train your brain to be literal. I've lost my capacity to have any deep interpersonal relationships, experience, nuance or tone or any of that...because of literalism. And that's fractured my capacity to connect on such a deep level.

I feel as though I abandon my God if I leave. If I stay, I feel as if I abandon myself.

When behaviour is inconsistent with faith values it causes perpetual cognitive dissonance.

I've heard the deep anguish of my LGBTQI students who feel like they need to choose between their internal identity or their religion.

It was clear to me that I could be gay or I could be Christian but not both.

If I wanted to minister in the Presbyterian Church, I needed to go even deeper into the closet and to learn to mirror some of the homophobic attitudes that I was hearing and seeing.

All through my life – especially when I was a minister – the stresses of being gay but not 'out' caused a lot of damage in my relationship with God.

For the longest time, I didn't understand how LGBTQI folks had any relationship with Christianity. It is an abusive relationship.

I was living in constant fear and anxiety over an impossible dilemma of either being alone and terrified of being outed OR rejected and abandoned by the church.

There was no way I was ever going to tell any other minister, because that would mean inviting them to keep a secret. And if anyone found out, I could get in trouble and could get them in trouble. So, I suffered. I suffer in silence.

I was relationally isolated. I was so afraid of being found out that I closed myself off to everyone...no friendships with men or women. So, I just totally shut myself down...and eventually I found myself to be sort of a dead person emotionally. I was not a 'nice' person. That way, no one would want to be close to me.

I couldn't connect with other people authentically. And people couldn't connect with me authentically...because they were running into my wall of artifice.

One day as I was journaling the words, 'I am a lesbian', appeared on the page. I knew it was true and it stopped me in my tracks. I was terrified of myself going to hell. I drove for an hour into the big city to the

public library and took out every single book on being gay off the shelf. I took them to a desk facing the wall at the back corner, making sure all the spines were facing the wall so nobody could figure out what I was reading...just in case someone walked by, suspected or figured out that I'm a lesbian. It was the beginning of being hyper vigilant, still hyper vigilant. I look for danger everywhere.

Other people just leave the church completely and turn their back on faith and their relationship with God. They become disillusioned by the pain that is inflicted on them because of who they are and the hypocrisy they encounter. Although the church may have been important to them at one time, the lack of welcome and the harm done outweighs any sense of grace or belonging they may have once felt.

For 15 years I was very involved (providing care) in the AIDS epidemic. My prayers to God to save these beautiful souls seemed to go unheeded. I felt despair...helplessness. My cries for mercy for these long-suffering men went nowhere. Over time, I had a crisis of faith and left the church as a regular attendee.

My confidence and belief in God's unconditional love for me started to diminish over the years of shame, guilt and depression that was brought on by the church...and to be fair, by society at large.

The shaming did great damage to my relationship with God. I don't really know if I've ever had a healthy relationship with God because of it.

Trying to Manage the Pain – Leaving, Substance Abuse and Self-Harm

No one should ever be harmed for naming their sexual identity. We live in a culture and a world where LGBTQI persons are bullied, brutalized and sometimes killed. Moreover, bullying and violence occurs in congregations or in the community with the support of church members. Presbyteries and sessions fail to hold church members and church leaders accountable for their hateful acts. For our failure to protect those attacked and brutalized, we are sorry and we repent. For our ongoing failure to hold people accountable for abuse and hatred, we are sorry and we repent. (Moderator's Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

Storytellers spoke about being forced into hiding and into silence. Because of the fear they experience and because the church is not a safe place, there is no possibility to reach out for help, for pastoral support or for counselling within the community. They move to different communities so they can be visible and live openly. Often people seek ways to numb the pain through self-medication or substance abuse. Some people attempted to live a "straight" life and dated and married, always holding their secret from their partner and then sometimes from their children as well.

I heard more stories from friends and students who were struggling to come out. And those who had come out to a religious community or to a Christian family tended to be the ones likely to experience homelessness, depression, trauma, self-harm and death by suicide.

Leaving

We ended up staying away from church because of the 'politics' surrounding the 'issue'. That 'issue' was one of our family members! We have not rejoined the church even though we had a very long history in leadership and stewardship with the church.

My son was the victim of homophobia in a Christian community. That ended his relationship with the church.

Something that is clear to me is that it seems to be taking an awfully long time to get clarity in the denomination on including LGBTQI people. I think when one dangles the possibility of hope for a long period of time but never gets there...people just give up and leave.

Gay people move to live in a different town so they can be invisible.

I think it's important to know that when you ask queer people to suppress themselves or you ask them to leave, they take a lot of things with them. It's not just bodies; it's the passion and their gifts too.

A visitor to our church stated that she will 'not be coming back', because the congregation was to remain opposed to LGBTQI voices.

A lesbian couple was not made to feel welcome at church, so they left.

A multigenerational family left their home church because they had lost hope that the church would ever make a change (re: be affirming). I said to them, 'If I weren't clergy, I would probably join you'.

A friend of mine who is gay once said to me, 'I can't believe in The Presbyterian Church in Canada because The Presbyterian Church in Canada doesn't believe in me'.

I heard on many occasions that I should 'just go join the United Church' despite my strong Presbyterian roots.

I came to understand that congregational ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada would be dangerous for me to consider or accept.

The Presbyterian Church has lost a large number of individuals who happen to be gay or lesbian and who were probably called in part to the church because of their feelings of being different, unique and not understood. The church's perceived view on homosexuality has resulted in a lot of suffering by people who have children or parents who are gay and feel excluded.

Our congregation is on the edge of leaving if The Presbyterian Church in Canada doesn't get its act together with respect to affirming LGBTQI people.

I already have a clergy colleague – also an ally – who has walked away from The Presbyterian Church in Canada to the PC(USA) over the lack of a decision around inclusion.

Youth who were involved with the church from a very young age are now leaving the church entirely over the injustice of exclusion of LGBTQI people.

It's unlikely that Knox College would have accepted me for ordination in the Presbyterian Church, so I left and went United.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's position (on same-sex relationships) has likely contributed to the decline of the denomination. The Presbyterian Church in Canada says it is loving and accepting but with respect to LGBTQI people, it's not.

It's too late for all of the brilliant minds that are now in the United Church, that went through seminary at Knox College and left.

Even though my daughter and her wife were married at our church, they still ended up leaving...because some in their Presbyterian 'family' rejected them and their marriage.

There has been a continual loss of interest in the church – especially since 1997 – because of The Presbyterian Church in Canada's failure to affirm.

If The Presbyterian Church in Canada had decided to become an inclusive church, I probably would have stayed as an ordained minister.

I feel like the church used to have a much wider table and I feel that the table has gotten smaller and smaller and I don't know if it's because the people who are not affirming have been louder...so others feel like they are not welcome anymore.

My daughter (Presbyterian) and her wife (United) – who had both grown up in the church – no longer attend any church.

I loved The Presbyterian Church in Canada and would have stayed. It is where I grew up. But as a gay man, it was not an option. I am an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada. I still miss The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Substance Abuse

It's costly too. To spend years of your life living in silence. I drank a lot for quite a few years until finally I came out and within a year...I just reached a day when I thought I don't need to drink anymore. I don't need to mask the pain because the pain has significantly diminished. And there's really not a need to hide. I remember saying to myself and probably saying out loud to my boyfriend... 'I don't want to allow myself to be the victim anymore'. And by that I meant the victim of various things: The victim of the church's disapproval. The victim of society's disapproval and the victim of drinking. It was not until I finally had the courage to come out after meeting someone and found a community and congregation that supported me...that I was finally able to quit abusing alcohol.

Self-Harm

As a gay Christian man, I was confused and depressed. I was going to cut myself attempting suicide but was prevented by a voice from God. I heard, 'How dare you destroy the temple of God...you know it's better to be gay than dead'. I had never thought about a gay human as a temple of God as I grew up without any language or context that fit me. All I know is that I had a sense that I was not to blame.

Suicide

When it did not seem possible to live with this dilemma any longer, many considered suicide. Although for some this remained only a thought, there were others who moved to suicide ideation and planning. We also heard stories of people who did attempt to take their own lives and also about many who died by suicide because they could not live with this dilemma anymore. The suicide rate among LGBTQI youth, particularly those with a strong connection to a faith community, is much higher than in the general population. (See Appendix 6: Statistics re Death by Suicide, Homelessness, Depression and More Among Sexual and Gender Minorities)

I lived with constant tension for most of my life. I was a closeted gay minister, married, a parent, underwent so-called conversion therapy, depression and contemplated suicide. I saw that my only two options were to kill myself or run away.

(In my role as chaplain) I've encountered people who have contemplated suicide because of the conflict between their religious background and their unfolding sexuality.

Some have to move out of their communities of origin to find safe spaces. That failure to find a safe space in the 'real' church, can push one to suicide.

I realized that my child was at risk of suicide and all kinds of other pathologies. I knew my child had been going through all of this inner turmoil simply because he was gay.

That experience of homophobia made me have a mental health relapse and I ended up suicidal.

My son prayed for healing from being gay. He ended up being suicidal.

There are kids who have killed themselves and they were part of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and were gay. We are very sinful; in that we are complicit in their deaths.

Following her father's physical abuse amplified by homophobia, she lived in a world of fear, became severely depressed and eventually took her own life.

And I remember some of the comments that I was reading there (The Presbyterian Church in Canada Facebook chat during General Assembly) and I was just shocked. There was so much persecution...and also indifference to the results of that persecution. I mean it was known that people had killed themselves...and it seemed that it was okay! Why is this alright? Why, why is this allowed? Why are you allowed to say things like that in public...when it's so hateful?

My friend was an educator in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and in the closet her whole life. That secrecy led to her suicide.

Someone in my life who identified as lesbian – who had been shamed – died by suicide...‘That’s when I walked away from Christianity completely’.

It turned out that one of the members of the congregation, who had mysteriously disappeared, had committed suicide and he had tied a rope around his neck and had tied it to the bridge and jumped off. He had come out to his minister and his minister had told him that he was a severe sinner and that God would heal him and advised him to get married to a woman who had two children. So, he married her. After he read the 1994 report, he wrote a note and he committed suicide.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH COMMUNITY

Even in the face of being shamed, ostracized and experiencing harm, many storytellers acknowledge and embrace the community of the church through their worship, sharing of their gifts and celebration of God’s grace. Often reference is made to “the church and the LGBTQI community”, as if they were two different entities. What was conveyed in many stories was that people who identify as LGBTQI understand themselves to be part of the church, members of the body of Christ. However, their experience of life in the church is something very different.

By God’s grace, led by the Holy Spirit and seeking to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ we repent and desire to go in a new way and to be a welcoming church centered in the Triune God of grace who draws us into community. As such a community, we will seek, as individuals and congregations, to welcome all, as Jesus Christ has welcomed us. We will reach out, rejoice together in fellowship and seek holiness as we worship, pray, sing, eat and listen together for God’s Word speaking to the whole church. We commit ourselves to pray with one another, weep with one another and rejoice with one another. (Moderator’s Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

Grace Experienced in the Face of Challenges

Many of the LGBTQI storytellers began their stories by recounting their deep sense of connection to the church through the long involvement of their families in The Presbyterian Church in Canada over many generations. Others experienced this sense of connection through the joy they felt at being received into a congregation where they heard and experienced the good news that they were loved by God and by the members of the community of faith. It is important to recognize this connection and sense of belonging in the church that many felt.

I came to the Presbyterian Church when I was five or six years old. And so, I’ve grown up in the Presbyterian Church. Sometimes I get the sense that when people discuss this issue, they think that gay people are outside the church and are criticizing the church. I think it’s important for people in our church to realize that there are gay people in the church...who have grown up in the church and who are gay even though they’ve been told that that’s wrong. And there’s nothing they can do about it. I would really like your final report to say that and I’m sure other people are saying the same thing.

Being a kid that grew up in a home where we were about as Presbyterian a family as you can get. Both my grandfathers were Presbyterian ministers. My mom’s dad worked at the church national office for years and years. My other grandfather was at Knox (...) for like 30 plus years. And now my mom is a Presbyterian minister at St. (...). As a kid growing up in the Presbyterian tradition – we were steeped in the Presbyterian way and kind of the Presbyterian way of thinking...I think that’s why early in my life...I was raised to understand that “being gay is NOT okay”...that it was a sin...and that created a real dichotomy in my life because here I was, I considered myself to be a Christian but I always knew that I was gay.

You know as much as any of us can ever know who we are...but well before I was in grade 7 or 8...I didn’t know what to call it...but there’s something there. And then everyone tells you, ‘Okay...you’re not interested in girls but don’t worry that will come’.” People would say, ‘Oh just wait until you start liking girls. And so, when you’re a gay kid there’s a sense of waiting and you’re always waiting for this this big interest to kind of hit you that doesn’t really ever come.

In early adolescence there was something like guilt but not guilt. Brene Brown writes a lot about shame. So, guilt is knowing you feel bad about something you’ve done, whereas shame is feeling bad about something that you are. And guilt is motivating because it can help you to change. But shame is crippling. And so, I think there was with me a lot of shame. And it was...it was Christian shame. And it was Presbyterian shame. And it was family shame. Because when you’re a gay Christian it’s an abomination. It is the worst possible thing, right?

It's the shame. And it's just crushing. I just kept asking, "God...Please take this away from me. Please take this away from me." And yeah, that existed for a long time.

So, even into university...I dated girls. I'd sometimes see a cute guy on campus and...I'd be like, 'No. Think of this girl. (that I was dating at the time). You can think of this girl'. And I'd physically say this over and over to myself.

It seemed that God wasn't answering my prayers. And it wasn't until I went back to my church (from when I was in high school) and...my old youth group leader was there and she was going through a hard time. She was mentioning that, 'I just don't think God answers prayers'. I said to her, 'I think God does answer prayers. I just don't always think that we're ready to hear what He's telling us'.

As I was speaking the words to her, I was listening to the words that were coming out of my mouth. It was that afternoon that I was leaving the church that it hit me and I realized then that God hasn't been silent. He's been answering my prayers. And it was just an overwhelming feeling of...'Okay...you're okay with Him'. And that was a turning point. It was a complete like overall visceral feeling. And it's the same feeling when the Holy Spirit is in church on a Sunday morning because it is a feeling that you get. That's the feeling I had when I was driving home from church in my car alone. God seemed to be saying to me, 'I've got you and you're fine. So, stop asking me to take it away'. And so, I think it was then knowing that I was okay with God and He was okay with me.

People wonder why I stayed with the Presbyterian Church. It's in my blood and my bones to be Presbyterian. That's not the case for all of our family. Some members of the family have, of course, left the church or gone to other denominations. But for me, there's a very strong line of connection with the Presbyterian Church and the Reformed tradition. My grandparents and my parents were elders in the church. My father was the clerk of session. My mother ran the WMS and did all sorts of other things in the church. I grew up in that context. We went regularly to the little church that was in the Scottish Settlement. I went to the cemetery and looked at the graves of people who had come from the Highlands of Scotland. So, when people tell me, 'You know, just go and join the United Church'...I say, 'No, that's not who I am'. The Presbyterian Church has been my church, my community, where my family has been connected for all the years and we've been in Canada for a long time.

The leadership and pastor at our church lead the way for inclusive change. LGBTQI people are invited into the life of the church. That was the proof...it was our pastor putting himself right on the line there and showing us his love. It was unbelievable. The minister invited me to unreserved full access participation into the entire life of the church. And he did it again and again and again. That's how I found my way back to the church and to God.

I don't know how many active families still attend our church on a regular basis but I'd say 65 percent of them are related to me. Our family is a pillar of St. (...) Presbyterian Church...as elders, clerk of session, board of managers, Sunday School teachers etc. My grandfather came from Scotland to that church. My parents were married in that church. Both parents were buried from that church. My sister was married in that church. You know there's a lot of family connection and I feel...when I walk in that building...all of the family connections that have gone before. My partner has always been accepted as part of our family.

There are some safe people that I found that I've come out to that haven't condemned me or at least not yet. And they've been supportive for the most part. And for that I give thanks to God. I love this church of ours and hate it all in the same breath. It would be so much easier if I could just leave The Presbyterian Church in Canada and I tried to leave. Not once, not twice, not three times but four times. Just like that line from Hotel California, 'you can check out anytime but you can never leave.'

My Presbyterian roots go back more than two hundred years to my great-great-great grandfather. He emigrated from Scotland to Canada in the early 1800s and was mentioned in the Proudfoot Papers. And this is what is said in the Proudfoot papers when my ancestor was baptized: 'at this place, there is a people who cannot live without the gospel and who are zealous for it and love it'. I know who I am and where I come from but it has been a very long journey.

My Mom tells me that I was eight years old when I first said I wanted to be a minister...And that our church was incredibly important to us. My parents had emigrated from England to Canada in (the 1960s). And in doing so had left their family...had left their community. My father was a Presbyterian and my grandmother

is very Presbyterian. My grandparents...on my father's side met in Sunday school. And so, church was important to him and continues to be important to my aunts. Recognizing the need for community and recognizing the need for a circle of friends given that they had left all of their families, the church ended up being a place where they found all that. In our family, the church was the extended family. I can remember potluck dinners in the church hall. I think – as I'm an adult looking back, that they happened every time we had communion. Because every three or four weeks we'd have a potluck lunch. They connected it with communion so you can have communion and then they'd have the community meal afterwards.

My parents were extremely involved in leadership. My dad became an elder. My mom was a Sunday school trustee. My mom was the treasurer.

I remember lots of singing with guitar and lots of music and just enjoying loving that experience. I can remember as a child preferring to be in church as opposed to Sunday school. Sunday school was boring; church was fun. And in the prayers, I would practice praying and seeing if I could pray at the same time as the person who was praying. So, when they would be praying, I would be saying in my mind the same words they were saying...just as they were saying...I would connect. So given the role the church played and how important it was for me and my spiritual development, it makes sense that I would look to be a minister.

On finally finding an affirming church in The Presbyterian Church in Canada...after realizing my former church would not accept me: 'I cried for 45 minutes in the park by myself...I realized how much I needed this space. I needed this so much. I just needed this part of my life to come back. I missed it so much.'

God or the Church?

In many stories, there was a contrast between what people experienced in their relationship with God and what they experienced in the church. Despite the harm done to them, the deep relationship of love and grace with the Divine enabled them to continue to offer their gifts in the church and indeed to hold out a wider vision of what the church might be.

Accepting myself and living an openly gay life led to me being a better person. It was then that it was easier to read the Bible. I became a much happier person.

I came to understand that I'm gay, so I can't go to church. It's just what it is. I had to pick between being Christian and being gay. I really thought that I just wasn't allowed to also be a spiritual person.

And this is the message that I want to carry to gay people, "You may have given up on God but God has never given up on you." And that's very important because whosoever believes shall be saved.

What I hear in the preaching at our church is that the bottom line is 'grace'.

When your life has been grounded in theology and you now feel that theology does not provide a framework to answer the questions facing you, where do you turn? Always to God!

This is not a story of shame. I think being gay has made me a better person. And in fact, a better Christian. My relationship with God is better. I feel like I'm less judgemental because I'm gay. I feel I'm more welcoming and open...inclusive.

I had a very intimate sense of speaking with Jesus and telling him about my secrets that I didn't feel I could tell anyone else.

I really don't think that my being gay bothered God a great deal.

I have never felt that God has been against me. So, my relationship with God is good.

I don't know what brought me back to church but something did. And maybe, we'll just say, it was the Holy Spirit. I really wasn't angry with God, because I really do feel like I was accepted by Him.

When I graduated from (...) College, I knew being gay was part of me even though I was fighting it and ignoring it and praying about it. But it didn't seem to bother God – I went to churches that were good churches and I had good ministries there...and I always left before they learned the truth about me – I never stayed anywhere too long.

Eventually you just stop coming out and you just start living your life. You may have to 'correct' people every once in a while, especially those who just assume that you are 'straight'. Eventually most people see me for who I am, except perhaps in the church.

At one point I had an experience of the presence of God that was quite overwhelming when I was saying my prayers at night. I guess you could say I knew that God loved me but I didn't know if God loved me the way that I was.

God is love. And if not, then why are we doing this?

This is who God made me to be. There is no question in my mind that this is who I was made to be. And as far as that goes, I just thank God for it. I absolutely thank God for it.

I want to have a 'normal' life experience and I want to be special for being the person I am. Yes, I happen to be gay...and I am so much more.

The God I believe in...the faith that I stand for is not a God of hatred or abuse. Not a God of judgement but a God of love.

Grace Received in the Face of Harm

There are storytellers who have had a generally positive experience of being part of a church community. Despite knowing and even experiencing the exclusion and abuse that was present in the larger life of the church, their experience of being welcomed and affirmed in a local church community still enabled them to know God's grace and love. This grace may have been experienced because of a congregation, family members, friends, allies or church leaders.

When I came out to my minister, he said to me, 'Well, I think you should just come along to church Sunday and be among those who love you.'

So maybe it's helpful to know that there have been families (with members who are LGBTQI) for whom the Presbyterian Church was a positive experience.

And it's very interesting when I say a good thing about my church...my (high school) friends are very surprised. And when I talk about it, I have to explain to them that my church is very accepting. It's not like a lot of churches you see; it's very open.

My church actually hosts a gay support group.

It blows my mind how diverse it is at my church and it's great to see. I (openly identifies as queer) was really thrown in the first year I was here. I was able to help lead Vacation Bible School, Sunday School and other programs. I was given all of the opportunities and encouraged to participate right away.

I have a deep sense of belonging...of 'family' in The Presbyterian Church in Canada despite the church's stance about me.

The congregation loved me whether I was dating a same-sex partner or an opposite-sex partner. It didn't matter.

My (LGBTQI) child feels like their voice is being heard in their church.

To their affirming church: "Thank you for not making us choose between our faith and our love for each other."

I was given an equal and legitimate platform to share my story. My racially diverse congregation listened without judgement to my story as I was transitioning (from male to female). They continued to welcome and support me. There was curiosity and non-invasive questioning from the congregation but I was never misgendered.

Acts of Grace

This sense of inclusion and belonging could often be traced to a specific decision or event which was taken by the congregation.

Special event was held to support the church musician who was maimed by gay bashing assault in his town.

Our church accepted a gay organist who was in a (same-sex) relationship.

Having a lesbian couple be married at our church let me know that it was a safe space.

Our session, ministers and congregation fully supported a same-sex wedding in the sanctuary.

Our church set up a support group for parents of those who identify as LGBTQI.

My church encouraged me to set up a Bible Study group (for an LGBTQI group).

(Our church) hosted a Bible study specifically around supporting LGBTQI people.

Our church marched in the Halifax Pride Parade.

I have found joy and fellowship with SAGA, an organized group within St. Andrew's, with many gay and lesbian folk. It is truly heart-warming fellowship...their compassion and warmth, their inclusive ways are most admirable and joyfully received by myself and my partner.

(Back then) the question was raised, "Why was St. Andrew's Gay Association allowed to use the church?" But the solution was very simple. Make it an official church organization. So, from then on SAGA has been an official committee of St. Andrew's.

I know that when I choose to marry a same-sex partner, it will be made available to me at my church.

My church is accepting of me (as I am) and created an Inclusion Committee.

Local congregation through discernment and discussion has become inclusive and affirming.

When I saw Pride flag stickers in the windows of the church and when I was also asked about what pronouns I preferred to be used, I thought, "Maybe I'm allowed to be here."

When our church marched in the Pride Parade (in our town).

Having fantastic role models in the church that are also LGBTQI.

Our church provided education about language and terminology and were also involved in the local Pride Parade.

An organizer of the Toronto Pride Parade worked to be sure that the Presbyterians were at the front (of the faith groups' section) because it was felt they were doing very important work.

Seeing "God's Love Includes Everyone" flags and signs at the Pride Parade.

My church intentionally includes gays in all areas of church life including session...not just in SAGA.

The Body, Mind and Soul discussion led our session and church to change our church legislation to include everyone.

So, we drafted an inclusion statement...it's in the staff manual. This is the best that we can be to be inclusive. It opened the door for gay staff members to be open about their lives.

Gay man was accepted as part of the worshipping community in the Ghanaian Presbyterian Church.

There were moments of grace I experienced that affirmed my (closeted) identity. They included: The 'Affirm' gatherings in Waterloo; when I heard a preacher speak about LGBTQI affirmation and what it's like to be in exile and to be reminded that God has no step-children; attending Pride event with other Presbyterians and The Presbyterian Church in Canada for Inclusion website.

Leading with Grace

In many cases, this sense of belonging and being loved was made possible through the courageous or creative actions of a minister or another church leader. For many storytellers, the importance of such actions in making real the gracious invitation of God to all cannot be underestimated. For many ministers who told their stories, the act of welcoming people who identified as LGBTQI and getting to know what their gifts are and inviting them to serve was transforming.

Welcoming people involves getting to know them and what their gifts are and inviting them to serve in all aspects of church and ministry.

For me, I'm responding to the people and work that God has put before me. A ministry that embraces the LGBTQI community.

The first person I came out to was my university chaplain who was an ally. He saved my life through his support and understanding. I wish more church leaders would be more like that university chaplain instead of piecemealing scripture to back their homo-bi-transphobia.

In his first sermon after the 9/11 World Trade Center Terrorist Attack, our minister made a point of saying that it's wrong to be accusing homosexuals for the World Trade Centre bombing and it is not what God believes. It really resonated with me that in the pulpit he was willing to stand up there and say this is just wrong. It's not what's in the Bible.

The minister and his family were very receptive to us attending the church. That encouraged us to attend more than the church itself.

Thank God for my minister, because if I had talked to my mom about our trans kid, it would have been a much different outcome. My minister talked to me and said she didn't believe the soul is male or female. It didn't really matter what body we put the soul in.

And so, she (our minister) was just an invaluable source of unconditional love and acceptance. She helped me when my child came out...and also gave me resources and books.

My friend, – who's now a minister – and I talked about marriage and I just picked up on the language he used: 'two people' – a marriage between two people, two persons.

I was at my first Pride and I was standing there and saw the Presbyterian Pride people walking by and I called out to my minister. She came over to the rails and gave me a hug. The biggest turning point in my entire life, I think...was that hug from my minister.

The support and love from a minister gave me the courage to come out at General Assembly.

Both of my kids have said, "Well, we know it was okay to be gay, cause of an elder who is out at our church." It was somebody that they knew was an okay adult...a lovely person, super skilled, well connected at church.

Seeing and knowing that I was part of a group of ministers who marched in the Pride Parade helped him to trust that I am an ally and to be able to share with me.

And the Music Director said to me, 'Just before we get started (job interview) how do you identify? Like what pronouns would you like me to use?'

When I came out, the minister never judged or did anything negative. He was there really to say, 'I'm here pastorally for you. And if you want to talk, we can talk'. I hope that in the church community, that's what people would find.

I try to lead a space where everyone gets to know that God loves them, not because of anything they do, just because of who they are. They come to know that God's love is universal.

I remember one minister remarking to me about the value of thinking about...what it's like to be in the midst of a conversation where you are being talked 'about' but not talked 'with'. He hadn't quite thought about that before and it was quite encouraging for me to know that someone understood that.

The churches I served (as a minister) grew. We did good things, creative things. I saw people's lives changed there and let the Spirit move there. It didn't seem to bother God at all that being gay is part of my life.

Gracious Families

Sometimes people's positive experience of church community came through the courage and persistence of family members who did not exclude them in their family life nor in the connection with the church. Sometimes this was a perspective that developed over time. Family members who told their stories also recounted how their faith and lives were transformed as they more fully included members who identified as LGBTQI. Coming out as LGBTQI often involves much preparation and stress. There may be fear of being rejected or ridiculed by their own family or community.

That's what I need to keep saying to my kids, 'That whatever you do with your life, you know Jesus loves you'.

I have heard stories from loving grandmothers in their 90s who have changed their minds about homosexuality because their grandchildren came out.

My daughter came out to me in grade 10...and thank goodness, I had the common sense to just give her a big hug...and say, 'It's all good.'

We had quite the journey as people who at one time were ashamed parents of a straight ally to LGBTQI friends...to becoming loving accepting grandparents of a bisexual granddaughter.

I remember how my Presbyterian mother – an elder in her church – and my partner's Catholic father sat on a couch in the middle of a gay bar watching a drag show. They were introduced to an amazing community of friends. With each introduction his father beamed with pride and my mom still talks about how much fun that night was.

Quietly one night with my parents, I realized that I can have a good life as a lesbian. I felt tears falling down my face....

My mother always bought nice pink 'happy granddaughter' birthday cards for my (non-binary adult child). This year, my mother bought a 'non-gendered' card and wrote, 'Happy Birthday to my Grandchild'. So those little things can make a big difference!

My mother's first question really was, 'Do you have the support and care you need these days?' And my dad said, 'I don't understand this but you're our son and we love you and we will always do whatever we can to care for you.'

I really appreciate the way that my family gathered around me and has continued to enfold me.

After I came out, my mother grabbed me and said, 'No matter what, God loves you. No matter what you do'.

My family continued to love and accept me even though they did not understand my identity.

And my dad said to my sibling, 'Are you gay?'. And my sibling replied, 'Yup.' And that was that. Our family is great. There's never been any question of loving them any less or treating them any differently.

I thought being gay meant a life of loneliness. But when I made that decision to come out to my family, then my bigger family and then to my community, I was shocked by how incredible an experience it was. I was met with incredible love and understanding from my traditional Presbyterian family. Coming out to my family also led to another reconciliation in our family. My closeted gay cousin had hidden from my grandfather. My coming out letter – also sent to my grandfather – prompted him to go talk to my uncle about the letter. That opened the door for my grandfather to be invited to my cousin's same-sex wedding.

When I was in a difficult conversation with another minister who objected to gay people being included in the church, I exclaimed, 'I just want you to stop. I just want you to be a minister for four seconds and love my son. Just love my son!'

When it came to my parents, it was like, "We don't understand it but we love you." And they accepted my partner as family and have always included him in everything.

One coming out experience as recounted by the storyteller and their family members:

(From the storyteller) I was practicing saying, 'I am gay. I'm gay...' I practiced it over and over...out loud. It's bizarre but you have to build yourself up to have the courage to say it...first of all, to yourself...And then to someone else.

(The storyteller's parent) I'll never forget that night when my son came out to me. I was bawling the whole way home saying, "Oh God, why (my son), why, why, why?! Please not my son" and all I could think of was the struggles that he was going to have in the years ahead. And I was so shocked because he isn't flamboyant and you would never know that he is gay. It was a Friday night and I went upstairs to my bedroom...and I never kneel for prayer as I've just never gotten into that habit but I got on my knees and I remember saying, "God help me see this thing through the eyes of Jesus and not through my eyes"...and that prayer started a whole process in my life where God was opening up my eyes to new ways of understanding and new ways of thinking through my son.

(The storyteller's) grandfather had said, "I have been praying for years that God would teach me about this and now through my grandson he is teaching me. You are my angel." So, it was such a moment of grace for him (grandfather).

(As recounted by storyteller's sibling) My grandfather took my big burly brother's face in his hands saying, "This is why you are my grandson. You're my angel who's come to teach me how to be a better human."

Surprising Relationships of Grace

Even though coming out typically is very difficult, if the hearers affirm and include the person coming out, the sense of relief and welcome can bring great healing. Some storytellers who identified as LGBTQI also recounted how this sense of grace and belonging had come through Allies, at times people who might be the least expected to do so.

It was so important having a trusted, active adult ally who supported LGBTQI people in the church.

One church member who did try and get us to be an LGBTQI safe zone was there for us. When there was a backlash, she protected us and stuck her neck out for us.

I learned at my church that you shouldn't assume what people believe. I assumed 'older' people would have a lot of trouble with accepting gay people. That was not the case.

Upon learning that I was gay, my minister said, 'Oh, that's not a problem'. It turned out to be true.

It made all the difference that my church was accepting and making space for LGBTQI people.

I feel called to continue in ministry in spite of my disagreement with The Presbyterian Church in Canada's current stance with respect to inclusion. I struggle on how to best serve LGBTQI people.

I stay with The Presbyterian Church in Canada because it is right, not because it's easy. I'm staying despite the injustice and exclusion of gay people...especially for the sake of youth and kids who need supports and role models.

I found a network of friends and mentors who value me...all parts of me and the gifts that I bring to the church.

A new friend gave me a big hug and said, 'It's so nice to know that somebody else knows what this is like'...because her daughter is dating a transman.

Just even asking for a person's preferred pronouns can make it seem like people care and are accepting and open.

IN SEARCH OF GRACE

For a number of storytellers, their experience of grace and belonging in the church came only when they moved outside of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and into a different faith community or support group or ecumenical network.

I appreciated that the Anglican Canon Paul Jennings saw same-sex unions as a form of Christian Community.

So, when I came out to the first person ever...(not at church)...it was amazing. And I was accepted and I had a wonderful kind of positive experience from all of my (non-churched) friends.

I was able to comfortably come out to a pastor associated with Generous Spaces Ministry.

My school's GSA (Gender-Sexuality Awareness Club – High School) lets us find people who have similar experiences...and it's helpful knowing that there are other people with similar journeys. It's a very open space...non-judgmental.

(My child) went to a new high school this year and joined the GSA...and right away felt total acceptance.

But you know, it's sad that I found acceptance in a secular place, rather than church...but it was a gift.

As I was learning to minister to gay people in my congregation, it was ministers in other denominations that offered me support and guidance.

My family had joined an evangelical church but when I came out, I was received with love and felt closer than ever to my immediate family.

When God Works Through LGBTQI People

It is important to recognize that LGBTQI people are not only recipients of God's grace but that God's grace also flows through them. As mentioned above, it often happens that a false dichotomy is drawn between the church and the LGBTQI community. All people are a gift from God and exclusion not only harms those who identify as LGBTQI; the life of the church and its witness to the world is diminished when LGBTQI people are excluded.

It has suddenly occurred to me that queerness has shaped my ministry...to be gentler, not judgmental. Being queer is a gift. A way to see the world.

I can see how my journey and my pain and all that has transformed my life...can be used to walk with other people. And maybe, to also walk with The Presbyterian Church in Canada...and maybe that is where grace can be found.

I kind of think of my identities as a superpower...I exist in between a lot of different definitions or binaries.

Knowing who I am and that this is the voice of my ministry...is the voice of my own true gladness. That was never in conflict.

So, the friends and the people who cared for me and that really taught me about ministry were mostly gay.

I went from being both a Christian and gay...to now being a gay Christian, where I feel like so much of what I do regarding my sexuality is because I'm a Christian...and so much of what I do regarding my Christianity is because of my sexuality.

I've had some really great experiences ever since coming out in church spaces. It has given other people space. People 'corralled me' to ask, 'How's your partner?' or 'You know, my sister's gay'. People keep asking questions. I'm thinking to myself, 'I know what's going on here. People are looking for THAT safe person...to TALK to and disclose their story'. It's amazing how you become that safe person for others...by living your life honestly.

It is important to provide opportunities for community, leadership and exercising gifts inside and outside the church for LGBTQI persons.

We're ordinary people. Church is full of people like us or it should be. Yeah. And that's how I see it. This is all about ordinary people and their families...and single people too.

I stay involved to support other LGBTQI people and to encourage change in The Presbyterian Church in Canada to be more inclusive. It's a calling.

As a gay person, I cannot turn off being gay. I will see my entire world...always as a gay person.

I remind myself that God intentionally put me on this earth and made me this way so that I can truly empathize with and be an advocate for those whose spirits are broken due to this constant dissonance between wanting to be proud of who they are and the shame they feel from what the church preaches – which contradicts God's message of love for one another.

The inclusion of LGBTQI people is not an 'issue' to be discussed but people to be loved.

Once, during worship, there was a laying on of hands and giving of forgiveness by members identifying as LGBTQI...in spite being treated horribly they stay committed to God.

I am so appreciative of those who are openly LGBTQI, that were brave enough to speak out at General Assembly.

Beloved by God

As has been illustrated in many of the stories told to the Rainbow Communion, heteronormative assumptions are built into the life and practice of the church, from announcements made in the local congregation to the doctrine and polity of the denomination. Without thinking or question, opposite sex attraction and the binary nature of gender are assumed. Those who challenge those assumptions by their words or simply by being present are most often silenced, ignored and excluded. In order for the church to move in a new direction, it is essential to affirm that all people whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity are equally beloved by God.

It is time to re-establish that churches are supposed to be safe places.

I want to tell churches there are already gay people...LGTBQI people...in your congregation. Open your eyes and assume that every group of people includes LGBTQI people.

To repent of homophobia would be a willingness to talk to one another as human beings. There is no room for hate or judgement.

In short, we are a queer couple comprised of a queer man and a transgender queer woman who are invested in the Presbyterian church. We hope that this church will take the right path forward to accept God's children, regardless of gender and sexuality. We hope that this church will allow us to marry in the sight of God...family and congregation. We hope that this church will accept us as we are...recognizing that while we have many flaws, who we are and who we love are not sins.

Reconciliation occurs when we are allowed to be who we are in the context of God's grace.

I want a church that's open and inclusive. Only where and when this occurs can LGBTQ individuals in our faith community really enjoy dignity and the assurance of being equally beloved by God.

Reconciliation is what it really means to love people even when you don't agree with them. It also means we don't have a scale of sin.

There needs to be a clear statement that affirms all persons who identify as LGBTQI or as non-straight or not-cisgender.

In responding to a parent who was troubled that their daughter came out, I replied, "Don't worry about her salvation; it's in God's hands. Just love her."

Real reconciliation cannot happen without inclusion.

Recommendation No. RCL-002

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirm that all people whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity are equally beloved by God.

RESPONDING TO THE CALL TO LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE BROKEN BODY OF THE CHURCH

The church too often puts more emphasis on a person's sexual identity than on their identity in Christ. When the church ignores the gifts present within the body of Christ, it fails to appreciate all that God has for the church and fails to see God's glory revealed in all people. For our unwillingness to affirm the spiritual gifts present in all the people of the church, we are sorry and we repent. (Moderator's Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

The Dilemma of Responding to a Calling or Vocation within the Church

People who identify as LGBTQI have participated in the life of the church at different levels of leadership and accountability. One of the consequences of forced isolation is that people who identify as LGBTQI are not able to offer their gifts freely in the church. This does not mean that they do not feel a sense of calling or that they do not have gifts to share. They are often afraid to become more involved and particularly to be in a leadership role because of the possibility of their secret being revealed and having to face the consequences of this within the church and in their broader lives. This is true for all levels of participation in the church.

I'm living with fear because there's still that old – mostly homophobic – thinking in church. You don't know who you can tell. I don't want it to stop my dream of getting ordained and helping people and becoming a missionary. I have to live a double life and be careful.

There are many young adults in The Presbyterian Church in Canada who identify as LGBTQI or Allies who didn't go into ministry because of the church's stance. They felt that they were not part of the church and never would be.

The church's stance on same-sex marriage stood in my way of learning how to be a good Christian.

My confidence and belief in God's unconditional love for me started to diminish over the years of shame, guilt and depression that was brought on by the church.

After 20 years of life struggling to have a spiritual home, to then have what felt like exile. To not have a career and especially not to be able to honour the Call that was in my heart.

The seminary becomes the place where those who are also gay are seeking affirmation in ministry and they do not have their sense of call affirmed. The institution takes it upon itself to deny a person's sense of call regardless of that person's conviction that they are responding to a call to ministry.

There was somebody in the congregation who did an intensive search on my name. They discovered that while I was doing graduate work in philosophy, I had done a lot of writing work for a journal. One of the journal issues was entitled 'Lesbian Mothering' and I had done a book review (in it). This person brought that to our session. That person said, "This is proof that she is a lesbian!" That didn't prove anything other than I'm somebody who likes getting free books as a reviewer. But that was a red light to me, that if I wanted to be in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, I needed to go even deeper into the closet and learn to mirror some of the homophobic attitudes that I was hearing and seeing.

My participation and serving in the life of the congregation was curbed because of my relationship with my partner.

Impact on Allies who are Responding to a Calling or Vocation

Not only is there a fear of being outed or outing oneself, there is also a fear of being criticized for advocating for people who may identify as LGBTQI or for simply wrestling with questions around sexuality or gender.

I experienced discrimination during an interview. This issue of sexuality and inclusion came up. It became apparent that it was to be the litmus test of whether I was the minister for the job...whatever my stance was on this issue. I said, "I'm not going to answer that. If we want to get to that debate, then the interview's over." If I had to face that in terms of the awkwardness in an interview – where one's stance was a determination of whether or not you were suitable for ministry...well, let's hope that's not become the single criteria to call ministers.

I received threatening letters from members of my congregation regarding my supportive stance on same-sex marriage.

We've got ministers who have gay kids but their kids are not out in the congregation and the ministers are afraid to say anything. I can't imagine what that's like for them.

As an ordained person working in the church, I am always feeling the pressure to stay silent about my kid who identifies as LGBTQI. I keep asking myself, "How can I support my kid through university if I can't stay employed?" I have to keep my mouth shut.

I am always worrying about having to do things in secret...whether for my family or to support LGBTQI folks in an affirming way. I am not sure if my session would support me if I am openly affirming or supportive.

I was torn by the prospect of losing my job versus turning away same-sex couples who wished to be married by me.

I still feel wretched that I had to decline to conduct the marriage of a good friend and their partner.

I confess that I'm still learning to be an ally. And I want to say that the church needs to be a safe place for allies, too. So now I'm quoting from my great mentor when decades ago she said, "We are talking about creating safe places for people within the LGBTQ community."

There also needs to be safe places for supporters. Sometimes people who are supporting the LGBTQ community also need to know that they are in safe places, not just in physical spaces but also emotionally and spiritually safe places. I don't really feel safe in my denomination. I believe allies need to feel safe too.

During an interview for a job within the church, questions were posed that did not pertain to my abilities...but rather around my sexuality.

After all of the fear and hurt experienced, ministry has become 'deadening' and no longer 'life giving'.

(...) college was a very dangerous place. It was dangerous in all sorts of ways. The chances of me slipping up and letting somebody know...not that I was a gay person...but even just that I was an ally...it would have sunk everything!

Upon speaking in support of LGBTQI Christians, a family member told me that they had a prophesy that God was going to shut me up for my blaspheming.

I struggled long and hard with a request to marry a same-sex couple that I knew. The wedding would not be in our church. I considered that I'd made vows not to take a divisive course. Would be marrying this couple fall under the category of divisive course? What is a divisive course that's not defined? Is there really a rule in the church that says I can't marry somebody? Where is it written? Maybe it's written somewhere. There was an investigation because it was suspected that I had conducted a same-sex wedding. I remember some

nights...waking up in the middle the night just imagining being investigated by presbytery and what would the discipline be. I lived in fear that my vocation would be taken away from me.

The Heightened Fear and Anxiety Associated with Working with Children and Youth*

(See Appendix 7: Debunking the Myth that Falsely Links Paedophilia with Those who Identify as LGBTQI)

The reluctance to share gifts becomes more acute when working with children or youth or with vulnerable adults because of the erroneous and ruinous association made between people who identify as LGBTQI and the abuse of children and other vulnerable people. Despite a strong sense of calling and having gifts to nurture faith formation, many people simply do not offer to serve out of deep fear for their own reputation. Others feel the need to leave their leadership roles in ministry with children and youth because of rumours and speculation about their character and motives.

I definitely think one of the things holding me back after I came out to myself was the long history of stigma around LGBTQ people working with children, especially gay people. It was definitely something that I never wanted to be associated with me, even though I knew it was not correct...and it was homophobic to think that way. I didn't ever want my capacity to be called into question because of who I'm attracted to.

In an article published by the Presbyterian Record and the New Westminster newspapers a young person was asked to reconsider her participation in Pride events or reconsider her participation as a youth leader.

People need to be exposed to healthy gay relationships...and not assume that: homosexual = paedophile.

The Rainbow Communion heard the stories of a number of people who have been involved in leadership in church camping. It became apparent that for many young people who identify as LGBTQI or who advocate for them, camp often provides a more open and inclusive context than their own congregations and one that is sometimes at variance with the official policy of the church.

My church camp became a haven where I was safe and felt that I could serve God, not The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

I see hypocrisy in the church for telling kids that the church is open and accepting. I am worried that at church camp children are being told that God loves them but the church's official stance is NOT inclusive. There is the potential for great harm to a child in that situation. The camp ethos is at variance with The Presbyterian Church in Canada official policy which can be harmful when kids return home to their non-inclusive churches.

Camp is my church. My 'home church' is not, because 'church' is not safe.

However, even in these contexts there is a great deal of fear that parents or grandparents will withdraw their children or grandchildren from camp if staff and campers are able to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Those who do not identify as LGBTQI are also often fearful that their advocacy for inclusion might put their jobs at risk or lead to the withdrawal of children or young people from programs.

They perceive us as being 'different', being a threat...I guess people have a lot of misinformation about homosexuality.

A family member was prepared to remove their own transgender grandchild from a Presbyterian Church in Canada program because the program had made accommodations for trans participants. Financial support by them was to be rescinded, too.

Some people believe that LGBTQI persons are more likely to sexually abuse children. This is a real conundrum for gay camp counsellors...and it also adds to the fear of coming out.

It was made clear that there would be a question of whether or not camps would be financially supported by the church...if they were to be LGBTQ inclusive.

Risks of Considering Paid Employment within The Presbyterian Church in Canada

The fear of being involved in leadership in the church becomes even more acute when considering following a call to ordained ministry, either as elders or as ministers of Word and Sacraments or as diaconal ministers or to other forms

of paid, accountable employment. Many people who told their stories felt a strong call to leadership in the church but wrestled with the possibility of being ordained in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Some simply decided to ignore or resist the call to ministry.

Because I needed to let those that I worked with know that I had outed myself when supporting a homeless gay youth (who had just been thrown out of his home), the news then moved quickly through the rest of the staff and hierarchy. They then attempted to fire me – even though I was not in a relationship at the time – for a ‘breach of morals’ clause. As a result, because of my honesty, I have never been ordained in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

It’s not just me going through this. There are people who have felt the Call even before the church was talking about sexuality and inclusion; they had to bury a part of themselves.

If you can pass for straight and can stay in the closet...then you can have a career in the church serving God.

It is unfair that someone who has given their whole life to the church now finds their employment precarious (if outed).

LGBTQI people must be as free to be ordained as any straight person. The church has no right to ask about their relationships.

The church has created a place where ‘identity politics’ and having a sexual/gender identity becomes the biggest part of who you are instead of you as a whole person and the gifts that you bring.

My call to ministry 31 years ago was overwhelmingly strong to the point where I felt I had no choice but to do what God called me to do and pursue a vocation in ordained ministry within the Presbyterian church. But even then, God knew what he was getting in a minister. He knew who I was. He knew what I was. And He called me anyway.

It always takes more time for me to discern...whenever I feel called to do something in the church.

And when somebody asked me if I let my name stand to become an elder, I said, ‘No. I thought you can’t be gay in the Presbyterian Church.’” And so, I didn’t.

For any who hear the call to enter ministry and are gay, it is a decision to live in secrecy.

The Threat of Being ‘Outed’ While Preparing for Ministry

A number of storytellers recounted how they had to end their preparation for ministry of Word and Sacraments or diaconal ministry in the Presbyterian Church when they were outed or when they found the need to hide overwhelming. Despite a strong sense of call to ministry, they were told that they could not continue in the process because of their same-sex relationship or their refusal to commit to a life of celibacy. This left many people with a deep sense of internal trauma because they were unable to follow their call in the church that they loved. The cost was heavy as they had to pursue their calling in another denomination that was inclusive or had to find work in another vocation.

As a candidate for ministry, I experienced fear at being found out and punished for my orientation.

The current situation means that (Presbyterian) seminary students who came out have to move over to Emmanuel College (United) in order to complete their studies.

In the spring (–), when I was (–) years old, I attended a Guidance Conference at Crieff Hills to consider a career in ministry. I will not be using words such as ‘vocation’ or ‘call’ because these words are too painful for me to use. If I had become a minister, I would have received a taxable income, so, from my perspective, it would have been a career.

I learned a lot at the Guidance Conference – learning is not always fun; some learning can be quite painful. Particularly, I learned how humiliating and oppressive you (The Presbyterian Church in Canada) were toward LGBTQ individuals, like myself.

When I was being interviewed during the Guidance Conference, an elder repeatedly asked me if I had had any past sexual relationships, finally, asking – “has there ever been someone?” I was humiliated. You have no idea how personal that question was and how it made me feel, as a young, (–) -year-old man: Like I was

on trial. Really, I was on trial. Because, if I had answered, that I am attracted to men, that would have been a serious problem.

I made the decision that The Presbyterian Church in Canada was not for me. That was traumatic, especially because I had grown up in your world. But it would have been even more traumatic to have pretended to be straight just for the sake of a career as a minister – I would have been no help to my parishioners if I was living against my own grain.

I am submitting this story because there could be another young man or young woman, out there who is considering a career in ministry. That young man or young woman might identify as gay or bisexual.

All I ask is that you consider how humiliating your treatment of me was – how that trauma is a kind that you cannot presume to repair. If there were a ‘GOD’ – a ‘GOD’ who escapes my own human capacity to imagine, to love and to wonder – then perhaps that ‘GOD’ could help me to heal the trauma you caused me. That ‘GOD’ could maybe help another young man or young woman, who is struggling between a call to ministry and a call to living an honest, authentic life.

I was attacked by The Presbyterian Church in Canada (Guidance Conference) counsellors who made life very miserable and tried to derail my ministry.

Being in Ordained Ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada

For those who still pursued their call, some had become ordained or had taken up leadership in the church. However, this was almost always accomplished by not being forthright about their LGBTQI identity and relationships. The need to hide their true self becomes heightened and the need for secrecy is paramount.

One minister spoke about the “deadliness of silence”. Fear of what exposure would mean includes: loss of employment for themselves and/or their family members, ruined reputation and not being able to follow a deeply felt sense of call. One person recounted the story of a minister who, “was counselled not to come out because the congregation liked her so much.”

As I cannot be out in the church, I forgo some of the privileges that straight people take for granted, such as: sharing a home, being together with someone you love, sharing health and dental benefits....

The number of times I mentioned homosexuality in a sermon you can count on the fingers of one hand in twenty-seven years...But the time I did mention it there was always a nasty fall out afterwards.

If I left the church and I don’t have a ministry, I don’t have anything. I lose my identity. I can’t risk that.

I can’t reveal this part of myself in church. Many have been concealing who they are from the church.

I felt trapped and torn between how God made me and the call God gave me.

I have lived in a lot of fear and watched congregants become so angry over the question of inclusion...including my inclusion.

I experienced great discomfort as a closeted clergy person and having to compartmentalize my life.

A Presbyterian Church in Canada minister falsely charged me with being lesbian several decades ago. I had to endure a horrid meeting at the presbytery.

If I was discovered...I wouldn’t be loved anymore. I wouldn’t be accepted. I wouldn’t be nurtured.

Some of those elders were my best friends. But eventually, they often came to me saying, “You know, if you are not ‘anti-gay’ enough in the pulpit, we are going to leave the church.” So, they did.

My congregation just needed some education on sexuality...and I was afraid that if I provided that leadership I would be outed.

I had to hide all the time. Every time the church phone rang and somebody said, ‘I’d like to talk to you.’ – my fear was that somebody has ‘found me out’.

...We, who identify as LGBTQI and are called to ministry and leadership are always having to flee into hiding or having to fight for our vocational life.

I felt that I had to be untruthful. To tell the truth in that time was too costly. So, I felt that I had to live a lie. And I felt that I had to hide.

For me, homophobia is day-to-day experience. Its presence in the church leaves me hiding, reluctant to be vulnerable with my colleagues, a feeling of threats always hanging over my head and feeling shame.

Living Openly in the Church

For those who have been out and have received a call or been employed in the church, many have experienced bullying, harassment, threats and retribution for living their lives openly and honestly.

I have endured homophobic slurs, assaults and bullying.

I avoided coming out because of the abuse that would surely follow.

AIDS was described as 'God's Punishment' (against gays).

When the minister included LGBTQI in their prayer, there was a backlash and critical comments made.

As I was going through the calling process there's always the nagging question, 'Did they turn me down because I'm gay'.

I have been affirmed, welcomed and given opportunities within my congregations. But somewhere else in the Presbyterian churches, a kid like me, will have opportunities denied because of their sexuality.

LGBTQI+ youth are hindered in their future prospects because it's hard and almost impossible to go to school and eventually get a good job when you are living on the streets. Many are thrown out of their own homes because parents believe it's what the Bible says.

There were some parishioners who anonymously left some pamphlets and articles on my desk that were anti-gay.

The posters (assuring LGBTQI community they were welcome) that had been hung in the church and neighbourhood were torn down repeatedly.

I endured loss of status and betterment opportunities because of virulent homophobic culture. I had to take early retirement for my health.

Forced Celibacy

Some believe that the only way they can live out their call is to accept a life of imposed celibacy.

It was several decades ago that I made my decision to proceed toward the ministry of Word and Sacraments. And if I had known then, what I know now...I would never have done it. I'd have looked for some other line of work rather than live a life of forced celibacy.

There is the special burden of celibacy imposed on gay people by the church. There is a denial of justice, freedom, equality by the imposition of life-long celibacy.

I've chosen celibacy not because I particularly want to be but because it's basically been forced on me.

To be honest, we are generally not very welcoming to LGBTQI persons when they seek leadership positions in our church. We inquire neatly into their sexual preferences orientation and experiences. Then, if they still want to pursue careers in our organization, we force them to accept a life of perpetual deprivation and self-denial as celibates.

I felt that call...and I also felt the call to finally just be honest and come out. I had three pastors tell me that I have to be celibate.

You are not allowed to experience love or a connection with a partner.

Those Forced to Leave The Presbyterian Church in Canada

We heard several stories of ministers who have been forced to leave The Presbyterian Church in Canada when they came out or it was discovered or alleged that they were in a same-sex relationship or were LGBTQI. People were shamed, threatened, bullied and faced charges in church courts. People who felt strongly called to ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and had demonstrated gifts for ministry were forced to leave and did lose their employment and income as a result. The trauma caused in these instances was severe and it was necessary to be involved in counselling and other forms of therapy for years in order to address this trauma. There was a financial cost to this that had significant and often ruinous implications for their future life and ministry.

I remember feeling the difficulty of my dilemma...knowing that I could either do the work that I loved or I could live an honest life but I couldn't do both. I could either lie and save my job and my credentials or I could be truthful and lose all of that.

I knew that if I came out to the congregation, even to the session, that it would cause division...it would cause people to have to take sides. Even if I came out to the clerk of session and said, 'Just keep it to yourself'. She probably would have done it. But it would have put great pressure on her and that secrecy would have caused repercussions for that community of faith...that depended on each other to be transparent and honest and loving and kind. So, to avoid risking harm to this congregation, I went back to the session and I said, "I hear your call to me and I am touched beyond words but I don't hear the same call." And I left. I am still not ordained.

I ended up applying for early retirement because of the difficulty I had in finding a call as a now openly gay man.

My education for an M.Div. and a path to ordination was scuttled at The Presbyterian Church in Canada Guidance Conference. A counsellor asked me privately if I was a lesbian and asked me that question because 'out of great concern' somebody else on the committee was asking questions about my sexual orientation and that was the beginning of the end.

(The Rev.) Darryl Macdonald was denied ordination not because of his orientation but because he was in a same-sex relationship which was known to the church.

Some found a calling in another denomination that was inclusive. Many of these people expressed a feeling that they had found a new and more authentic home because of their sense of being fully embraced. However, this did not erase the pain and trauma of having to leave the church that had nurtured them and which they loved. There continued to be a wound that never fully healed because of the continuing exclusive nature of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

I had to leave a community that formed me in my vocation...because of my sexual orientation.

I would hope that others don't have to experience what I did and have to leave the church. I hope that we don't all have to keep leaving the 'home' we found in the church...to go find it somewhere else.

Not just a small specific group is being harmed, a lot of people are being affected inside and outside of this denomination.

The Impact of the 1996 General Assembly's Decision re The Rev. Darryl Macdonald

(See Appendix 3 and Appendix 5, Section 1990s)

The case of the Rev. Darryl Macdonald became well known throughout the denomination and had implications not only for Darryl Macdonald and St. Andrew's, Lachine but also for the denomination as a whole. The decision of the Presbytery of Montreal to sustain his call to St. Andrew's, Lachine and to ordain him was overturned by the General Assembly because he had shared that he was in a same-sex relationship. The members of St. Andrew's had given overwhelming support to the call with the full knowledge that Darryl was in a committed relationship with another man. They had discerned strong gifts for ministry that were well suited to their needs as an aging, suburban congregation.

In his story told to the Rainbow Communion, the Rev. Darryl Macdonald recalled the pain of this experience for him, for his family and friends and for the congregation of St. Andrew's, Lachine. The Rev. Macdonald appealed the decision of the General Assembly but that appeal was not allowed to be heard. In effect, the Rev. Macdonald was silenced and his story was never fully heard in the church. This silencing had profound consequences for the Rev. Macdonald, for St. Andrew's, Lachine and for The Presbyterian Church in Canada. For this reason, a large section of his story is included as Appendix 3 to this report, with his permission. In addition, a presentation made by Ruth Taylor an elder and member of the search committee at St. Andrew's, Lachine, describing her perspective on this experience is also included in Appendix 3.

I realized that I had been holding onto this stuff for so long and never got the opportunity to sit down and tell my story to the Presbyterian Church. Because they said, 'We don't want to hear it actually. We're not even going to listen to it because we're gonna go on a decision of the Assembly'. That was just devastating to hear that the church doesn't want to hear our faith story and doesn't even acknowledge that you have a faith story. That was for me the biggest sin done to me by The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

I felt abandoned by the church when the edict denying my call to Montreal was read out loud in the sanctuary.

Eventually the [Presbyterian Church in Canada] church said, "Sure, you can come and preach in our churches but we still won't ordain you."

Upon receiving the news that ordination was to be denied:

I kept thinking that, "This doesn't feel like church to me. This feels like something else." (...) I mean really, just to say it really clearly, it felt like the General Assembly molested me on that day...in the sanctuary...in front of everyone. That's what it felt like.

From congregant and elder, Ruth Taylor:

Nevertheless, all too soon we were called to a special meeting by Presbytery, regarding the General Assembly decision after the report of the committee 5-4. We were ordered officially to remove Darryl from our pulpit. We were given no opportunity to ask questions – for the chairman and accompanying elder had left. The cold finality stunned us.

Dr. Richard Isaac was a storyteller who included his dissent to the General Assembly's decision in 1996 as part of his story. His dissent reads (A&P 1996, p. 33):

The decision made reflects:

1. a scriptural interpretation when there is no accepted biblical model of a long term, committed same-sex relationship;
2. a church tradition which has resulted in persecution and violence toward lesbian and gay people; and
3. an archaic scientific view which does not even consider the implications of the createdness of our sexual orientations.

The Assembly has valued the possible loss of members and potential discord over the pastoral encouragement of diversity of our members and the prophetic education in matters of sexuality. The search for the place of Christ in this Appeal, as in all things, must be paramount.

Although voiced in discussions, the pastoral experience of our elders and the stories of our members are not reflected in this decision.

One day, even this church, along with an increasing number of others, will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the call and ordination of all suitable persons regardless of affirmed sexual orientation. For the time being, however, this decision and policy encourages secrecy, duplicity and unhealthfulness among those in this church to whom God has given the gift of same-sex orientation.

An ordained elder, Dr. Richard Isaac was a member of the session at St. Andrew's, Toronto and believed that the censure imposed on Darryl Macdonald should equally apply to himself since he was a gay man in a committed long-term relationship. He was granted leave to withdraw from the Assembly for "reasons of doctrine". (A&P 1996, p. 44). Subsequently, the session of St. Andrew's produced, A Statement of the Session of St. Andrew's Church, Toronto in Response to the Decision of the 122nd General Assembly re: Appeal No. 2, 1995 (adopted, June 25, 1996) that was supportive of its lesbian and gay members and elders.

For some people, this process and the decision to not ordain and to ban the Rev. Macdonald from any Presbyterian pulpit deepened their fear and led to their leaving the denomination.

I loved The Presbyterian Church in Canada and would have stayed but it is unlikely that Knox College in Toronto would accept me for ordination in the Presbyterian Church. So, I left and went United. But if I could have stayed...I would have stayed.

A lot of my colleagues, they left and came as well to the United Church after that happened and they were fearful of what was gonna happen to them. And so, they came in and that's because they were gay too. They went, 'Oh, oh there's going to be a witch hunt and people are going to start looking for all these gay people in the church'.

For others, this decision of the General Assembly strengthened their resolve to organize and work to bring fuller inclusion in the church for all God's children. It was the genesis of a new organization called, "A New Network," which advocated for fuller inclusion in the church with a newsletter that went to members across the country.

What really pushed me to be more of an advocate, was that I was so disappointed with our church and with the Darryl Macdonald situation. I heard about it on a CBC newsclip on a plane flying back from Atlanta to Toronto. And I thought, 'What is this church? What is this church, which is my church...? I have to keep fighting and maybe I have to do more. Maybe I have to be more out. Maybe I have to be more vocal and more of a leader in this'.

So, it really pushed me. I went with a group of people from Toronto to Montreal to Darryl's 'unofficial' ordination service, which was a wonderful experience that included ministers of all sorts of different denominations...including one Catholic priest, a Pentecostal and everybody in between. Of course, it had no validity within the Presbyterian Church but we were there to support Darryl and St. Andrew's Lachine. He and the congregation left shortly after and did become part of the United Church. But that was a great evening and a great way to be in the face of the church and to say we're here and we're going to do this. This is a wonderful man who is called to ministry and he should be ordained.

We were members of St. Columba by the Lake; Darryl Macdonald was there and we got to know him and heard him preach...and went to some sessions he led based on Iona Community liturgy. And I thought, what's wrong with the system? This man is a superb preacher. Why don't they want him in the pulpit? I like good preaching. Darryl was a good preacher. That's pretty important to me. So that was another of those things that sort of firmed up my feeling that there is something wrong with this picture. So, I got a little bit involved in activism.

THE PARTICULARITY OF HARM DONE TO DIVERSE GROUPS

It is important to recognize that the harm that has been perpetrated on people who identify as LGBTQI has been experienced by diverse individuals and communities. The intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity with other identities impacts how people have experienced harm. People who identify within the various parts of the LGBTQI acronym have very different experiences of harm, based on their life experiences and diverse identities.

Experiences of disability, poverty and racialization are among the many identities that people hold and that intersect with LGBTQI identity. What follows here reflects some of the diverse experiences of harm done to people who identify as LGBTQI and who also named at least one additional cultural identity as part of their stories.

Harm Done to those Storytellers who are Racialized as People of Colour or Self-identify within Particular Ethno-cultural Communities

Some storytellers recounted their intersectional experiences of being LGBTQI and also identifying as a racialized person or belonging to particular ethno-cultural communities. These intersecting identities cannot be separated; some stories therefore highlighted the added level of pain and trauma of having multiple identities. These stories do not represent entire cultural communities. While the stories below represent each person's individual experience, communities are not homogenous, both harm and grace can be found.

Some racialized and ethno-cultural communities, for example, perceive that LGBTQI people only exist in "White" or "Canadian" communities. Storytellers recounted the pain of seeming to betray their racial or ethno-cultural identity in coming out and having to "choose" between their racial or ethno-cultural identity and their identity as an LGBTQI person. Some spoke about finally finding a worshipping community that was more inclusive of people who identified

as LGBTQI but not feeling fully at home because it was predominantly White or because they may have been one of the only racialized persons present in that community.

Referring to conversations where people were invited to share in an open-space discussion around sexuality at a General Assembly: I was shocked at the language that came up in the discussions. Words like heresy were used but there was other language that came up that was really disrespectful. And also, there were those who did not recognize or think about who might have been in the space. There were a lot of assumptions made at that time.

As a black woman, I always come at it from my own experience of exclusion...and then watching other people exclude others. I felt that to be painful in another kind of way. (...) LGBTQI people who find out that I'm a member of the Presbyterian Church wonder, 'Well, is this a safe person for me to be around?' Because people know that I'm a heterosexual, cisgender woman. They know I'm married to a man. And they'll wonder, 'Can I really be fully who I am around this black woman?' And there's often an element of racism that gets pulled in there, too, because there is sometimes a perception that all racialized people are homophobic and that racialized people cannot be LGBTQI peoples or allies.

There is an absence of terminology for the word 'Gay' in Indian and many Asian languages. That makes it even more isolating for Asian gays.

I worried for my Korean parents. If it gets out that their child is gay, they would believe that they 'raised something shameful'. The shame is intergenerational and not just borne on the shoulders of the gay child.

LGBTQI people fear rejection by their Korean parents. In the Korean culture it is understood that you also must protect your parents.

I grew up in Hong Kong. I learned that the British Government...when they took over Hong Kong...did not ban the Ching dynasty law. The Ching dynasty law in Hong Kong allowed multiple wives. But what they did, they put in the sodomy law. The British Empire did that to every colony. So right now, if you go to any previous British colony...and current ones...they all have that law. That's what the British Empire did. And then of course with Christianity, it went into those places because of colonialism. Otherwise, some of those places, the missionaries would never have been able to get in to start with. Colonialism allowed Christianity to flourish and with that kind of mentality especially under the British Empire ruling the British colonies...those places are particularly bad when it comes to homophobia. And so, I am just pointing this out. OK. I'm not saying that this is the root or the reason, I just say OK, that's one example I can tell you. But why is the British Empire so keen on this? What makes the Anglican Church think this is the most important thing. I have no idea. But this is what I saw.

I did mention the British Empire...But many cultures, they did not have this form of homophobia in their culture. It is after they were colonized and then with Christianity that went in. And then they made people change. So, I'm not pointing fingers but it seems to me that Christianity has something to do with this particular hate...in human nature humans have a tendency to hate, to discriminate or hate people that are different. That is natural. I noticed that. Anyone who is born differently or looks differently or some foreigner would come in and they would look and immediately they would reject. But some people always welcome the different looking, different culture, different people. So that is not the whole truth. But generally, people were suspicious about different people. So, this is what I'm talking about, the culture, the tradition with no homophobia kind of concept. But then Christianity went in and they started to build up. And to the point that in many countries, they embraced it as their own. And they reject colonialism but then they embraced this particular part of the Christian teaching. This I could not understand. I'm not going to tell you how to deal with this and what to do. But it's a tool. Again, it's connected with Christianity with teaching. So, it's up to The Presbyterian Church in Canada to form a committee to study this.

I'm from South Africa, in the Dutch Reformed Church...Apartheid South Africa. It is very much a macho and masochistic culture. And so, I tried everything in my power to fit in, to be a straight man.

There is little or no support for the parents of LGBTQI Korean kids. My parents will have nowhere to go for care.

The real catastrophe that arises when Koreans come out, is that they are not able to fulfill their parents' expectations.

It is extremely important to have an LGBTQI Korean voice in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Currently, there is not a place for that voice in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

By looking at the Bible and slavery...I mean, the Bible is full of one story after the other. Oppression and oppression and oppression...and oppressors. And so, then that opens the door to the oppression of LGBTQI people, the oppression of people of colour. (...) We need to ask, 'Who are bearing these wounds?' and then, 'Let's talk about these wounds'. I think that those of us who have suffered and then read that the church took the position that we (BIPOC*) were not fully human...the church was able to lead with a system that was so oppressive. And so those of us with those kinds of pain, we challenge the supremacy of doctrines. (*BIPOC: Black, Indigenous and People of Colour)

Indigenous Experiences in the Context of The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Oppression by the church has caused great harm in many lives and communities. Direct parallels should never be drawn between the harm done to Indigenous People with that done to those who identify as or are mistaken to be, LGBTQI. However, there are intersections in human identities that make up each and every individual. We are more than just one single identity.

Several Indigenous people, off the record, expressed their reluctance to speak directly to the Rainbow Communion. The deep fear of further traumatization made them hesitant to fully trust the process and be vulnerable with the church.

The acronym, LGBTQI, has emerged from the colonial culture and many Indigenous people use the term "Two Spirit". This is 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.

The Rev. Mary Fontaine shared her story from the perspective of an Indigenous woman, who is a leader in her own community and a minister in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. This story was also shared in a sermon preached at the General Assembly in 2019.

I speak as a Nehiyow woman, a Cree woman who grew up in the Mistawasis Presbyterian Church, learning from both my church and my people's culture and spirituality. (...)

In our traditional Indigenous cultures, some young men would stay behind at the camp while the men went hunting. These men did not have the gift of hunting and preferred to do women's work. But they were stronger than the women physically. So, they were not forced to go with the men but allowed to be who they were. They stayed behind and the men felt better that they were there to help and protect the women and the children. They were not interested in marrying women and they often had spiritual gifts which reflected the Creator in some ways. The Creator is powerful but in a gentle way. He is not deaf, he hears hearts, especially broken ones. He might be considered a little weird by us 'normal' folks because he readily loves and accepts people who are different.

Our people accepted the otherness of these men and honoured the spiritual gifts and services they provided for their communities. (...).

The church has a violent history and has harmed many people, even though Christians are also persecuted in certain parts of the world. Sisters and brothers in Christ who identify as LGBTQI people are rejected, misunderstood and not considered worthy people of God. Oppression harms people, no matter what race, religion or gender. Judgement is not up to us. But love is up to us, it's our purpose in life and our responsibility.

I share this story before I close. At a wedding I officiated, one of my adopted nephews was there. I knew him as a little child. He was in his early 20s by then. Ever since he was a toddler, we had a strong auntie/nephew bond. At the wedding he had a few drinks before he came to talk to me. He looked gay. But he was trying so hard to be 'normal'. He kept on telling me about his accomplishments, denying his gender identity. It broke my heart. I just hugged him and held him and told him it's okay – this little guy who thought his auntie now

a Presbyterian minister would reject him. Didn't he know how much I loved him? And would always love him no matter what? Doesn't God love me no matter what?

If gay people love Jesus the way I do or the way you do, they will serve, according to their own sanctified imagination of God. Gay people in my culture are said to be two-spirited, which means they have a balance of both male and female characteristics and are spiritually gifted in some way for the greater good. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ is a child of God and can serve according to their gifts.

Identifying Harm Done to Specific Sexual and Gender Minorities in the LGBTQI Spectrum

In the terms of reference given by the 2017 General Assembly, the Rainbow Communion was mandated to look at harm done and grace received by people who identify in the different categories represented by the acronym LGBTQI. This is the acronym currently used by The Presbyterian Church in Canada 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. It needs to be recognized that variations of the acronym exist to emphasize the spectrum that helps to identify various expressions of sexual orientation and gender identity. LGBTQI was the acronym provided in the terms of reference for the Rainbow Communion.

The "LGBTQI community" is an 'artificial' community because all the separate identities have been grouped together for representation and media awareness.

As noted in Appendix 4, historically the overt condemnation and harm done by the church has primarily been addressed to men who have sex with men. The church's more recent statements and debates have been related primarily to same-sex marriage and those seeking ordination who are in same-sex relationships. Although some of the concerns and discussion also apply to others in the LGBTQI spectrum, there are also unique experiences of harm done to people who identify as bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and intersex.

Harm Done to Those who Identify as Bisexual

The stories of people who identified as bisexual, highlighted the need to recognize the distinction between homophobia and biphobia. Biphobia is defined as 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. Bisexual people face a number of false stereotypes and misunderstanding from those who do not identify as bisexual such as: they are promiscuous, are unable to remain monogamous or must be with both male and female partners simultaneously.

A commissioner's comment seemed to confuse bisexuality with polyamorousness. I was deeply disturbed that the comment went largely unchallenged.

As a bisexual, the biggest issue I encounter is those who won't believe that I can be monogamous.

With respect to people's confusion around bisexuality, I try to explain to them that it's not based on attraction to a person's sex organs, it's about attraction to the individual.

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. In effect, they are told that bisexuality does not exist. Bisexual people are often told to "choose one gender". This often leads to a sense of alienation and erasure.

All of a sudden, people who were mean to me on Facebook were suddenly nice once I started posting pictures of me and (my opposite sex partner) together.

As a bisexual person, I often experience alienation from both the straight and gay worlds.

Will it ever be safe for bisexual clergy to really come out?

My daughter has friends who are openly gay and lesbian...and she is bi...She told me, "They wouldn't believe me when I came out." In their eyes, she isn't 'gay enough'.

There is pressure on 'bi' people to 'decide' and 'pick one' (re: be 'gay or straight').

I'm invisible in church 'policy' because I'm married to an opposite gender spouse (identifies as bisexual). I get to 'sneak around' in my invisibility cloak. Because I'm invisible, there hasn't been a relevant discussion in church where I can bring it up.

Harm Done to Those Who Identify as Transgender

The language and the constructs that have been used in the church to address harm done most often do not adequately reflect the realities and lived experiences of those who identify as sexual and gender minorities. In particular, it has become evident that the lives of people who identify as transgender are all but invisible, in fact some would say "erased". In The Presbyterian Church in Canada transphobia is rarely named in addressing the experiences of LGBTQI people.

The diversity of experience of people who identify as LGBTQI is highlighted when hearing the stories of people who identify as transgender or non-binary. The distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity is often forgotten, dismissed or minimized in discussions of lived experience and harm done when in fact it is very significant. People who identify as transgender not only experience misunderstanding, stereotyping and harm from society in general but also from those who identify as gay, lesbian and bisexual. The church has done very little to address the harm done to transgender people and often assumes that statements addressed to lesbian, gay and bisexual people are also addressed to transgender people.

The whole acronym LGBTQI, is used but the focus is really just on the L and the G.

I heard someone at 2017 General Assembly question why transgender people should be in the church and that there are NO trans people in the church.

A parishioner stopped coming to church because I was offering pastoral care to a man who was transitioning (from male to female).

There are those places that are clearly hateful but the indifferent ones are also harmful.

I try to come back for Christmas Eve service with my family and I can barely walk into the building. I am different...I'm like a shell of myself in this space. I find it just like very difficult and like very uncomfortable. I feel like there's not space to actually show up as I am or as I want to be. I had to shut myself off from church in order to come to terms with who I really am. It was – and still is – so gendered and heteronormative. There's nothing to affirm my identity.

The stories we heard highlighted the level of disgust and shaming expressed toward people who identify as transgender. Harassment and abuse are often part of their daily lived experience. In the church and in society in general, those who are in the process of transitioning or those whose expression of gender is non-binary or shifts back and forth between cultural expressions of masculinity and femininity, most often experience judgement, threats, harassment and even physical and sexual abuse, simply for not conforming to the rigid constructs of gender expression.

A transphobic response is one that is directed towards someone who does not fall into that masculine or feminine 'ideal' or cultural 'norm' regarding the way one should dress and speak and present yourself. Transphobia appears whenever someone wants to shame, belittle or physically harm that person or even keep them from using a bathroom. That's hatred.

Church has been an unsafe space. I wore different clothes to church than I did elsewhere – like a mask.

Young people are dying because of our rigidity in defining gender. Trans people in particular.

I was shamed as a child to conform to do 'boy' activities.

And it would be a totally different thing if (my child) was coming out as gay but as trans, it's just such a different thing...especially going to trans femme...that dangerous. The physical danger aspect is ramped up so much higher.

There is shame and guilt imposed and associated with identifying somewhere along the gender spectrum.

The way in which the notion of the male/female binary is set as the norm is really damaging including expectations of how to be masculine and feminine. There is still a huge amount of transphobia in society at large, especially towards trans women.

Significantly higher rates of disconnection from family and church community as well as self-harm, suicide ideation and death by suicide for transgender people are well documented. (see Appendix 6) Transgender people are more at risk of death by suicide than heterosexual people and lesbian, gay and bisexual people. People who identify as transgender have to confront myths and stereotypes which ridicule, mock and misrepresent them. The request to use appropriate pronouns is often ignored, criticized or ridiculed.

Now that my physical transitioning is happening, I'm being told that being trans is a mental illness. People don't realize the mental anguish, harm and pain I experienced prior to transitioning.

Unique assumptions are made about transgender people being sexual predators that is different from those assumptions about bi, gay, lesbian individuals.

I feel disempowered, shamed and stifled by pervasive subtle transphobia. I came to the point of potential suicide or to transition. I could not pretend I was cis-gender any longer.

Transphobia

Transphobia is defined as the 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.

There's something unique in the reaction of disgust often attached to transphobia in a way that is different from other forms of discrimination.

I wrote a paper on transsexuality (at school). The paper was returned to me in a sealed brown envelope after the other classmates had left the room.

I know of someone who was outed as trans. They did not receive a Call because they were not cis-gender.

My (family member) who is trans doesn't feel that they would find a friend in the church but outside the church, there's all kinds of support. The church just wants to 'fix' them. I don't think that the church understands. In order to support my (family member) I have to be a lone ranger.

I worked as a church camp counsellor over a number of years. When I returned again several years later, I had this feeling of 'How is this still happening? How are all of these younger staff members still forced to hide who they are and still being misgendered?!

I was listening to a radio phone-in show where all these parents of trans youth were calling in and I realized that I am really desperate to talk to other people who are going through this and making this journey. I am so alone on this in the church.

I had a friend on staff who is trans and identified as male whenever he was not working at camp. We were not allowed to use his pronouns and we were not allowed to use his chosen name. This person felt so strongly and passionately enough about working at camp that he went misgendered for four months out of the year. That's just the way that it was. We couldn't let the campers know.

Terms like, 'You throw like a girl', creates transphobic cultural messages. The barriers in the church to talk about this are very high.

Transphobia is completely ignored in the church.

Harm Done to Those who Identify as Queer

Queerness is an umbrella term that is both an orientation and a community for those on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. There are those who have heard the word used as an insult. The term "queer" has been reclaimed in more recent years by many who identify as LGBTQIA+ and they find it to be empowering and create a sense of community, rather than being derogatory. It is worth noting that while the word queer is generally celebrated, some LGBTQIA+ folks still

prefer to avoid it due to its discriminatory history. (GLAAD Media Reference Guide – Glossary of Terms, glaad.org/reference/lgbtq 2021.)

Queerness tends to be more nuanced than a sexual identity or gender identity. Queerness is more encompassing of one's overall intersectional identity. Language about queer identity and different expressions of queer identity is evolving as people seek language that most properly reflects who they are.

I am a big fan of the word 'queer' because I use it to describe my identity. I would say that I'm queer and the discovery of people who have taken that word back (from being a slur) was a big revelation to me. I felt like it was a good umbrella term for LGBTQI which I use interchangeably...because I feel like it really captures everybody.

While sometimes a term such as 'queer' might be helpful for some individuals to self-identify, their experiences of harm can be vastly different. Because of the perceptions and potential biases of those who do not identify as queer, harm may be perpetrated out of ignorance, stigmatization and/or overt bullying. The harm most frequently described by the storytellers who identify as queer is erasure, where their identity is not accepted or valued or is misunderstood. Additionally, their partners may be marginalized or assumptions made about their own identities as they are in relationship with someone who identifies as queer.

As someone who has a spouse who identifies as a cisgender-man...I do a lot of explaining, because people just automatically assume that I identify as 'straight' or that I am not monogamous. I identify as queer and as a woman but I don't present that gender the same way all the time. You just know it's just who you are and part of how you present yourself.

I think like a lot of teens that grew up in a religious group. I had this kind of dichotomy of who I felt that I was right now and who I felt that I should be, based on the kind of values that were taught in Sunday School, worship and in the church in general. It was never explicitly said like, 'Oh you shouldn't be queer' but I struggled like a lot of teens, thinking that, 'I know I'm supposed to be one way but I don't feel like I am or I am trying to be this person that doesn't feel genuine.'

It's not something that I spoke to anyone at church about ever but there was definitely a 'don't ask don't tell' culture. So, if you were staff and you were queer, everyone kind of knew amongst the (church camp) staff but you weren't allowed to talk about it and you weren't allowed to display anything that would give that away. It was just such a mixed message to me. I think that it's one of the reasons that I eventually distanced myself from camp and church. I'm an alumnus and I'm still kind of on mailing lists but I haven't remained involved because that sense of hypocrisy really sat poorly with me over the years.

The few times that the topic was even touched upon (at church), coupled with a complete lack of acknowledgement or validation for queer identities within the church, created a large and dark empty, black hole in my overall church experience.

I still worry – that if certain people find out that I'm queer, then they will have less respect for my work in the church, that to some people, my queerness would make them think I lack credibility or the capacity to do my job.

Further Discrimination

When I came out to various friends who identify as gay or lesbian – after they had been coming out to me over the years – I did not receive the same celebration and support that I felt that I'd given them. They did not seem to appreciate my queer identity in the same way I had affirmed their identities. And that was a rift that was kind of insurmountable for me.

A lot of times I'm told, "You don't deal with the same challenges as lesbians, gays and trans people, because you get to look straight to an uneducated outside observer." I will grant that I don't get harassed on the street when I walk hand in hand with my (opposite cisgender) spouse or when they hear my spouse's name or pronoun. My co-workers don't immediately form judgments about me. There's privilege that I'm able to live out in the open and feel safe about it. But at the same time a huge part of my identity is never spoken of. It is only brought up if I make a point of bringing it up.

Harm Done to Those who are Questioning

Storytellers shared their journeys of self-discovery and coming out to themselves. Most went on to say more about the experiences of being closeted, partially closeted or coming out fully to others. While there was likely a period of questioning during that time, none of the storytellers who came to speak with the Rainbow Communion indicated at that time that they self-identified as 'Questioning'. Many spoke about how they wished there would have been someone to safely talk with during this journey and often lamented that it not only felt unsafe to do so in the church but they also felt certain that they would face condemnation. Quotations throughout this report support that sense of isolation and fear during this important time in the storyteller's life.

Harm Done to Those who Identify as Intersex

Society at large often assumes that there are only two sexes: male and female and that everyone's body must be one or the other. It also implies the assumption that gender is biologically determined. It does not take into account intersex individuals. Intersex refers to individuals born with bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from hormonal, chromosomal anomalies and/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. In effect, this is an attempt to erase the fact that the person is intersex. 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 and gender, while others do not and some choose to identify as intersex. Intersex people may or may not identify as transgender and/or non-binary.

When I began the process of coming out, first to friends and family, then more publicly...I claimed my identity as non-binary.

Since then, I've done a lot of reading and reflecting and had quite a bit of time in therapy devoted to this aspect of my life journey and it turns out there is more to the story....

When I was 12 years old and puberty began, mine was different from the other boys in my class: I began to develop breasts. This was, as you can imagine, extremely traumatizing – especially since I was an only child with older parents who were very traditional and totally unavailable to me. I was 'that kid': you know, the one with the bad hair and the funny clothes who read the dictionary, socially awkward and usually alone.

My different development, as well as my general appearance and the way I spoke and acted, made me a target of some serious bullying. Over time, I learned to hide my secrets and try not to stand out. I tried to play the role of a typical boy/young man, though I felt deep down that I wasn't. I learned not to look at that part of myself: to hate my chest and the other features (known pretty well only to me) of an intersex person.

I am only now beginning to understand what it means for my sense of self to be intersex, to be in neither binary gender box – biologically as well as psychologically and socially. Yes, I am trans non-binary and I am intersex. I was never fully male or female physically and this made me an outsider, a freak (or so I thought)...I now realize that I am far from alone and I can be proud of who I am.

Because of the church's stance on same-sex relationships, it can be especially confusing and marginalizing to those who are intersex as to where they belong in the Body of Christ. Questions may arise such as: "What or who determines if ours is an opposite gender relationship?", "Are intersex people to remain celibate?", "Must one pass as cisgender and remain closeted as intersex?" The adherence to heteronormative and gender-binary identities, means that those who are intersex are erased and harm is perpetuated.

HARM DONE TO THOSE WHO IDENTIFY AS HETEROSEXUAL AND CIS-GENDER BECAUSE OF HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA AND HETEROSEXISM

In this homophobic environment we are all harmed. Families have felt and still feel the church's expectations to condemn and reject children, siblings and parents who do not look, act or speak in ways congruent with the restrictive gender definitions of the church and society. Friends feel pressure to break off connections. For the ways our congregations judge and exclude others based on restrictive gender definitions, we are sorry and we repent. (Moderator's Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

Harm Done to Affirming Families, Allies and Advocates

Although the harm done to those who identify as LGBTQI is most direct and obvious, harm is also done to others who are members of their families and communities simply because they seek to be affirming or to advocate for the rights and dignity of those they love. In 2018, a recommendation in the Rainbow Communion's first interim report was adopted by the Assembly to include the stories of those other than people who identify as LGBTQI who have been harmed by homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy. These people often identify themselves as allies and many times find themselves marginalized, abused or silenced because of their supportive words and actions. Sometimes it is simply the fear of 'what might be' for those they love that causes the harm.

I was terrified of what the world and our church might do to our child.

I was appointed many years ago by General Assembly to sit on the Committee on Sexual Orientation. I was openly mocked by other colleagues and received sarcastic remarks like, 'Great career move'.

I lived in fear that my parent (minister) was going to be fired for being gay in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

I now live with the regret that I imposed my heteronormative perspective on others, which caused harm.

As a minister who is looking to serve with authenticity and disagrees with the current (non-affirming) stance of The Presbyterian Church in Canada I may have to leave the church.

At one General Assembly...at a 'listening table' (re: sexuality discussion) some people became very hostile and manipulative. One exclaimed to me that, "You won't be a Presbyterian minister anymore and have no pension." And that was just because I expressed affirming views. I identify as an ally and parent of an LGBTQI adult.

I don't feel like I would ever be physically harmed but I've certainly been emotionally harmed several times by people trying to throw scripture to say to me it's not Christian or Presbyterian to be an ally (to LGBTQI people).

I am fearful about raising my children in the church...especially if it's not demonstrative of God's inclusive love.

I was so afraid of losing my job in The Presbyterian Church in Canada because my (teen child) came out as bisexual.

My sibling didn't tell anyone for years. Part of it was because our church was not affirming. My sibling didn't know how people would react to being a gay 'preacher's kid'...and that was a big source of fear.

It is interesting to me that my family would still say to me that, "We are all praying for (my brother). We are praying that he'll turnaround and become straight!" Turnaround?! My brother is turning 50!

This 'issue' of gay people in the church...and The Presbyterian Church in Canada's stance on it affects families and the way they are treated too.

I feel that my own job – as a minister – is threatened because one of my family members identifies as LGBTQI. I keep wondering... 'How will the views of my congregation and presbytery affect my vocation?'

Generally, when someone comes out in a 'churched' family, the impact is negative and it's a matter of degrees of negativity depending on the family.

The church has been a really horrible place to watch my sister try to figure out where and how she fits in.

When people share their stories it's easier not to hear them or to dismiss them when they are people who are not in your biological family.

I am pained and very sad that I have not been able to conduct the marriage of my own family member to their same-sex partner.

As a Presbyterian minister and even when I was studying for ministry, I was perceived to be a 'natural enemy' to my gay family member.

There was also harm done to a parent who loves their gay child simply because of the unspoken attitudes, questions and assumptions made by their church culture and beliefs.

Christian families can get through just about anything. You can get through drug abuse, we can get through alcoholism but being gay...that's the worst possible thing a Christian kid could be.

Our family is gradually losing our faith community because of the lack of support for our lesbian daughter.

My daughter's friends don't care whether someone is LGBTQI. They won't ever come to church because of The Presbyterian Church in Canada's stance on same-sex relationships.

It was heart breaking to hear a family's story that included an LGBTQI adult child...and how much they wished they could be married in the church.

Devastation was expressed in a prayer circle over the revelation of someone's daughter coming out.

My mother can't speak about the joy in her son's life with people in the congregation because she is the minister.

There has been damage to our family relationships because of the church's teachings.

Because of the church's teachings, my parents and sibling had a very hard time when I came out. The church taught us all to wear a mask.

It has been a real heartbreak for me to see my (gay) brother estranged from The Presbyterian Church in Canada but I keep hoping for something different.

I am still grieving that I failed to support a good friend who came out to me in high school. I am grieving my anti-gay family that had instilled homophobia in me. I have since apologized to that friend.

While attending a funeral at a Presbyterian church for an elderly relative – my cousin who also attended with their partner had great reluctance coming into the church hall afterwards for the reception. The discomfort she felt in a hall full of church leaders still saddens me.

There was quite a journey for my parents as well. When I came out to them, there were lots of questions and comments including: "So, what did we do wrong?" and "Well, at least you're not pregnant."

Our daughter is so angry at the way the church has treated her LGBTQI sibling. She will not come back to the church and does not understand why we continue to attend. The tension in our family is over whether to stay in the church or not.

When our child came out as gay, there was instant fear from the potential rejection of our family from the church.

In our family, there's an expectation of 'Don't ask, don't tell'. It has led to significant tension and toxicity for everyone.

I think for my three (adult) children part of their estrangement from the church was that their sibling was not embraced by the whole church.

I received threatening letters from members of my congregation regarding my position on same-sex marriage. I was both afraid and hurt.

Despite the harm that comes to me as an ally, I stay to use whatever straight privilege I might have to support my LGBTQI friends and to help build a church where it is evident that God loves us all.

There were recriminations against me because I would not sign a letter opposing same-sex marriage. As a result, I am seeking a call elsewhere.

How awful is it to teach your child to hide who they are? For their safety they cannot be their true selves to others.

I felt very badly that a fellow at the seminary was given a homophobic nickname but I was afraid to say anything about it.

I was ostracized at our church just because I was not anti-gay. I had to explain to our 8-year-old why we could not go back to church because it was not safe. The reaction of the church caused marital tension and great anxiety to the point that I needed to use medication.

I certainly do not have the trust in the polity that I would have had as a naive (-) -year-old at my first Assembly...before I went into Knox (College) and the issue at that Assembly was the last of the liberty of conscience around the ordination of women...and the host of the Assembly that year was (a church) who was vehemently opposed to women.

So...I experienced the worst of the church in polity and process around gender related issues. Somehow, I felt it even more when it was someone else. It affected me more when I could see what the church was doing to others (LGBTQI). That seemed to have more of an impact on me than what the church was doing to me. When someone hurts someone that you care about...sometimes it hurts more than if they did it to you.

Because of what happened to me (for speaking in favour of LGBTQI inclusion), neither my wife nor daughter will come to the church anymore. They have only seen the hurt...and not the grace of my journey in faith. They hate the church.

There have been moments where I read a post on the Presbyterian Facebook page or heard comments during the livestreaming of 2019 General Assembly where people vented their (outrage) against the vote for full inclusion. I started feeling then that it's too much for me – it's too upsetting...and then, I started thinking about my LGBTQI friends and family and tried to imagine what it's like for them.

Harm Done to Straight Spouses and Partners

As noted above, some people who identify as LGBTQI enter into opposite sex relationships in order to hide or to cover up who they really are or without having recognized their true sexual orientation or gender identity. Although these relationships can be loving and fulfilling to some extent, they can also cause great harm to the straight partner who is not fully aware or who believes that time and compassion might change the person they love. The underlying secrecy and deception of the relationship means that it can never be fully open and honest. The shock and shame often associated with discovering that they are or were in a romantic relationship with a person who now identifies as LGBTQI can be profound.

We are the collateral damage. We get victimized twice, because people don't know what to do. You are blamed...and people wonder "How come we didn't know?...because everyone knew." Well, I didn't know (that my spouse was gay). People seem to believe that it was 'something you did', 'you made (your spouse) gay', 'you weren't enough', 'something is wrong with you'.

Our sexuality is the core of who we are, whether we're male or female. When you find out that this fraud has been perpetrated on you for (many, many) years. It shakes the core of who you are.

So, I was married for a long while. And now going through the separation process. And in my children's mind I'm the bad parent. My ex hasn't told the children about being homosexual.

This is kind of the same for most of the people who were in the Straight Spouses Support Group. I attend a group in a different city. There are Straight Spouses Groups closer to home for support but I did not wish to see people who might know me. I am a straight spouse married to a closeted person...who is closeted because it wouldn't be accepted in their family circles and wouldn't be accepted in their church circle.

It's more than just a church. It's the Christian culture. There are those that think that you can always 'pray away the gay'. I don't think so. There may be some people who you can do that with. I don't think that's true for most people. So, the consequences are that I was short changed and missed out on many normal things in a relationship. Sex. Touch. Time.

You depend on someone else. And that kind of mirrors your dependence on God, too. There's that beautiful co-dependency. You miss out on that, too.

I was studying in university. Well, you know how carefully you decide whether you should get married? I made a list of 'qualifications'. I made sure the person that I might marry would meet these qualifications. I'm someone with a strong sex drive and God gave me someone who wasn't the least bit interested in me sexually. I was also abused by my spouse...not physically...but because there was no physical intimacy, because of who they 'are'...They pretended to be straight, because otherwise they'd lose their leadership position in the church. So, they'd pretend to be straight.

In a way, I was just someone...on a checklist. Like the white picket fence and a dog. You know...all the criteria for the 'perfect' life. And those things that a couple enjoys. But it created a power imbalance. You want touch, so you negotiate to have a closer relationship. We ended up being so busy with commitments and good works that my spouse was always so busy and tired...and that provided excuses as to why we could not be intimate or have sex.

I got rejected by the person in the world that's supposed to be there for you. Eventually I felt invisible. You know it's supposed to be mutual partnership. And sex shouldn't be rare. I realize as you get older it gets less frequent but it made me feel very rejected. So, after I discovered my spouse in a romantic relationship with a same-sex partner...I had never considered suicide in my life before that but at that time...for about a two or three-week window I was. I was so upset that I was suicidal.

Another consequence is there's very few churches that I can feel comfortable at. If they do find out...that your ex-spouse is a homosexual.

You know the 'Let's get together and pray away the gay stuff'. You become an object for people to manipulate. You can't tell them about the incredible hurt you've endured. So...it was kind of nice to be able to talk with you (Rainbow Communion Listening Space) today.

Not all those consequences so far have been negative. There are some positive consequences. It's made me a better listener. There's a lot of hurting people in our support group. We have a local group that meets but we also have a Facebook group and there's people from all around the world.

It's also made me more compassionate. The fact that our relationship ended is not surprising.

One program I did attend was a Christian-based one and they encourage you..."Hey, you know you weren't perfect in your relationship either". In some ways it's kind of irrelevant. It's how do we get from where we are now to a good place? I struggle with forgiveness and I know we're supposed to forgive. That if you don't forgive, God won't forgive you.

Our kids don't know the truth. They think I'm the bad one. Eventually the truth will become known but I will have missed out on many things.

Years have been stolen from my life. It's not that my ex finally acknowledged being gay. It's the fact that they misrepresented who they were.

And you know there's that Bible verse, 'Count it all joy when you suffer'. I'm having difficulty with that. But I've realized that forgiveness is a decision. And it's also a process. But the other thing that I also find very difficult is not trying to take any form of revenge. I find that very difficult.

(My ex) has a homophobic family. There was constant stress. I think that's what attracts closeted gays to someone like me. I grew up in an accepting family. We look at 'people as people'.

Very late in our marriage, we did finally get to a counsellor. It was not easy to find a qualified Christian counsellor that was safe for me and my closeted spouse. There is still a lot of stigma. If there's more openness and acceptance in the church...if there's more people telling their stories...there might be more understanding of our pain. That would help a lot. The church needs to develop trained counsellors with respect to sexuality. 'Straight' is a sexuality and straight spouses have a different experience. That needs to be seen and heard.

Harm Done to Those Wrongly Perceived to be LGBTQI

Several storytellers related their experiences of being wrongly perceived to be LGBTQI. They have always identified as 'straight' and cis-gender. Stereotypes are used to categorize people and these perceptions can lead to similar kinds of experiences of harm done as for people who do identify as LGBTQI. This can lead to resentment but it can also lead to a deeper understanding and empathy with those who identify as LGBTQI.

I lived a circumscribed life. I couldn't do all I wanted to do because of my fear that participating in my preferred activities would lead me to being labelled as gay...and that was not a safe option.

I endured loss of status and betterment of opportunities because of virulent homophobic culture even though I was not gay, I just refused to participate in that culture.

I came home many days from school with cuts and bruises, bloody noses and black eyes because of their assaults. While at school I faced anti-gay taunting, locker room hazing and I was socially ostracized because people assumed that I was gay.

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CHURCH

"If one member suffers, all suffer together with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26a) The pain that has been recounted in many of the stories that have been told to the Rainbow Communion has deeply wounded individuals, families and communities but it has also wounded the whole church. The gifts of so many members have not been able to be fully shared to enrich the life of the community. The fear and silence that has so devastated the lives of people who identify as LGBTQI has also impacted the life of the church. Trust has been broken. Truth cannot be told. Relationships cannot flourish. The church cannot be the church.

This diminishing of the church has been seen by others, both inside and outside The Presbyterian Church in Canada. A community that is not willing to address the pain within itself does not attract others to it. Many storytellers attributed the exodus of people who identify as LGBTQI, along with that of family and friends, as being a significant part of the decline of the church. Especially among younger people who live their lives in a society which has become more inclusive of people who identify as LGBTQI, both in its legal framework and in its attitudes, it is difficult to understand why the church continues to exclude and harm those members who are different. Over and over again, younger people have expressed their desire to build a more inclusive church and the church has been dismayed when they leave because change does not happen. Some storytellers expressed their concern that many young people have stopped searching for God in the Presbyterian Church and have stopped bringing their passion and creativity to the Presbyterian Church's mission.

As people of faith...is (sexuality) all that we can talk about, all that we can fixate on...and is it putting up barriers between us that really don't need to be there?

I have stepped back from the courts of the church because it just was not healthy for me to be in those spaces.

I'm tired of it. So tired of dissenting. I would rather be rejoicing than dissenting.

I think one of the biggest pains or sadness I've carried as a Presbyterian is that I don't feel really comfortable inviting friends or anyone in the LGBTQI community to church because they would either be harmed or triggered or feel unsafe.

I have found over the years that our church is very good at reinforcing a conspiracy of silence. We don't like to talk about difficult things.

My story? It's not necessarily so important but more important are all of the stories the church will NEVER hear from so many that are no longer connected to the church now as a direct result of the inaction and harm to LGBTQI people.

Young LGBTQI youth and their allies are leaving because the church isn't moving fast enough to accept them or stop harm.

If gay people...LGBTQI people...being able to fulfill their call is the end of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, I'm prepared for that to happen. I think it probably should happen if we can't do that.

In support, my family followed me to the United Church despite their engrained Presbyterian identity.

There are church leaders who say that they do not know any gays. Perhaps it is because no one comes out to them because it would not be a safe experience to do so.

The church has a long history of saying, 'for the good of the church, keep silent'. This has not served the church well. I hoped that approach died in the last century. I believe that younger people today simply won't take that.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada will be tainted with the sin of discriminating against LGBTQI persons for a very long time...even if the denomination becomes fully inclusive someday.

A lot of us feel alone at this point in time...no matter which side of the conversation we fall on. It's a result of conflict within our denomination. You don't know who you can turn to and you don't know who you can trust.

When do we get to have fun with each other, support each other's work, imagine new ideas or support new initiatives? When do we get to just love each other instead of just focussing on budgets, agendas, minutes...and endless discussions about sexuality? How can we build relationships with one another and get on with mission and outreach?

I'm constantly torn between the gospel of love and being ordained in The Presbyterian Church in Canada (a non-affirming denomination). I am discerning whether to leave or stay.

I feel it's important to share my story, because it's not just me going through this. There are people who have felt called to serve, before they knew that the church was not inclusive. They also have to be burying parts of themselves. I never want anybody to feel like this. The church needs to realize that younger people are moving forward and if we don't continue moving towards inclusion, the church is going to fall apart because my generation will just walk away.

The sad thing is that the church will experience losses in dealing with the issue of LGBTQI inclusion. Those who feel they can't affirm will believe that they would otherwise be abandoning the Word of God and those who do affirm will feel that the church is not loving enough and they can't be a part of it.

I think that young people who've been raised in a reasonably secularized culture are going to have a hard time plugging into any traditional looking church especially if they discover that church is even a little behind in terms of affirmation and inclusion of others.

Focusing so much on excluding LGBTQI people harms our witness on behalf of Christ.

The more we get fixated on this (sexuality), the less ministry we do.

Harm Done in the Courts of the Church

Even when congregations and church members do not participate in emotional and physical bullying, the church's silence condones such action when it fails to speak against the violence. By not speaking clearly and in a public way, the church is "part of the evil of the world, of its violence, neglect and injustice." Moreover, church members wanting to speak fear that if they speak, they will be ridiculed and bullied themselves. For our silence and silencing others, we are sorry and we repent. (Living Faith 2.5.6) (Moderator's Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

Many storytellers expressed their deep concern that the courts of the church are not safe spaces for people who identify as LGBTQI and where bullying is allowed. The assumption is often made in the courts that LGBTQI people are simply not present. Exclusive language and homophobic slurs are considered by many to be normal and permissible and are not challenged or ruled out of order.

Shocked at the behaviour, disrespect and gossip that happens at General Assembly from all sides. The discussions at GA about sexuality issues create a lot of negativity and rudeness. This is not church.

We waste a lot of time at General Assembly talking about things that have been the same...and will continue to be the same. The reports and recommendations relating to 'sexuality and inclusion' were given limited time and were cut-off despite the need for further discussion. What does this say about what the church thinks of the LGBTQI community? So, properly allocating resources and putting 'sexuality and inclusion' as a priority at Assembly is obvious.

Allowing the General Assembly to 'air grievances' was a very bad idea, (especially) if we actually believed that there was a faith-based process and a spirit-led decision (process led by the Committee of Former Moderators to discern a pathway forward in 2019). We needed (instead) to sit and listen to what God told us in that moment, because it (Pathway B – Full Inclusion) was a surprise to everyone.

Some of the behaviour that I observed at GA and the comments that I heard seemed to be anything but Christian. Individuals who spoke chose not to be respectful and in fact seemed to choose to be arrogant, mean and rude. They were cruel, judgmental and uncaring.

As people were walking out of the 2019 General Assembly (because the Assembly had voted for (Pathway B – Full Inclusion) I wondered if they recognize the parallels with what they were feeling and how many individuals have felt that same way for decades because they were excluded.

To watch people (at General Assembly 2019) lining up to vote on my future in the church was a very painful process.

Do people appreciate that there are real people who are being impacted by their homophobic statements?

Allowing the 'airing of grievances' on the floor of the 2019 General Assembly caused incredible hurt as many homophobic statements were permitted to go unchallenged.

Compromises that were agreed to were made by a group of straight male leaders. Those decisions lack integrity when they exclude the people affected from the decision-making process.

Witnessed dirty church politics at play during the nominations for Committee on Church Doctrine. Someone's name was put forward but then was removed and someone else's was put forward to keep them out. The attempt to keep this (LGBTQI) leader off the committee occurred at two different Assemblies.

I was verbally attacked at General Assembly by a minister who wanted to know why I was doing all that I could to break up The Presbyterian Church in Canada. He berated me saying that I was not fulfilling my vows and did not believe in scripture and that I was only concerned about social justice.

The platform given at the microphones at General Assembly led to me being personally attacked by a variety of people, simply for coming out and speaking in favour of inclusion.

People are empowered to speak in the courts of the church with insensitivity about LGBTQI people as if they are not even there.

The voices of LGBTQI people were completely silenced at General Assembly. No one sought to hear from those being talked about.

Observing The Presbyterian Church in Canada sexuality discussions brings back the pain of homophobic-inspired violence I endured in the military.

It could have been so joyful at the 2019 General Assembly when the vote to be fully inclusive was affirmed three times. But then to have it become this negative time of listening to objections and hurt over the decision, it felt like we were being chastised or burnt or berated because this court of the church chose to go in this direction. It was very painful.

The church permits the use of academic language and 'process' to hide evil. In this case, it was to call into question the veracity of the tragic story of a gay person's death by suicide.

The inefficiencies in the setup of General Assembly and the decision-making process allows for frequent interruptions in the agenda and disrespect to be shown. Polity must not be manipulated to obfuscate reality and prevent a fair process.

When I served on the 1997–2003 Committee on Sexual Orientation, I received hate mail.

During the discussion on sexuality (at GA), I thought, ‘You don’t comprehend what’s being talked about here’...after a person said, “We need to bring the blinds down to keep Satan out of the room.” There’s another example of extremism.

General Assembly 2019 was traumatizing. First there was joy at finally being included (Pathway B – Full Inclusion voted and affirmed twice by a majority), then the Assembly permitted homophobic comments, anger and vitriol on the floor in response to the vote. Then, an entirely different action was passed that put gays as second-class citizens.

Having the prospect of inclusion be compared to receiving a diagnosis of cancer...from the floor of General Assembly and no one objected.

THE SIN OF HYPOCRISY

The call of the Committee on Church Doctrine in the 1994 Report on Human Sexuality was for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to repent of the harm done by homophobia and hypocrisy. This is echoed in the 2018 Moderator’s Letter of Repentance.

Irrational fear in the church has created a climate where there is often more interest in condemning what is considered sin than in listening to the struggles and stories of human beings. The church is often quick to speak and slow to listen. Further, the church is quick to name and condemn certain sexual practices, while at times being slow to name and confront sexual abuse and marital unfaithfulness. For our hypocrisy, we are sorry and we repent. For offering judgment and condemnation rather than gospel hope, we are sorry and we repent. (Moderator’s Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

The hypocrisy of the church was recognized in that people who identify as LGBTQI had been singled out as being more sinful than others and that they were often held to higher standards of morality than others.

I had someone say to me (an openly gay person), “It’s okay to be gay but just as long as it’s not my kid.”

Church people said to me (about my daughter) that they would always love ‘(name)’ because she was ‘(name)’...who they’d known for years. True but...should those church people not love everyone in the LGBTQI community and in the heterosexual community regardless of whether we knew them before or not?

In the gospels, Jesus often calls out those in leadership, the Scribes and the Pharisees, for their hypocrisy. They were so focused on telling others about their sins that they could not or would not, see the ways that they did not follow the greatest commandments to love God and their neighbour as themselves.

Not All Are Welcome

Naming the hypocrisy of the church in its relationship with people who identify as LGBTQI was central to the message of many of the storytellers and to the pain that they had experienced. In their lives, what the church said or proclaimed and what the church did were two different things. In many of the stories, people pointed to the hypocrisy of “All Are Welcome” signs on churches, when in fact it was unlikely that they would be welcome if they were honest about who they were.

The irony of churches that have ‘all are welcome’ on their signs.

If there is no room for grace, we are just a social club.

I find it really grating to pass by churches that say, ‘All are welcome’. I find that so irritating.

To place socio-economic, cultural or sexuality conditions on who is welcome in a church is to state publicly that not everyone is welcome.

The actions of this church are not reflective of God's love for all.

We need the signs that say, 'All are Welcome' to have an asterisk that indicates, 'As long as you are NOT one of 'those' groups...lesbian, gay, trans, etc.'

I really struggled with my faith and it took a long time for me to realize that my issue was not with God. It was with the church and the hypocrisy that I saw there.

Hypocrisy is when we are serving the church (The Presbyterian Church in Canada) and not serving Jesus.

When I needed it, the church was not a place to go to for help or support.

'Whosoever believes' means that there is no 'gate keeper' to keep people out.

Hypocrisy is continuing to hurt others even after hearing about harm.

I read the apology that came out a while ago. I appreciated that it was a step. It felt to me disingenuous when the church continues to harm people.

Jesus did not work for division, yet that is what's happening.

I overheard a conversation about LGBTQI people not belonging in 'our' church.

People have actually said, "We've got to keep those people out."

There are churches that are 'welcoming' to LGBTQI people but not as a minister or elder.

As a minister, it is painful to be seen as 'not welcoming enough' through association with The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Prioritizing money, the institution...the system, over people's safety is hypocritical.

Hypocrisy: When privileged, white, straight male PCC leaders complain about the loss of safe space for them (because Pathway B – Full Inclusion had been voted for).

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is concerned about the rights of people in other countries and continents but what about the rights of our own members such as gays in the church? We have members who have to hide who they are. They have to introduce their partners as 'room mates'. The Presbyterian Church in Canada is forcing members into hypocrisy.

(We are told) that we gay men and women are welcome but you have to be celibate and you have to live a life where you don't get to experience love.

It's strange how the word 'welcome' has become controversial.

Polity versus Pastoral Care

For many, the hypocrisy of the church is made manifest in prioritizing polity and doctrine over pastoral care and the experience of shared community in the local congregation. Despite being part of the church, there are limits placed on participation for those who identify as LGBTQI which do not exist for others.

An LGBTQI member was part of a 'super-affirming' congregation but because the denomination would not stand with that member, the hypocrisy became too much to remain. Exited The Presbyterian Church in Canada despite great gifts in leadership.

You can 'come in' but you cannot get married.

The session approved that our wedding would be held in the sanctuary – apparently it was 100% support. That felt good but the wedding had to be officiated by a United minister.

When our daughter came out, the church was totally supportive, including providing the venue for the wedding but not the officiant.

The harm done includes neglect as well as abuse.

I buried my feelings deep into the closet...especially when all I had heard from the pulpit was condemnation.

By failing to ordain gays and lesbians, with the number of them within the church, is that we are sentencing those people to living a life lacking integrity and genuineness. And that to me, is more sinful than a lot of things we might do.

It has been a difficult process to come to terms with the fact that my Presbyterian minister parent cannot officiate my wedding (to my same-sex partner).

The church is teaching its children not to be who they are as spiritual, sexual, emotional and physical beings. The Presbyterian Church in Canada focusses on polity rather than real whole people.

As a Presbyterian minister, I am able to baptize or bury gay friends in the church. I am not able to marry them.

Why do we need to hear these stories and respond with care? So that hopefully our children will stop killing themselves if they are gay or lesbian.

I get more impatient with seeing the hurt that we continue to do. And the most hurt for me in my life comes from the church and from fellow clergy.

I am not permitted to serve those who wish to be married and happen to have a same-sex partner.

Directing people to go to some 'affirming' congregations or denominations instead of resolving the stance in The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a deficient response.

The church is putting me in a position where one day I'm going to have to choose between what is best for a child and following church polity.

In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, polity opposes LGBTQI inclusion but we have gay elders who are married.

We (same-sex spouses) asked about having our son baptized...and I guess session came to some sort of compromise because there were those that thought that it would not be appropriate to do our son's baptism in the church...and so it did not happen in the church building. Instead, the baptism took place at our cottage and it was a beautiful ceremony with many people in attendance.

I never understood really...especially as we were members of the church, why we could not use the building for our son's baptismal service. But we were younger and less vocal in those days. This happened about 15 years ago. I mean the baptism wasn't denied but the idea that there was something about having it in the church building that was sacrosanct kind of rubbed us the wrong way. But anyway, it worked out...and our other two kids, by the time they were ready and chose to be baptized...those happened in the church.

The congregation might have been more supportive of us if the wider church had been more open. People look for direction from the wider church.

Polity is used as a shield to avoid talking about people.

Hypocrisy evident when (a very slim majority of) the Doctrine Committee voted to 'shut down' the LGBTQI voice and then right afterwards say, 'Let's pray'.

The hypocrisy of the church is also made manifest when pastoral relationships were broken. People who had trusted others did not experience compassion or the care they had expected or were betrayed.

I was openly mocked in a meeting with a high voice and the limp wrist from someone who reported to be an ally, which was incredibly hurtful.

It seems to me that the church was being used as a tool for shame, judgement and condemnation. That didn't really align with my own personal connections with the Divine...with my understanding of Jesus' words and work.

Our minister at the time spoke with my parents and others by saying a gay neighbour that had been outed...should have been shot. He said that, "If anybody's gay in the congregation, he would prefer them to leave."

I have observed that there is very little overt homophobia in my presbytery but a lot of hypocrisy around inclusion of LGBTQI people.

It's what's in the 'fine print' that's hurtful. I've never been betrayed by someone I know that hates me. I've only been betrayed by people I thought loved me.

After a presbytery meeting that focused on the topic of sexuality, about five different senior ministers came to me and said, 'Oh, we agree with you but we can't say it publicly.'

Harm is caused by the church's inaction on the issue of inclusion despite knowing the toll it is taking on people's lives.

Our church says it is supportive of LGBTQI people but it is not public, vocal or visible.

So, I heard from another pastor who had heard from somebody that I'm gay. He called to tell me that I shouldn't have any sex. That was the sum of his pastoral advice.

There is harm when overt homophobia is simply met with silence and by standing by those who say they are allies to LGBTQI community.

Inaction around inclusion is causing harm. You can't talk out of the two sides of your mouth.

It is difficult to have so many people who identify as allies but how do they take the next step to really stand with us to be really engaged with the difficult conversations? Otherwise, we are still just being talked about.

Our church doesn't have a public display of affirmation of LGBTQI persons despite saying we are an 'affirming' place. It is only quietly affirming.

The worst betrayal is by spaces claiming to be safe or seeming to be that way but then being hurtful or judgmental.

I learned afterwards that the letter I wrote to my former congregation had been edited – before its distribution and without my knowledge – because it didn't jibe with the interim moderator's point of view. (The letter explained why the minister left that church in order to live an open and authentic life).

My respect and trust were entirely broken because of my experience with the church as a structure...as a bureaucratic process.

In my early ministry, I realized that I was saying that, "God loves you but doesn't want you to be who you are."

I think they (those who oppose inclusion) need to realize that a lot of their sons and daughters and uncles and aunts are LGBTQI. But they are not going to open up to them if they think they're not going to get a fair hearing or a warm reception. They don't trust them...and why should they?

The church is fine with taking my money and people are just fine by taking my labour and people are fine having me keep my peace but as soon as you're mad at me, as soon as you disagree with me, as soon as there is conflict, then me being gay is an issue.

We...(the supportive grandparents of trans and gay grandchildren) owe it to the church not to step away. I live with the dilemma about whether to stay in the church. I feel that things in the church need to change – especially so that my family is welcome but I also can't turn my back on my faith or I'll be dead inside.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada says to me that they are willing to use my gifts to bring about what The Presbyterian Church in Canada wants to manifest as a church but don't ask us to give you any sort of power. Do not ask to be recognized as an equal. Do not ask to be able to live out in the fullness of who you are. Hide who you are. Lie about who you are. Don't love yourself...

I've gone from thinking, 'That's just the way it is', to thinking...'I've been hurt by the church'.

The harm that I experienced while serving on the Committee on Church Doctrine and what followed was cruel. After reaching out to other committee members to try to put the betrayal into context, there were no responses.

It bothers me that the church would bless that kind of self-denial...for me to ignore attraction to someone of the same-sex and choose an opposite-sex mate. For me, it is like when Jesus said that the Pharisees were putting heavy burdens on people's backs and not willing to lift them. I felt that the burden of celibacy or marrying somebody I didn't love was a burden they were willing to put on my back to make them feel better about their theology.

Complicit in Hypocrisy

The decision of many storytellers to stay in the church was particularly difficult because of their perception that they were complicit in perpetuating harm simply by their presence in the church. They felt that that presence endorsed the church's stance on same-sex relationships.

The contentious issue I had was not with God; it was with the church and with the hypocrisy that I saw there. Can I be a leader in the church when I don't believe what it's saying? Am I then complicit in the hypocrisy?

I remained quiet and did not take the lead because I feared what the impact would be on the program but then ended up feeling ashamed...because I am not being my authentic honest self.

The church's current position is quite worrying to me. Because of its position, I am concerned and very worried that I am unable to foster a safe loving environment for the kids that participate in the programs that I run.

Instead of spreading love and acceptance we are contributing to hurt, pain and suffering. Especially for the young people in our midst who so badly need to feel our unconditional support and love as they try to find their way in this world. Some days, I am ashamed of my church.

It becomes impossible to defend the Bible as it has been used as an oppressive document against LGBTQI people.

I sat back...trusted the process...trusted the church. Have I let God down? Because I sat back and believed in the church structures. I hoped and I prayed things would change. I feel greater hurt and pain because of the church's homophobia.

As an ordained minister, I experienced a crisis of conscience at being asked and then having to turn down officiating a marriage between two women.

During the sermon, the minister began to preach about 'Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve'...and essentially condemned the practice of homosexuality. It was an incredibly uncomfortable moment for our family. In hindsight, we should have made a braver decision to leave the service but felt uncomfortable considering our family came for our son's baptism.

I struggle as a minister wondering how can I support gays when our denomination is not affirming? I am often asking myself, “What is the role of the Spirit? What does ‘being true’ to the gospel mean?”

I could not be authentic if I was going to preach that God’s grace was sufficient. How can I explain that I (LGBTQI) got excluded from that?

I am constantly feeling paralyzed with thoughts of leaving because of the harm caused to others but then I feel the need to stay to support the LGBTQI community.

I am tired of apologizing for the church because we say we want to be better and more loving but we are not. We are hypocrites.

I do not like being associated with a non-inclusive denomination. I don’t announce to others that I’m Presbyterian even though I grew up in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and serve as a clergy member.

I was preaching about grace and at one point in the sermon I said, “God’s grace is sufficient for everyone”. And the voice in my head said, “Except you.”

I know of lifetime members who had to leave the church because the denomination wouldn’t embrace their children. It was impossible to live with the hypocrisy of loving their children and serving the church that excluded them.

Being involved in The Presbyterian Church in Canada as an LGBTQI person feels wrong and we could not in good conscience, invite friends to attend church with us. They and their family would not see themselves reflected or affirmed.

Even as an ally, I feel complicit in causing more harm just by going to church.

How can I associate my name with an organization that fundamentally is not there for me?

Felt like a hypocrite when approached by a congregant to help them ‘become heterosexual’ out of fear to keep their Christian job.

It has been so difficult and hurtful to explain to Presbyterian youth the barriers that exist in the church...that it is not a safe space, no same-sex marriage or ordination of LGBTQI teaching and ruling elders.

I live with and lament my own hypocrisy in not following my conscience when asked to perform a same-sex marriage rather than stick to the rules of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

After refusing to marry a same-sex couple – one of whom was my friend – I vowed that I would not ever say ‘no’ again. I felt awful. I felt wretched being there at that wedding and knowing that I could have done that for a friend. I’ve never been asked again.

As someone who works with kids and youth in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, I realize that I may be hurting these kids because I belong to this institution that says they cannot love who they love.

If you are going to be accepting, it has to be without the ‘fine print’.

Double Standard

Storytellers named the double standard of the church as being at the heart of hypocrisy. Those who understand that people who identify as LGBTQI and/or are in a same-sex relationship as sin, hold them to a higher standard than others. Many gave examples of behaviours identified as sin, such as those who are divorced, who are engaged in pre-marital sex, etc., where forgiveness and pastoral exceptions are offered. That same compassion and pastoral exception are not offered to those who identify as LGBTQI and/or are in a same-sex relationship. Biblical passages are used as weapons against those who identify as LGBTQI whereas passages condemning other behaviours are put in the context of their time. Many ask why being LGBTQI and/or in a same-sex relationship seems to be in a category of sin all its own with no hope for compassion or understanding or reconciliation.

I can find lots in the Bible that points to quite a few things that are not acceptable or are considered to be abominations but somehow the church figured out a way to have polity that allows many of those things to be permitted. So, I thought it just makes sense that the same approach be taken with respect to the church's attitude on same-sex relationships.

And the next time that person says anything to me about me and my same-sex partner, I am going to be inclined to say, 'And who else have you confronted about their sins today other than me?'

Hypocrisy: When the church says it's welcoming and it's open and it's loving...and especially when we say things like, 'we're all sinners' and yet, we seem to hold a special place or to put up a barrier for people whose sin is a certain sexual expression or identification. When we condemn only specific 'sins'.

Religion has been used as a weapon to inflict shame, guilt and harm.

We offer a wide pastoral dispensation from scriptural centre to heterosexual individuals who have divorced for reasons other than marital faithfulness, yet we do not allow LGBTQI people a similar pastoral leave to marry and have their marriages – even civil ones – recognized. This hypocrisy is poisoning the body politic of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Clergy who have dated or had relationships with members of their own congregation were breaking the pastoral tie and covenant of care that's required of pastors continue to serve in The Presbyterian Church in Canada but those who identify as LGBTQI are harassed, threatened and/or removed.

We are quick to condemn homosexuals and are slow to confront sexual abuse, infidelity etc.

The hypocrisy of largely white, straight men committing adultery in their church but having no discipline...but the LGBTQI community does get disciplined.

With respect to grace, there seems to be an exception for LGBTQI people as if they are 'broken people'...whereas grace is frequently extended to those who are divorced, break marriage vows etc.

We are tolerant of theological differences in some areas. Why not with respect to LGBTQI inclusion?

Requiring a celibacy contract to be signed by a gay man but straight people were not asked to sign a celibacy contract.

Celibacy is required of gay clergy in the Anglican and Presbyterian churches but not for straight persons.

I was singled out to take a vow of celibacy when other candidates – single hetero – were not required to do so.

In an affirming theology, there is less of an angry vengeful God that demands my celibacy...my commitment not to love or to be loved...as a sacrifice.

It's time to stop the 'celibacy' thing. We don't interrogate straight candidates for ministry on the nature of their relationships with their partners.

The church wants you to be a celibate gay...but encourages you to marry someone you don't love (of the opposite gender) and not be celibate with them! The church does not love me as I am.

Someone who is critical of 'sexual lifestyle' as being a 'bad Christian' yet that same person only comes to church once or twice a year.

The church makes peace with and for divorced people but not for gays.

We bring in and support refugees, help the downtrodden and help so many people who are marginalized. We should be creating more acceptance and stop making it such a scary world in the church.

How can one sin be more sinful than another?

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a double standard organization allowing disingenuous, hypocritical and discriminatory behaviour. An organization claiming to love is actually discriminating against its own members and leaders.

I struggle with the selective use of biblical warnings? What about warning against wealth?

Those who point to scripture to exclude LGBTQI people but then ignore so many other parts of scripture.

If I am created in God's image, how can you say I'm sinful and going to hell? There is a disconnect here. So, which is it?

The hypocrisy of following the 'anti-gay' biblical rules but not all the other ones like eating shrimp, wearing veils.

Hypocrisy is when homosexuality is singled out as the one sin worth noting.

Gay relationships are treated as a special category of sinners.

In a sermon the pastor would bring me up and say, 'Well (name), you know how she struggles with her sexuality but look she's being celibate because she gave her sexuality to God.' ...I never knew what he meant.

I spent more time wrestling about what it meant to get divorced as a Christian, than I did on homosexuality.

Harm Caused by "Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin"

Some storytellers recounted experiences in congregations which considered themselves to be welcoming of LGBTQI people but condemned any same-sex sexual intimacy, same-sex marriage or any attempt to change the gender that was assigned at birth. In these situations, it is understood that the church can only go so far in welcoming but must never officially act in a way that would seem to bless same-sex activity or gender transition.

Invoking God when confronting an 'accused' sinner is a form of abuse.

As a queer Christian, I come across so many people that have the mindset that makes my skin crawl...of 'love the sinner, hate the sin'.

Can only offer 'welcome' to the congregation but not by the national church. Not 'welcomed' enough.

The church says that there's nothing wrong with being homosexual but there is something wrong with acting homosexual. I have always thought that was a real contradiction.

The 'love the sinner and hate the sin' thinking just makes gay people more palatable for our society.

A Presbyterian minister said to me, 'I have to love you but I don't like your lifestyle'.

People mostly think about, 'Okay...you have gay men, you have lesbians and they want to get married...of course because everyone wants to get married'. I think the reason that this is continuing to be a challenge is because the church has always had a dysmorphic relationship with bodies, with sex and with sexuality. And so, if we're not willing to address...all of it, I think we're doomed to failure in this conversation. I think about my family members who lived together before marriage. Why, why do we push them away?

I think that there's such an opportunity here to be really getting to the heart of what this is all about – and this is not about gay people. This is not about trans people. This is about fear of difference and the church's control of power. If we can't address how God's been put in a little box, even if the church changes rules around marriage, we will continue to have issues. We will continue to have issues where people are not able to be their true selves without being judged.

'Loving the sinner and hating the sin' is not really 'loving the sinner'...but instead is belittling of the person.

RESPONDING TO HARM DONE

GOD'S COVENANTAL EMBRACE

As mentioned previously, the Moderator's Letter of Repentance reminds the church of the harm done and the need to live out its repentance:

The church by its actions and inaction, speaking and silence, creates hurt, fear and distrust among LGBTQI persons who are part of the church. Deaf to the cries of hurt, fear and distrust, the church dismisses the pain experienced by LGBTQI persons. For our unwillingness to recognize the hurt and fear our actions and attitudes have caused, we are sorry and we repent. (Moderator's Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

As the Rainbow Communion met and reflected on the stories that had been told, it was impossible not to find resonance in the words of scripture and particularly in the stories in which God's love and embrace is extended to those who have been harmed and wounded and those who live their lives on the margins. The cries of lament that are so often heard in the Psalms are heard in the anguished words of harm done, betrayal, hypocrisy and despair that formed such a significant part of the stories told. There are also glimpses of the praise and thanksgiving that also make up the Psalms but the dominant voice is of lament. "How long, O God, how long?"

Christians are the most dangerous when they're 'right'. It's not about being 'right'. I would love to see if this issue could be confronted as an issue of understanding the character of God, rather than understanding the correct theology or the correct box that we put God into. The mystery and wonder of faith seem to be downplayed in the conventional church. It has been replaced with morality, teaching and an obsession with sexuality.

Although the history of the church and its use of scripture have more often than not supported the marginalization and brutalization of those who are understood to be different because of race, gender, social or economic status, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc., (see Appendix 4), there is another trajectory in the witness of scripture, God's covenantal embrace of those on the margins. God's concern for the Hebrew people enslaved in Egypt, the call of the prophets for God's people to remember their covenant with God and to do justice to those who were being exploited and harmed and Jesus' embrace of those who were considered to be outcasts and sinners. Hearing this message has led many who identify as LGBTQI to find salvation and liberation in their own lives in that same embrace.

There is a trajectory in the Bible towards inclusion.

There are examples where the church has been oppressive with respect to race and gender throughout history. But there are also examples where the church has also repented for these actions. It is possible.

It's important to read the Bible in light of God's call towards love and justice. We need to embrace the biblical stories of inclusion and emancipation.

Although the gospel stories do not speak overtly about Jesus' embrace of people who today would identify themselves as sexual and gender minorities, it is impossible not to sense a resonance in the stories the Rainbow Communion heard and the stories of Jesus' encounters with those on the margins. The gospels are filled with these stories of encounter and embrace – with the tax collector Zacchaeus, with the Samaritan woman at the well, with people with leprosy, with people who were marginalized because of different physical and mental challenges, with people involved in the sex trade, with all kinds of so-called sinners.

There's a direct parallel between ministering to the outcasts of the church to the guests of the wedding in the parable.

Who did Jesus hang out with? He hung out with prostitutes and bankers and just about everyone who was not liked in society. So, if Jesus could do it, why can't we accept our own people?

The Ethiopian Eunuch is a story that opens up a conversation about including people of other sexual identities.

Jesus was with the marginalized who then brought them into the centre.

Jesus loved the undervalued.

I am really struggling with The Presbyterian Church in Canada right now. We are called as Christians to love. We are called to follow Jesus' example...loving those who are marginalized, cast out, judged by the rest of society. We are called to show compassion, welcome and acceptance. To me The Presbyterian Church in Canada is not doing that right now.

The history of the first century church is one of a community which sought to welcome all in love. Those who were marginalized, slaves, women, the poor and others were welcomed. It also welcomed others in a community that formed in response to God's loving embrace made known in Christ. The ancient hymn to love in Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth beautifully evokes what the essence of these communities was to be: "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."

Throughout its history, the church has been called to remember its beginnings and that call to welcome all in Christ's name and to value the gifts of all. The profound struggle of the early church concerning the relation of followers of Jesus who were of Jewish and Gentile origin has been reflected over and over in Christian history as the church has been challenged to welcome those who were different because of culture, ethnicity, race, social status and gender. And there are countless examples of those on the margins calling the church to be the church and to repent of its refusal to welcome, to show hospitality and to be blessed by the gifts of all. Once again in this century, the church and the world are reminded of the consequences of marginalization and exclusion and the refusal to recognize the offer of God's loving embrace to all.

Despite the continuing official exclusion in the church, the gospel has brought dignity and abundance of life to many people who have been seen to be less than others and has inspired other people to work with them to bring an end to systems of exclusion and discrimination in the church and in the broader society. Those who sought to respond to God's love and grace through the pursuit of justice were to be an example for all in what Martin Luther King, Jr. called "the beloved community".

The Road to Emmaus – Trauma and Grace

As the committee has met, has listened and has reflected on the stories we have heard, we have spent time in studying scripture together seeking to understand where the Spirit is leading us.

One of the most powerful stories we read together was from Luke's gospel, chapter 24, the story of the disciples' encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus.

The Encounter

It was Sunday, the day after the Sabbath and the third day since the brutal torture and execution of Jesus by the Romans with the collusion of the local religious authorities. Two disciples were returning home from Jerusalem with these events deeply embedded in their thoughts and in their souls. This was all they could think about or talk about. They are joined by a stranger on the road. They are shocked that he does not seem to know anything about what has happened over the last few days. As they walked and talked though, the stranger brought a new perspective on what had happened through a reading of the Hebrew scriptures. The conversation was intense and upon reaching their home the disciples invited the stranger to stay with them even though he seemed to be going on along the road. He accepted. They offered food and as the stranger blessed and broke the bread, they recognized him. And the stranger vanished from their sight.

In the introduction to the Second Edition of her book, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, Serene Jones (p. xi) writes:

The Bible is one long series of traumatic events and accounts of how people struggle to speak about God in the face of them. Two traumatic biblical events jumped out at me immediately – the crucifixion and the resulting trauma of those Christians who experienced it.

For Jones, the story of the road to Emmaus captures these two events. Both the crucified one and those who had been witness to the crucifixion are present. The conversation between the two disciples and the conversation with the stranger tells and retells the story in a kind of loop which is typical of those who have suffered or have been witness to trauma. As we read the story of the road to Emmaus, we remembered the stories we had heard and recognized in them the deep trauma of people who have been wounded by violence or have been witnesses to it. Jones defines a

traumatic event as “an experience in which a person perceives oneself or another to be threatened with annihilation.” (Jones, p. 28)

You'll have to forgive me for the rather disjointed telling of my story...because I have memory gaps. Fear does that. I wonder if it's PTSD from all the times when I felt so very unsafe.

Re-traumatization happens for me when engaging with the church...nowhere else in my life do I experience that.

Yes, I may be paranoid at times but I have legitimate reasons. So, I keep asking myself, will this be the day my whole life and calling come to an end? What do I need to do to keep safe or pass as straight? The reality is that this has consumed my whole life. And to be honest, I feel as if my ministry in the church is a mere shadow of what it could be. I feel like I've let God down and that I'm so much less than I could be because I've never reached my full potential with all the gifts that God has graced me with.

To be anything other than straight in the church is to be in constantly engaged in a battle to put away false guilt and shame. It is to feel less than whole, just to hear the subtle and covert messages of hatred and rejection all the time. To be a lesbian and (in leadership) in The Presbyterian Church in Canada is to live in exile from within the church. It is to live a nightmare each and every day and it never ends. It is to live in constant fear and vigilance with stress and trauma as the norm.

Jones notes that “those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) demonstrate symptoms such as memory loss, dissociative episodes, a profound sense of powerlessness, feelings of being haunted by intrusive memories and repetitive thought patterns, an ongoing state of hyperarousal and perhaps most painfully, a loss of basic trust and the capacity to meaningfully relate to others.” (Jones p. 28)

Those friends and the stranger on the road to Emmaus were grappling with trauma, the traumatic event that is at the very heart of Christian witness. Nothing was possible in the face of this trauma. All hope was lost. It was necessary to find a pathway through that trauma. The vast majority of the stories that were told to the Rainbow Communion were of people grappling with trauma, the trauma of being barred from being fully included in the community of those who have experienced God's covenantal embrace. Nothing is possible in the face of this trauma. All hope is lost. And it is necessary to find a pathway through that trauma.

Jones (p. 32) identifies the insights from the clinical research in dealing with trauma that are necessary for recovery:

First, the person or persons who have experienced trauma need to be able to tell their story. The event needs to be spoken, pulled out of the shadows of the mind into the light of day...The truth of the violence, in its full scope, must be articulated.

Second, there needs to be someone to witness this testimony, a third-party presence that not only creates the safe space for speaking but also receives the words when they finally are spoken.

Third, the testifier and the witness (and we are both) must begin the process of telling a new, different story together: we must begin to pave a new road through the brain.

In scripture, this is the pattern of the Psalms of Lament. The cry of the Psalmist must be spoken in all of its brutality and despair. The cry must be heard. And there must be a remembering, a reconstruction of a way that will recognize grace and embrace. In another important essay entitled “Soul Anatomy” in *Trauma and Grace*, Serene Jones speaks about the Psalms of Lament in relation to a pastoral response to an experience of trauma in a small congregation. Those who covenanted to walk with the person who had experienced trauma also covenanted to read together John Calvin's commentary on the Psalms. From this experience she writes:

What is crucial...is not to have the pain disappear or the forces of violence cease to bear down upon us but to reduce the hold that traumatic violence has upon the imaginative capacity of the one who suffers. In these psalms, hope returns not because evil is explained or immediate justice is invoked but because through activity of thanksgiving, the goodness of God is publicly attested to and reaffirmed. By invoking such goodness, the world in all its complex wonder returns as a gift of God.

We believe that we have had an Emmaus Road experience in listening to those who have been deeply wounded by the church and particularly by The Presbyterian Church in Canada. We have provided a space for stories to be told and heard. And we also are here acting as a conduit for those stories to be heard by the wider church as we all continue on the journey of repentance for the harm done to LGBTQI people and others. We must look at how we continue to

walk together and develop a new story in the relationship of LGBTQI people and the rest of the church. In Jones' words, to find a way that the "imaginative capacity" of those who have been harmed and subsequently those who have caused harm to be done, can be released to enable all to experience God's covenantal embrace and to find a new path forward.

A Call to Confession

As was stated in the Moderator's Letter of Repentance itself and as was reiterated at the beginning of this report, it was recognized that:

This letter of repentance is an interim response between the call of the 1994 document and the work of the Rainbow Communion. (Moderator's Letter of Repentance, A&P 2019, p. 19)

In order to reveal and confront the trauma that is experienced by people who identify as LGBTQI in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, it was necessary to open a space to allow what has happened to be "pulled out of the shadows of the mind into the light of day" and for "the truth of the violence, in its full scope, (to) be articulated". (Jones, p. 32). The church needed to hear the stories of those who have been harmed by homophobia and hypocrisy and by transphobia and heterosexism, in order to move forward on the road of repentance.

Every time I walk through a church door I don't want it to hurt anymore. I still can't figure out how to be in communion with people that have hurt me.

The stories shared with the Rainbow Communion have been painful and disturbing, as people have recounted their experiences of emotional, spiritual, physical and financial harm done. This harm is extensive and includes alienation, family division, separation from community and church, spiritual distress, bullying, harassment, loss of vocation, loss of income, loss of reputation, internalized homophobia and self-loathing, self-harm, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, death by suicide and a sense of separation from God. It is truly a sign of God's grace that there are people who identify as LGBTQI and others who have been harmed that remain in the church and continue to offer their gifts in the midst of these challenges.

Many people remain skeptical and doubtful about the church's ability and willingness to repent. Repentance requires a full recognition of the harm that has been done and continues to be done by the church to people who identify as LGBTQI. In addition, concrete actions that address this harm will need to be implemented in order to bring the healing that is needed and the assurance that harm will not continue.

I want The Presbyterian Church in Canada to follow up on its letter of repentance through substantive action/changes that demonstrate its repentance in acts of restitution contrition and penance.

Reconciliation looks like saying 'yes' to those wanting to marry and not destroying their loving same-sex relationship.

For reconciliation to happen, there needs to be sincere efforts to get to know and talk to people who have a different view than us.

Abolish the expectation of life-long celibacy for LGBTQI people and accept same-sex civil marriages as fully legitimate.

If congregations and leaders formed relationship with us (LGBTQI) and heard our stories that would make a difference.

Trust has to be earned and relationships have to be formed.

It took me a while to learn that Christ's command to love supersedes all objections to including and affirming. This was learned by prayer, thinking about the exclusion of a gay friend and re-reading the 'anti-gay' passages of the Bible.

I think because we're getting at it from a theological view, people will always talk about it as different understandings of how we interpret the issue of including LGBTQI people through scripture. People are always going to say, "Well, we always have different understandings of how we interpret scripture, so we've got to keep those people out."

Other denominations have gone at it from a justice perspective. When something is named as a justice issue, people get on board with it. People may not even understand what the theology is but it's a justice issue. Whereas I think within the Presbyterian Church, because it's this interpretation of exclusion, it just keeps going on and on and on.

I watched how people were voting this Assembly and I'm thinking, 'When people get home, will they be able to remember what they voted on? That there were some significant decisions that were made around the Doctrine of Discovery, for example?' That sounds great but my sense is, this is the work that we're always asking someone else to do, the way in which we do our justice work. For example: 'Let's ask the Moderator to write a letter'. It's always 'work' that someone else does.

I think this persists because there's an understanding that it's not something we're undertaking in our own congregations...at all levels in the church...as opposed to something that's out there. We just wait upon a 'decision' to occur before addressing an injustice.

One of the first places to begin is to revisit the way in which we are expected to interact and love one another with grace.

Over and over again, the Rainbow Communion heard the call for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to make a public confession of the harm that has been done to people who identify as LGBTQI and to pledge itself to change in order to stop harm from continuing to be done.

Only this will provide a context in which those who identify as LGBTQI may feel fully welcome in the body and fully welcome at the table where Jesus is present in the breaking of bread.

The first part of reconciliation is always the admission of wrongdoing...and getting down to the ground level and saying, "I'm sorry for everything I did wrong and I should have never hurt you...and it was so against the teaching in the Bible to do so."

It's important to dispel the fear of the unknown. We must build relationships and friendships with people who are LGBTQI. We need to 'journey with' instead of trying to convert.

My views on homosexuality were very naive. I kind of followed what everybody told me was the 'truth' of it all and ended up causing a lot of harm to a friend of mine who identifies as LGBTQI. And I didn't appreciate the harm that I likely caused him by things that I said and did. And I'm very regretful for that. And I never had an opportunity to go back to him and apologize. And I hope that he's able to forgive me for the things that I said and that I did.

There is something beautiful in dialogue. My hope is that The Presbyterian Church in Canada would find a way to make it safe for people to have the hard conversations needed for reconciliation.

Congregations should consider working on individualized processes of restorative justice for those who have been harmed.

I think a direct letter of apology that is read by a representative of the Presbyterian Church from the pulpit of Summerlea United to the St. Andrew's, Lachine congregation would be really, really nice for those last few people. For some of the younger ones, who are now getting older, who stuck their necks out, to be able to hear that apology would be really worth it for them.

Recommendation No. RCL-003

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada offer a public confession to all individuals and congregations that have been harmed by the church in excluding and marginalizing people who identify as LGBTQI. The confession would acknowledge the church's responsibility for the harm done, seek forgiveness from God and from those who have been harmed and commit the church to a true change of heart and behaviour.

Recommendation No. RCL-004

That a Special Committee be appointed by the General Assembly, to prepare the Confession for harm done to LGBTQI people before the next General Assembly. The Confession will be given public expression in a Service of Worship led by the Moderator which will be live streamed, recorded and made available for use by the church.

Public Expression

Many storytellers recounted that in their local congregations, information regarding the church's studies and recommendations related to human sexuality had not been made available to them or that members had been actively discouraged from engaging in the studies or responding to requests for feedback. Many said that the minister or the session acted to limit discussion or to discourage the expression of alternative views to their own.

Controversy (around discussing LGBTQI Presbyterians) in our session was handled very politically...pushing it around rather than study and deliberate in keeping with the reformed tradition.

What I find interesting about the situation in The Presbyterian Church in Canada are the ways exclusion works institutionally.

Re: Moderator's Letter of Repentance: Our congregation was never made aware of the letter and there's been absolutely nothing said or shared from our church leadership. It has never been printed or given out to us.

Recommendation No. RCL-005

That members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada be encouraged to participate in the service of worship that gives public expression to the confession for harm done to LGBTQI people and to work individually and as congregations and the courts of the church to live out this confession and commitment so that harm does not continue.

More Than Just Words

Confession cannot be words only. Although those who told their stories have asked for a public confession or apology, they have also clearly stated that this must be accompanied by actions which address the harm that has been done and ensure that harm will not continue. Otherwise, the church will simply perpetuate the hypocrisy of the "All are welcome" signs. There has been a huge cost to those who have been harmed by homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy in the church. Some have paid with their lives. Others have seen their health shattered, their careers destroyed and their families, friendships and communities broken. There is a cost to address the harm that has been done and the church must be prepared to cover this cost.

To make church a place of love and acceptance and welcome for everyone...will take a lot of learning...concerted and intentional action and humility to reconcile with those we have hurt for so long.

It is time to take action and to offer support and care to those who have been traumatized and harmed within and by The Presbyterian Church in Canada and whose relationship with the body of Christ has been broken. A funding mechanism needs to be established to enable those who have been harmed to access support for their healing process. The Rainbow Communion consulted with professional counsellors and given the number of people who have already shared their stories of harm and the extent of the harm perpetrated, it is estimated that the fund should begin with a minimum of \$500,000. It is not known how many others might need to access this funding. An oversight body will need to be appointed to administer the fund and criteria will need to be established for those harmed to access this funding.

Recommendation No. RCL-006

That a fund be established with terms to be formed and administered by the Life and Mission Agency to provide resources to support psychotherapy/counselling for those who have experienced harm done by homophobia, hypocrisy, transphobia and heterosexism in the denomination and provide a report on the funding accessed to the next General Assembly.

Providing Pastoral Care

The work undertaken by the Rainbow Communion is only a beginning. There are many others in the church who identify as LGBTQI who have experienced harm but who have never been able to tell their stories to people who will listen without judgement. Even for those who have told their story to the Rainbow Communion, the level of pastoral care available is often not adequate.

For some people, the resources to address the harm that has been done are simply not available in the church or in the wider community. In some cases, there is no minister or other person available who can provide the pastoral care that is required. For others, their experience has meant that they are not comfortable or able to talk with ministers or members of the local church. Some people live in regions that have very little access to the resources of Presbyterian

churches. The Rainbow Communion did hear about congregations and presbyteries that are already providing pastoral support on a local basis but it is imperative that there be a national program of pastoral care that is available to all.

I think the denomination needs to figure out how to create material or create programs to help congregations wrestling with what this really means.

I do think that as we become more adept as a body (in) responding to the needs of the LGBTQI community, the inclusion of trans people has to be high on the priority list.

Recognize the presence of trans people...and should have space (for them) to be present; such as in ordinary church life. Be sensitive to the trauma of selfhood and identity.

State that trans people exist.

Churches should pray and truly hear the stories.

Learn from people who have suffered persecution.

I want to be able to be part of a church community where I don't need to 'code-switch' or hide parts of my life because I'm worried that someone won't understand or accept what I'm talking about; where the people around me are past stereotypes or misconceptions of what it means to identify as part of any group within the LGBTQI+ community. I hope that one day, congregations will have the knowledge and resources to adequately support people who are questioning their sexuality or gender.

In the Rainbow Communion's second interim report in 2019, the following recommendation was adopted by the General Assembly:

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. (A&P 2019, p. 46)

It is encouraging to know that this work has begun. It is important to build on this work and to expand the resources available to address harm done to people who identify as LGBTQI in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

At times I am filled with regret over wasted years, missed opportunities and broken relationships. But now, for the most part, I feel that a giant burden has finally been lifted. I am finally able to accept myself without feeling guilt or shame. Coming out was hard but staying closeted was killing me.

Many people who told their stories felt very isolated and alone. It was difficult for them to know whether their experience was unique or if there were others who had had similar experiences. In addition to the need for support to all those who identify as LGBTQI, there were also particular needs expressed for groups to support parents and caregivers of people who identify as LGBTQI and also for serving and retired clergy who face particular challenges within the church.

I don't know any ministers in the church who are gay although I'm sure there are more than just me.

I thought, "I'm the only guy in The Presbyterian Church in Canada who's a gay minister."

So, when I was growing up, the gay community was totally out of my sight...and out of sight of most people.

I had no role models at all.

I knew of my same-sex attraction from the time that I came to understand what 'attraction' was. I had no model for that. I had no language for it. I did not know how to do that or be that. So, I lived closeted...very tightly closeted for most of my life. And although I had had some same-sex relationships, they were always incredibly closed off from the rest of my world.

The church I attended legitimately cared for me and cared for my eternal well-being but not my happiness.

There's just no place for an LGBTQI kid in the Korean community church.

People in the closet don't want to be the subject of rumours and gossip, so we don't talk. It's no wonder that so many people at General Assembly don't know anyone who is gay in the church.

I think it is important for the church to have some sense of how many people there are in the church who are willing to go through this process of sharing their experience and realizing that there are more people, more gay people in the church than they thought and that some of them are in positions of responsibility and trust.

The first lesbian I ever met was actually at a Presbyterian church event! I thought to myself, 'You exist?!' So many of us are hiding.

There's a stereotype about LGBTQI kids. That 'those' kids are not 'our' Presbyterian kids.

I don't think I know any other gay Presbyterians...and I've grown up in the church my whole life. Where are they? Are they all gone? I think that LGBTQI just can't wait anymore. I can't see myself here anymore. I just don't belong.

I didn't realize there are role models that I could have found in the church. It would be really helpful if there was some sort of network to connect.

Far too many people fear homosexuals without knowing the whole person or without knowingly being connected with someone who is LGBTQI. That needs to change.

Be in relationship with people, not with labels. In a perfect world, remove all the labels. Because when we create a 'checklist' of who is to be included, we are going to forget somebody and they end up excluded or mis-identified.

Just because the church excludes gays, doesn't mean you don't have gays in your community. It is such a disservice – especially to young people and kids – not to have those role models.

I think young people are the ones who are so desperately looking for answers and just don't know where to get them...because there is nowhere to safely ask the questions.

There was a lot of internalized shame and fear that we both carried about the possibility of being queer. I don't think that can solely be attributed to the church but I think that if we had grown up with more queer role models in the church, perhaps our experiences would have been different.

Need to develop policies that are looking to bridge the extremes...and also catch the nuance in between...so that people are not excluded or rendered invisible.

The tone of the conversation needs to change away from secrecy and fear to being out in the open.

Recommendation No. RCL-007

That the Life and Mission Agency, together with synods, presbyteries, sessions and theological colleges encourage the development of organic networks of support groups and formalized pastoral care relationships across the church, both in person and online, to provide resources, guidance and care for people who identify as LGBTQI and in particular for serving and retired clergy and for family members of LGBTQI people.

Care for Youth

In many of the stories, there was a particular and pressing need to address harm done to youth who identify as LGBTQI. Appendix 6 references the terrifying statistics associated with mental distress and with rates of suicide and attempted suicide among LGBTQI youth, particularly those who are members of faith communities. Youth in The Presbyterian Church in Canada continue to be at risk of harm as attitudes and policies of exclusion continue to be perpetuated.

The staff were horrified when they came to understand that the denomination the camp operates under is non-affirming. Some decided they could not work here anymore. As much as they loved camp and their friends

and staff, they said to me, “We can’t work here. I am a gay person. I can’t work for an organization that does not let me be who I am.”

I think the care of LGBTQI people needs to be enshrined in law, in the Leading with Care document.

Policies such as Leading with Care need to address safety even in these times of discernment. How does The Presbyterian Church in Canada deal with bullying and harassment? Places such as social media (Facebook) are not safe.

Recommendation No. RCL-008

That resources and training events developed and gathered by the Life and Mission Agency, for the purpose of equipping ministers and youth leaders to provide exceptional care and appropriate support for LGBTQI youth, be recommended for use in congregations, presbyteries, synods and camps.

Debunking the Myth That Falsely Links Paedophilia with Those Who Identify as LGBTQI*

(See Appendix 7)

The myth that falsely links paedophilia with those who identify as LGBTQI must once and for all be rejected by The Presbyterian Church in Canada. For too long, LGBTQI people have lived under this shadow and the harm it has done and continues to do, is immense. This demonstrably false accusation has been used as a weapon and has caused many gifted people to be driven away from working with children and youth because of the erroneous perception that their orientation or gender identity immediately makes them abusers.

Although there is no justification for this belief, it persists in the church and in the broader society.

Even among those who identified as allies, some felt the need to clarify that the LGBTQI people they knew were not paedophiles. Some storytellers also felt the need to recount incidents of child abuse to the Rainbow Communion. It was shocking to recognize how deeply this identification is ingrained in thinking in the church and beyond even after decades of recognition that this is not the case. This was clearly stated in the Report of the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation in 2003 (A&P 2003, p. 537 and see Appendix 7). It is still often the elephant in the room when talking about the inclusion of those who identify as LGBTQI.

I have come to understand that The Presbyterian Church in Canada doesn’t trust me because of my orientation and links my identity to the abuse of children. I am an individual, I’m a human being. I’m a female. You know...I get up in the morning and put one foot down on the floor and then the other...and I stand up. I’m the same as anybody else. It bugs me that there is any acronym of letters that define people. We’re just people. If the church could just come to see me as an individual without a label, that would be a good step forward.

There was an elder at our table who said, “I will not allow somebody who identifies as LGBTQI to teach my children.”

I came out to some friends but they turned away from me because of their past experiences of being abused as children...and then associated that with me.

Someone in the Body, Mind and Soul discussion group at our church exclaimed, ‘If we permit people with same-sex orientation to be openly involved in our congregations, it just opens the doors to paedophiles’.

My sister’s husband wouldn’t let my gay brother in to their house because they had boys. I said to them, ‘He’s gay. He’s not a pedophile!’

I remember watching a film that was from a health class in the 1960s and it was to teach children to be aware of homosexuals, because they equated paedophilia with homosexuality.

I was accused of pedophilia when it was discovered that I was gay.

Recommendation No. RCL-009

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada reject without qualification the false claim that those who identify as LGBTQI are any more likely to be involved in paedophilia or the molestation or abuse of children or vulnerable adults than any other persons.

Responding Appropriately to Abuse

The invitation to participate in a Listening Space was to share stories of harm done due to homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy and/or grace received despite those challenges. However, there were those who felt compelled to share stories of other kinds of harm. Some did so because there were great efforts to provide a safe and respectful Listening Space, while others perceived that the Rainbow Communion was to hear any story of harm especially if it was of a sexual nature, including assault. Some people related stories of gender-based violence, misogyny, sexual harassment and abuse. Some people who had experienced abuse from both same-sex and opposite-sex abusers shared their stories as they perceived the Listening Space to be a safe space to do so. Most however, did not want their account to be included in the report but did share how important it was to be able to talk about their experience in a safe and covenanted space.

I began to sense a call to Ministry of Ordination of Word and Sacrament, which became deeply personal for me. It was not an easy thing for me. It took a long time. And for the first time in my life, my gender mattered. So, I had to kind of really think through my own gender and what that was. It was a barrier. It was an issue and to accept the sense of call was not easy for me. So, I finally decided that yes, I'm going to study. My congregation was really supportive. So, all of a sudden, I go from my family, my congregation and into The Presbyterian Church in Canada and discover, holy crap, there's huge issues out there. I knew that this was a problem about me being a woman but this is a real problem that I'm a woman.

And my first year at Knox...living there, I had a group of friends invite me to come and pray with them. And I went, I'm trying to fit in all over the place. Right? So, I walk into the room thinking we're kind of in prayer. And it became a vicious attack on me personally. It was men who said horrible things, there was no touching. There was no sexual harassment in touching but it was sexual harassment. It was awful. I was so shocked that we never did pray. I sat there and took it. I was so shocked. They ambushed me. I remember shaking.

There I was still trying to discern my call, still trying to figure out what I was doing there. I had vicious hate notes pushed under my door regularly. I had horrible posters posted on the bulletin board in the common room where I lived and also in the classrooms where I went to school. I had terrible things said to me personally. Every year that I was there, a constant barrage of nastiness. And it was personal attacks on me. In my last year at Knox, I think I spent three weeks lying on my couch facing depression. And it was actually a young man who was trying to be a priest...a Catholic priest...who came and just, you know, pulled me out of it.

And I had death threats. I had a stalker. I mean, I won't get into it. It was. It was awful. But it was because of my gender. It was about my gender. It was all about my gender. And back in those days, you had to go through licensing with (the presbytery) who didn't even know you. They conducted all the interviews and all the single men came out of there horrified because they were told, "Oh, you're single, don't you worry. You'll find a lovely young single woman in the congregation you're going to who you can marry and will be your helpmate." and to the women, "Oh you're female and you're single. Do you hate men? You're a lesbian and we're going to get to the truth of this." And everyone came out of the interviews, mostly the women...shaking and crying, the men shaking and angry.

In response to those who bravely shared stories of harm done, even outside the mandate of the Special Listening Committee, the church needs to be alerted to the need for spaces and opportunities for people to safely report these experiences and receive care.

Recommendation No. RCL-010

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada, through the Life and Mission Agency, provide a means for people to safely tell their stories of abuse and offer an appropriate pastoral response.

ENSURING THAT HARM DOES NOT CONTINUE

METANOIA

The Greek word that is used in the New Testament that is usually translated in English as "repentance" is "metanoia". It means "turning around", "changing our ways of thinking", "a transformative change of heart". It is often described as a 180 degree turn that sets us on a new course.

In its repentance from homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy, it is important for the church to name and to address the harm that has been done to people who identify as LGBTQI and others. Equally important is its

willingness to set itself on a different path that takes it away from harming these people and the belief that harming others can in any way be justified by its faith.

It is helpful to recall what Serene Jones (p. 32) identifies as a third insight from the clinical research in dealing with trauma that is necessary for recovery: “the testifier and the witness (and we are both) must begin the process of telling a new, different story together: we must begin to pave a new road through the brain.”

What is the new and different story that The Presbyterian Church in Canada and those who identify as LGBTQI are being called to tell that will begin to pave a new road through our collective brain and heart that will ensure that harm stops, that God’s covenantal embrace is extended to all and that the gifts of all are welcomed and celebrated?

Of course, repentance involves risk. Things will not be the same. What has been considered to be true and proper will be challenged. Each member will have to listen as well as speak, will have to receive as well as give, will have to bless as well as be blessed. But if harm is ever to come to an end, if those beloved members of the Body of Christ among us, our friends, our family, our companions on the journey, who are being harmed and excluded are to be truly welcomed and able to share their gifts, then there must be a willingness to take that risk and to embrace a new way.

The experience of many people who identify as LGBTQI in the church has been one of maddening compromise in which the church has been willing to go so far but then begins to fear and refuses to fully embrace those who have been harmed and excluded. The recognition of their full humanity, their identity as children of God like all others and their rights to fully participate in the church, have been used as bargaining chips in order to calm the fears of others and to ensure that real repentance and change does not take place. A 90 degree turn brings some change and sets a new course but in the end, it does not address the causes of harm nor end harm that is being done.

A WAY FORWARD

For true repentance to happen, it is essential to look honestly at attitudes and ways of organizing the church and to be willing to make a 180 degree turn when they are the source of harm and exclusion. Throughout the stories that were told to the Rainbow Communion, suggestions were made for changes that were necessary in The Presbyterian Church in Canada to ensure that harm will not continue. And throughout the stories that were told, there were glimpses of this new way of being together: in examples of God’s loving embrace being extended to all and the gifts of all being honoured and celebrated. These experiences can be seen as a starting point or perhaps as markers along the way that point to the right direction. These suggestions and experiences form the basis of the recommendations that follow.

Some only ask, “What are we to do with those LGBTQI people”, not “What can we work at together?”

I think we all have different conceptions of what it means to be the Body of Christ in the world. And you can’t live without the head, without the foot. You can’t live without your gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, your transgender brothers and sisters, your straight brothers and sisters. It’s all one Body.

We need to consider how we will reconcile with one another and repair the wounds. How can we prepare ourselves for that work?

...obviously a fully inclusive polity is the best way forward. But barring that, I think there needs to be a larger open discussion, throughout every level of the church about what it means to be an accepting community.

The church has to be the place where the perpetrator and the victim work it out, otherwise the cycle of division and retribution will prevail.

My concern is the harm being done. I don’t think we can even talk about reconciliation before the church faces the real harm being done to people...particularly to youth.

We (The Presbyterian Church in Canada) are making decisions about people that are experiencing massive barriers and trauma in their lives...and ‘we’ are coming from a position where ‘our’ safety is not at risk. We are talking about individuals from a place of power and privilege. We need to recognize this.

There is an urgent need for Presbyterians to hear the real stories and meet the real people being affected by these decisions. I was truly horrified to hear that there was not a single LGBT group or person whose experience was lifted up at the General Assembly. I feel sad that there are not more intentional safe spaces where conversations can happen. These are needed for the constructive work of reconciliation.

POLICY

It is important that all decision making, educational and program bodies of the church intentionally review and change their policies to reflect the belief that all people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity are equally beloved by God and to challenge homophobic, transphobic, heterosexist and hypocritical assumptions and practices.

Homophobia, transphobia and hypocrisy are all underpinning current policy and the policing of LGBTQI people in the church.

There's an important role in Leading with Care which can help open the way to inclusion and for gender to become a non-issue.

Attempts were made to silence the voice and participation of a gay minister who was to serve on a church committee. The process to nominate was manipulated, not once but twice in an attempt to prevent this person from serving a first and then a second term. His value was debated at General Assembly and also questioned at Synod. (This was unprecedented for a committee nomination.)

Who do you trust with your 'real self'? When the unity of the denomination is at stake and you're the reason – simply because you're not straight and because you'd like to be treated with dignity and respect.

Bathrooms are needed that are non-gender-specific and accessible for all.

Churches can become safe spaces. Use gender-inclusive language, install gender-neutral washrooms, act on the Moderator's Letter of Repentance and encourage affirming people to stay in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and not leave.

Buildings need to be updated so that washroom facilities and signage are welcoming and inclusive of trans people.

There is something fundamental about the way we teach our kids about love, about God's grace, about inclusion. Leading with Care can be amended much more easily than a lot of other things.

Even at this time, we, the church, can abolish the current expectation of lifelong celibacy for members of the LGBTQI community. Those who have already entered into a valid civil same-sex marriage, are legitimately wed. We need to countenance them having sexual relations within those marriages.

Need to update inclusive affirming policy and language reflected in Leading with Care as well.

Safe spaces and resources need to be created for parents and family of gay Koreans.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada must be careful how we talk about 'family' and gender non-binary people in Leading with Care...for example.

That we take seriously the need to provide safe space for people like me to be able to share our story, our reality...what it's like for us to be in the church and also to share our faith perspective as gay people because I feel that my reality affects the way I understand my faith.

I had this classmate who kept trying to get certified and kept being denied. We didn't know why. We didn't understand. We didn't know and it was only like after a year after I graduated...when I realized he was being honest...He could have lied but he was being honest about his orientation, so he was rejected by two different presbyteries. Now he works in the (different denomination) church as a hospital chaplain and he's doing amazing work. But he grew up Presbyterian and spent his whole life nurtured in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. He just decided to be honest and because of that, he was not allowed to be certified and his gifts were not being used.

When reviewing policy, it is important to look at the language that is used. The Book of Forms 55 already addresses issues of offensive language. "When a member in speaking utters language that another member regards as offensive or censurable, the latter may require that the words be taken down by the clerk." It needs to be recognized that homophobic, transphobic and heterosexist language is offensive and censurable.

Similarly, *The Presbyterian Church in Canada Style Guide and Web Standards*, addresses the use of inclusive language based on Living Faith 8.4.6 and is a useful tool in beginning to address language that can be harmful or exclusive. It states, “Acknowledging this, great care should be taken to avoid language that is demeaning or that stereotypes others on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, income, geography, mental and physical characteristics and age” (*The Presbyterian Church in Canada Style Guide*, p. 37).

Recommendation No. RCL-011

That with the support of the resources from the Life and Mission Agency, the courts of the church, agencies, colleges and camps review and update their policies, procedures and practices, including the language used, by June 2022, to ensure they reflect the full inclusion of all people.

Creating Safer Spaces in the Courts of the Church

As noted earlier in the report, there are particular concerns about addressing harm done to people who identify as LGBTQI in the courts of the church. There is a need to address exclusive language and homophobic slurs and to make the courts places where people who identify as LGBTQI can feel safe and included in order to participate fully and openly.

Changes to language and vocabulary are essential in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and must also be implemented.

Drop all references to gendered and heteronormative policies.

Church is not a safe place; it is safe people!

I don't think that the church has come to realize that institutional homophobia exists or the way that polity is manipulated to perpetuate homophobia.

There is risk associated with every single person you come out to in the church.

People have the right to know if they're safe somewhere...or not.

Allies who 'turn off' their sensitivity to LGBTQI folks can be more damaging than overt homophobia.

It is necessary that allies are also made to feel safe and empowered to speak up about inclusion and to tell their stories without fear.

We need to develop non-gender-specific pronouns. The language we use will probably have the broadest impact in people being able to see themselves as included.

We need to acknowledge non-binary people exist among us and also stop assuming that everyone is heterosexual and cis-gender. That understanding needs to be communicated...that there are non-binary and non-straight people.

There's actually some very inappropriate language that exists in the church's documents. They need to be updated or renewed so that they no longer refer to LGBTQI people as a 'lifestyle'.

There's still lots to be learned and done. And I'm still getting their pronouns wrong and I make mistakes constantly but my kids know that I love them and I would do anything for them.

We have some individuals who are quite vocal in the stance against LGBTQI inclusion. They make comments about it at fellowship hour. You hear them speaking to each other or they leave literature around the church and at the library. It's not necessarily the safest space.

It's important that churches clearly state their position as to whether they are affirming or non-affirming. The hurt comes when places that present as affirming...even by their silence...turn out to be unsafe. If a church or congregation has the choice to decide whether they are affirming or not, then they need to show and say that in some tangible way.

It's easy to put up a rainbow sticker; it's harder to change your washrooms to 'non-gender'.

People should not ever communicate 'disgust' about homosexuality because there may be a struggling LGBTQI person present...and therefore made to feel unsafe.

Someone once said to me that, "People (like me) cannot 'delight the heart of God' and that The Presbyterian Church in Canada should just split up because it does not make sense to have these two kinds of people in the church."

I've been harmed by the church...a lot of that harm is second degree harm from me witnessing harm done to others.

We need to identify what supports are needed for a trans person seeking a call.

There needs to be emphasis on developing a common understanding of the word 'safe'. All voices, including LGBTQI perspectives, must be heard and respected.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada must fully embrace the queer community and expect God's gifts from all people. The Presbyterian Church in Canada must confront feelings of disgust specifically around 'homosexual' physical intimacy.

Recommendation No. RCL-012

That, by June 2022, the Life and Mission Agency develop guidelines, including how we speak to one another, for helping make the courts and committees of the church safer spaces for all.

Care for One Another

The virtual invisibility of people who identify as LGBTQI in the courts and other bodies of the church, the lack of any policies related to their inclusion and the lack of concern regarding homophobic and transphobic language means that there are also no policies related to the resolution of disputes related to exclusion and abusive language and practices. These issues are often overlooked and remain unnamed because of the lack of any specific guidelines or policies to which those harmed can turn.

I think heterosexism is embedded and we need transformation, education and correction. And I think for the church we need a theological foundation that will help people understand what the psychological and social approach won't do.

There needs to be accountability and discipline when scripture is used as a weapon.

The church will need to develop conflict resolution materials for inclusion-related disputes.

LGBTQI voices should be leading the conversation.

I've also experienced what I call theological terrorism...people berating beliefs of others.

The church needs to become 'non-accusatory' with respect to gay people and their relationships.

A non-affirming church or congregation needs to make that clear all the time. People have the right to know if they are safe – or not – somewhere.

Make absolutely sure that your church is an affirming space before you claim to be one.

I just keep living in the hope that all who call themselves Christians, will respond pastorally and with love, once they learn about the harm caused by exclusion...because the harm is real for someone like me.

Recommendation No. RCL-013

That the Life and Mission Agency, in consultation with the Clerks of Assembly, create appropriate guidelines and policies to be used by the courts, agencies and congregations of the church to resolve disputes related to inclusion and report to the next General Assembly.

ACCOUNTABILITIES

Resources

Living out the church's repentance for harm done to people who identify as LGBTQI and its commitment to ensure that harm will not continue will require human as well as financial resources. It is important to state again that the work of the Rainbow Communion is only a beginning. Work will need to be done to follow up on the stories that have been told and the recommendations that have emerged from them. It is important to recognize that the work of repentance and of ensuring that harm will not continue, is not solely the work of any one office or staff person, it is the work of the whole church. However, much of the oversight and coordination of this work will be located within the Life and Mission Agency.

It would be helpful to have someone on national level as animator for education on gender and sexuality (Program Coordinator Sexuality and Inclusion role was created in 2020).

We need to begin healing conversations by recognizing and acknowledging our own power and privilege. Diversity, inclusion and anti-oppression training should be mandated for church leaders and staff.

Groups need to be held accountable to honouring one another and being compassionate. The church needs to invest in and find ways to build trust and relationships in order to explore hard topics, have good conversations and engage more deeply with issues around sexuality and equality.

I still find during my time at Sunday School (youth) that sexuality is not talked about. The only time it's talked about or mentioned in church is in the opening welcome statement from time to time and at some events we hold...otherwise, it's just not talked about at all.

It feels like we are always debating doctrine. I want to say, 'We are not debating doctrine, we are debating human beings'.

I wish that there was a resource I could use, because I am not a trained counsellor for supporting people coming out in toxic situations.

Recommendation No. RCL-014

That all congregations, presbyteries, synods and committees be encouraged to consult with the Program Coordinator Sexuality and Inclusion, concerning the ongoing work of resource and policy development, education and support for the full inclusion of LGBTQI people in all dimensions of the ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Representation

One of the deep frustrations reflected in the stories that have been told to the Rainbow Communion is that people who identify as LGBTQI have not had a voice in decision making in the church. Their exclusion and being made invisible has meant that they have not been able to contribute to the debates about their own inclusion and in other decision making in the church. In most instances, LGBTQI people are objectified and talked about rather than making their own contribution. It is imperative that people who openly identify as LGBTQI be deliberately, visibly and consistently included in all courts, agencies and other entities in the church and their voices be welcomed and heard.

At a meeting, one of the session members raised a question of whether a person who had been nominated as a new session member and was openly gay should become a session member.

There was a person who was very well respected and typically very gentle that was in our sexuality discussion group who said, "Well, why can't they (LGBTQI people) just go to their own church and then they'll be happy?"

I think it's all about education and giving space and our time to people who are living it...all it takes to bridge the gap is to put a face to it.

For healing to truly happen, we must listen to the voices of LGBTQI in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and continue to create spaces where we can say, 'We want to hear your story and you are not going to be punished for it'.

Stop putting up barriers. Just stop. Don't make it a 'thing'. If someone is called to the ministry, they go into ministry. If someone's called to work with youth, they work with youth. Who they are dating should not matter.

When somebody would ask me to let my name stand to become an elder, I said, 'No.' I thought, 'You can't be gay in The Presbyterian Church in Canada'. So, I didn't accept that call.

There is a systematic exclusion of gay leaders and teachers from denominational positions – especially at higher levels of responsibility – and platforms.

In an ideal future for the Presbyterian Church, kids will grow up with a mix of straight, cis and LGBTQI+ elders and mentors to help them foster their faith; this kind of representation can make a world of difference.

Recognize that when 'LGBTQI' is debated...it is about real people not mere labels. They are talking about ME.

Recommendation No. RCL-015

That committees to nominate at all levels and in all courts of the church, be urged and encouraged to include LGBTQI representation in the membership of committees of the sessions, presbyteries, synods, colleges and General Assembly.

Removing the Threat of More Harm

Many of the stories shared with the Rainbow Communion had never been shared before. Much of the harm that happens in the church goes unnoticed or is held in secret. No one will ever know the true extent of the harm that has been done and continues to be done and the dilemmas that people face every day in the church.

Although the inclusion of people who identify as LGBTQI at all levels of decision making is important, it does raise a serious and systemic dilemma for them which was clearly illustrated in the work of the Rainbow Communion. The church invited people who identify as LGBTQI to tell their stories and also required that at least two members of the Special Listening Committee identify as LGBTQI. This call and this requirement in fact demanded that people "out" themselves in a church that formally remained opposed to same-sex relationships and to the ordination of anyone married to a same-sex spouse. This made members of the committee and those who told their stories liable to the discipline and censure of the church in relation to its stance on same-sex relationships simply for being who they are and potentially made the Rainbow Communion a space in which harm would continue to be perpetrated against the very people the church sought to hear.

In order to address this dilemma, the Rainbow Communion in its interim report to the 2018 General Assembly made a recommendation that was subsequently adopted (A&P 2018, p. 459–64, 29). The intent of this recommendation was that people who served on the committee or who told their story would not be subject to the discipline and censure of the church in relation to its stance on same-sex relationships. Each member of the Special Committee and each person who told their story received a letter that attested to this decision of the Assembly.

For the Rainbow Communion, this represented a covenant the church had made with people who identify as LGBTQI in its process of repentance to enable them to be honest and open and to tell their stories with integrity and without the threat of discipline.

HARM CONTINUES

In 2019, the Rainbow Communion was made aware of a situation in which this covenant was not honoured and a storyteller's safety and position in the church was threatened. A presbytery's handling of a Call to a storyteller was challenged in the courts of the church despite knowing of the protection from the threat of censure afforded to this person by the decision of the 2018 General Assembly (A&P 2018, p. 459–64, 29). In the course of the proceedings, the action of the Assembly was dismissed as being irrelevant thereby nullifying the covenant made with the storyteller and potentially all storytellers and those who have served with the Special Listening Committee. Although a pastoral exception was made in this case and the storyteller was allowed to remain in the charge, the threat of harm remains and the covenant continues to be brought into question.

This situation had harmful consequences for the storyteller:

I am told I have no role in this dispute. The complainers were all there but I was not invited. We can't put down roots here until this is settled. It is like a dark cloud over us and a heavy weight on our shoulders. The uncertainty has costs at our end that seem to be of no concern to the powers that be either.

It cost the objectors nothing to oppose me and nothing to keep on opposing me with procedures and appeals.

I had one day advance notice that I might be forced out of my church the very next evening. No time to organize a thoughtful defence, no time to prepare myself for the worst, no time to prepare my church, no time to prepare my family, no time to put my things in order, no time to even pray in any coherent manner except a cry for help. If that motion had passed it would have crippled my church's recent progress, devastated their excitement for ministry, sent them back into the leaderless wilderness of vacancy and embittered their spirit against the denomination to the point of quitting.

It would be nice to bring an end to this stressful year-long process that is tantamount to the kind of sexual harassment the General Assembly already apologized for some years ago – but yet is still allowed to continue in the courts of the church.

The guarantee of the removal of the threat of censure adopted by the General Assembly has been brought into question jeopardizing the safety and wellbeing of those who serve on the Special Listening Committee and all those who have told their stories to the Rainbow Communion. This constitutes yet another instance of harm being perpetrated by the courts of the church against those who identify as LGBTQI and deepens their sense of betrayal and distrust. The Rainbow Communion has communicated these concerns to the Assembly Council, the Life and Mission Agency and other relevant bodies.

This experience illustrates the impossible situation in which people who identify as LGBTQI find themselves in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It shows the breaking of covenant with LGBTQI people, which allows harm to continue and the lengths of process to which the church will go to ensure that the rights and dignity of people who identify as LGBTQI are not upheld, even when affirmed by the General Assembly. In short, this situation demonstrates the continuing hypocrisy of the church in its relationship with people who identify as LGBTQI. When the courts of the church are used in this way, harm continues.

It was in this context that on March 17, 2021, the Moderator of the 2019 General Assembly, the Rev. Amanda Currie, wrote a pastoral letter to the church. It read in part:

With terms of reference set by the 2017 GA and revised by the 2018 GA, the Rainbow Communion implemented a listening process for LGBTQI people and others to tell their stories of harm done to them and/or God's grace experienced in the church. Recognizing that the invitation to participate in the listening process could produce a high level of fear for LGBTQI people to tell their stories and reveal their identities, especially for those who are subject to the discipline of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the 2018 General Assembly adopted the following recommendation:

“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... 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.” (A&P 2018, p. 29, 462.)

Individuals who have served on the Listening Committee or shared their stories are given a Letter of Certification as an attestation of the decision of the 2018 General Assembly. Those who have made themselves vulnerable by sharing openly and honestly in the listening process have a certificate in their hand to remind them of the promise made to them by The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It is our responsibility, as the church, to remember and to keep that promise...

Lent is a time for repentance. It begins with acknowledging our errors, as the Moderator's Letter of Repentance began to do three years ago. It continues with listening for the Spirit's guidance and turning in a new direction. I encourage the church to enact our repentance by giving public expression to the Letter of Repentance in our local contexts, by engaging with the resources being developed related to sexuality and

inclusion in our church and most urgently, by remembering and keeping the promise the church made to those who participated in the listening process.

As God has graciously kept covenant with us, may God give us the courage and compassion we need to keep our promises to one another.

All people, whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity, are equally beloved by God. People who identify as LGBTQI need to know that as beloved children of God they can be fully included in the church and in its decision-making processes and bodies without the threat of harm or the fear of direct or indirect discipline or censure because of their committed relationships with the people they love. This should not be a matter of pastoral exception but rather a recognition by the church that those who identify as LGBTQI and who choose to enter into a committed relationship with a spouse of the same sex cannot be disciplined, censured or excluded for this reason. This will enable those who identify as LGBTQI and/or are married to a same-sex spouse to participate freely and honestly in the life of the church as all others.

Because I participated in a public church event (by invitation) to debate the question of inclusion in the church, I was publicly scolded and skewered...by congregants and by one of the speakers at the event. It was not safe or respectful.

Need to remove threat of censure for ministers who conduct same-sex marriages and for ministers and elders who are married to same-sex partners.

Clergy already have liberty of conscience regarding who they marry in a religious ceremony, so that will not change in the future. No one can force a minister to marry any couple regardless of them being heterosexual or homosexual. For those who are non-affirming, they lose absolutely nothing; they do not have to give up anything except to acknowledge that we (LGBTQI) are present and have gifts to serve with as well...should The Presbyterian Church in Canada ever become inclusive and affirming.

In the midst of all of this mess, sometime after the presbytery had found me not guilty...it was made clear to me that I would probably never find a job in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. It didn't really matter that I had come out of the process with my credentials intact and without having been disciplined. I was on a blacklist (sic) and every time I would apply for a job, there would be some push back and reason not to hire me...simply for the allegations of being gay at that time.

Recommendation No. RCL-016

That identifying as LGBTQI and/or being in a same-sex marriage not be grounds for discipline and censure in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

WORSHIP

The church has no higher calling than to offer the worship that belongs to God day by day, Sunday by Sunday. (Living Faith 7.3.1). Members of the Body of Christ join together to worship God in Word and Sacrament and to find strength and hope for the task of proclaiming the coming of God's reign in the world. Those who gather include members who identify as LGBTQI.

The Rainbow Communion heard from many storytellers that in sacred spaces, those who identify as LGBTQI routinely feel marginalized and excluded. Language used in worship shapes the way we understand who God is, our theology and also how we understand ourselves as the Body of Christ. When the language used in worship is heteronormative, homophobic and/or binary, those who identify as LGBTQI do not understand themselves to be included in the body nor do they see themselves as being created in the image of God or being part of God's covenantal embrace. This has left many feeling unwelcome to participate in the life and worship of their home churches and feeling alienated from spaces that are meant for all to celebrate God's love and grace together.

The church has undertaken the role of judging the nature of authentic and loving relationships.

Marriage requests and criteria need to be treated equally whether for same-sex or opposite-sex couples.

Heteronormativity is so ingrained in our church even at worship. This morning, a casual reference was made to 'go and sit with your moms and dads'.

Non-inclusion leads to many questions on the part of the LGBTQI person about the need for church, prayer, worship and other staples of Christian life.

So, I started coming into this church and eventually some of the heat subsided and I was asked to play on the worship team (musician) which meant a lot to me because I was told by the other church that I could be involved in that way.

We need to examine traditional beliefs around marriage and family, like Adam and Eve and the nature of men and women. We need to treat it like the myth that it is. Humans are incredibly complex and wonderful.

The exclusion and invisibility of people who identify as LGBTQI in worship means that too often attention has not been paid to the language and symbols that are used. As the church lives out its repentance, it is essential to develop liturgical resources including visual symbols of affirmation in church spaces, prayers and words of welcome, alternative texts for hymns and access to inclusive worship music, assistance in writing sermons that use inclusive language and illustrations and liturgies for the sacraments that truly welcome all to the font and to the table.

It is important to mention LGBTQI in public discourse and in prayers. Remove the fear of saying the actual words out loud: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex.

One of the things that we need to do that will have a wide-ranging impact, will be for us to examine our language. We ordain every elder and every minister with the preamble that is hugely problematic. It has the patriarchal hierarchical relations embedded in it as the only way that the divine is connected to us. That's a problem.

Privilege varies between people in The Presbyterian Church in Canada based on their gender and sexual identity.

Recommendation No. RCL-017

That all congregations, presbyteries, synods and theological colleges be encouraged to use the Life and Mission Agency updated resources for worship and to review their own practices and the language that they use in worship.

Recommendation No. RCL-018

That congregations and other worshipping bodies be encouraged to be inclusive by providing opportunities for all to offer their gifts in worship and in the life and ministry of the church.

EDUCATION

One of the most important tasks of the church is to be involved in the education of its members of all ages. Many now refer to this as "Faith Formation", providing the opportunities to grow in faith throughout our lives. The Rainbow Communion heard from many story tellers that the educational programs in which they participated in the church did not ever make reference to the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities that make up the people of God. In fact, heteronormativity was taught exclusively while other expressions were ignored or condemned.

A long-time Presbyterian Church in Canada member shared that their minister became very defensive and angry when questioned about why the congregation was never offered the opportunity to discuss church doctrine on sexuality. The member's concerns were simply dismissed.

I was only exposed to a narrow-minded viewpoint because of what the church leaders believed and there was no sharing of information and resources (from The Presbyterian Church in Canada) about sexuality...nor discussion encouraged.

As questions (at our church) were raised about the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah, the response from leadership was 'We don't talk about that...'. So, we never got to explore what that all means or examine it in any kind of depth.

There are congregations that did not participate in the Body, Mind and Soul study because their ministers refused to share the resources.

Not preparing people to talk with one another about sexuality is an ‘open invitation’ to say hateful, insensitive things.

We need education to interpret the biblical passages to break down the prevalent and condemning stereotypes.

Mandate anti-oppression training, understanding privilege and power.

We need greater understanding of same-sex relationships, their families...and all they bring (to the church).

I think that every person in charge of Christian education inside a Presbyterian church should be involved with the inclusion team at that church.

I think there has to be a lot of education. I think everybody needs to be educated about LGBTQI issues, about homophobia, transphobia, about being a welcoming church.

In order to ensure that harm does not continue, it is important to provide resources for faith formation for people of all ages that will affirm and illustrate the calling to be a church that includes everyone. This would include guides for the study of scripture that invite reflection on the call to God’s loving embrace of all. Resources currently in use need to be examined to ensure that nothing is being taught that would continue the harm being perpetrated by the church on people who identify as LGBTQI.

It is important to note the role of silence. A lot of churches think that if they don’t talk about sexuality, then they are ‘welcoming or affirming’. Silence actually communicates that it is wrong or taboo. We need to talk openly to normalize sexuality and make clear who is welcome. It is not enough to NOT be ‘anti-gay’. Silence reinforces a message of shame.

The Life and Mission Agency has already begun to produce and provide resources for congregations as a result of previous recommendations of the Rainbow Communion adopted by the General Assembly (A&P 2019, p. 19, 486). This work needs to be continued and grown both through print and on-line resources, particularly on the web site of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Specific attention needs to be paid to resources for Ministers.

Scriptural understanding doesn’t cause homophobia but it can fuel it.

One time a girl told me that I was going to get cancer if I was gay because her pastor had preached that past Sunday that, ‘If you are gay and you succumbed to your temptations, you will get cancer and die’.

Heteronormativity often shapes a theological mindset that marginalizes the ‘non-straight’.

When you look closely at scripture, there is no case for exclusion.

The Bible doesn’t help on this issue. It’s like slavery. There was enough support for slavery in the Bible so that the people could say, ‘Slaves obey your masters’. So, slavery should be alright. You can do the same thing with homosexuality.

Reference the decision to ordain women, specifically to educate ‘Compensatory Education’.

The AIDS crisis was happening...the gay men’s health crisis...the teaching in the church was that it was God’s punishment – God’s wrath.

Need behaviour guidelines to be in place when entering biblical discussions on sexuality. During a church discussion that focused on the passages that are condemning of LGBTQI folks I replied, ‘Love your neighbour’. I was then confronted by an elder who countered with, ‘If you are going to do that, then where do you stop?’ The ‘slippery slope’ argument ensued. I had been silenced and no one moderated.

Theological Education

Some storytellers recounted experiences of harm done in the church’s theological colleges and in theological formation that did not address the harm done to people who identify as LGBTQI. The Rainbow Communion requested and received statements from each of the theological colleges concerning courses and activities that address the harm done to those who identify as LGBTQI and the church’s process of repentance for this harm. It was encouraging to hear

about what is being provided currently, particularly in courses related to pastoral care and theology. It is important that the colleges continue to review all courses as well as worship and community-building activities to ensure that they are reflective of communities of learning and preparation for ministry that welcome and include all.

I have not been well equipped to minister well to those who identify as LGBTQI.

Our biblical hermeneutic does not actually match the content of the 1994 Study on Human Sexuality.

Never in my life did I hear a sermon or youth pastor ever talk about same-sex relationships or attraction...so, it was a culture of absolute silence on the topic. From that, I understood it was taboo.

Learn from history. We must know the church's treatment of sexuality and learn from Luther and the Reformers. They rejected celibacy as a virtue.

There is a need for better biblical-theological articulation. For example: Adam and Eve and the description of their binary relationship...and the relationship between that description and the discovery of non-binary persons.

Heterosexism is a 'given' in the dominant theology of The Presbyterian Church in Canada especially since 1994.

Recommendation No. RCL-019

That theological colleges continue to examine and update their courses, worship and community-building activities to ensure that they reflect the church's commitment that harm does not continue and that LGBTQI people are fully included in the life of the church.

RAINBOW COMMUNION

The name, 'Rainbow Communion' was selected by the special committee to intentionally reflect its mandate and purpose. It also signaled a welcoming and inclusive space for those who have been harmed to tell their stories.

In Genesis, the rainbow is a sign of God's covenant with Noah and all humanity. Throughout this report, the language of covenant has been used to speak about the relationship between the church and people who identify as LGBTQI. After all the harm that has been done, we need to remember God's covenant and live into a new relationship with one another that sets us on a new and different path. The rainbow 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.

Communion can be defined as "the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level". When we are truly in communion with one another, we welcome and embrace each other and lose our fear. Of course, communion is also at the heart of our Christian life together. When we come together at the table to share bread and wine, we all come as guests, welcomed by the One who is love incarnate and who demonstrated that love in broken body and shed blood. It is a place where violence has been known and is remembered but it is also a place where the trauma of crucifixion is transformed in mystery into the living body of Christ where all share fully.

The Body of Christ

Those who met a stranger on the road to Emmaus only recognized the risen Christ when they gave thanks to God and broke bread together. They were truly "champions"*; those who shared bread together and recognized in that act the presence of the One who overcame fear and death. The encounter in the stories told by those who have been so deeply harmed and excluded by the church calls us to a new experience of communion. We are invited by the One who is Love to a new and transformed communion in the Body of Christ. Paul's description of the Body of Christ in the First Letter to the Corinthians states that, "when one member suffers, all suffer together with it". We can no longer say that we are not aware of the harm the church has perpetrated against LGBTQI people. Corinthians also states, "If one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it." The church lives in hope that in our words and in our actions, we can truly honour and welcome one another and rejoice together in all the diversity and beauty that is the Body of Christ.

* ‘Companion’ comes from panis, the Latin word for bread. Originally, the word was used to describe someone with whom you shared a meal.

Recommendation No. RCL-020

That this report and its recommendations together with the supporting resources be commended to congregations, the Life and Mission Agency and the courts of the church to assist in the process of reconciliation.

Recommendation No. RCL-021

That thanks be extended to all those who have served but are currently not members of the Special Committee re: Listening (LGBTQI People) and whose contributions have been invaluable to this work including the Rev. Dr. Timothy Archibald, the Rev. Joseph Bae, Ms. Bassma Younan; and chaplains, the Rev. Linda Patton-Cowie and the Rev. William Elliott.

Recommendation No. RCL-022

That gratitude be extended to all those who have served as deputized listeners.

Recommendation No. RCL-023

That the Special Committee re Listening (LGBTQI People) be dismissed.

APPENDIX 1

THE RAINBOW COMMUNION’S TERMS OF REFERENCE AND THE LISTENING PROCESS

Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment

As the Rainbow Communion began to develop the process for listening, two issues became apparent in relation to its scope: who would tell their stories and what needed to be addressed? The harm done to people who identify as LGBTQI by the church and by others impacts the lives of people beyond those individuals. Family members, friends, work colleagues, members of faith communities, members of social and community groups and others all have stories to tell of harm done and of how their lives have been impacted by the harm done to people who identify as LGBTQI that they know.

It was also realized that the issues being addressed and the content of the stories that people would bring were much broader than “homophobia and hypocrisy” which were named in the original terms of reference. This in turn had been drawn from the language that had been used in the 1994 Report on Human Sexuality. Much has changed since 1994. The struggle for justice and dignity for transsexual people and the recognition of the distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity has changed the landscape and the language in relation to speaking about the harm done to people who identify as LGBTQI. There has also been a recognition that the harm done is carried out in societies which are heteronormative, that is where heterosexual attraction and relationships are the only ones that are considered to be “normal”. This had been very clearly articulated in the joint report of the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency in 2017. In seeking to understand and respond to the harm done to people who identify as LGBTQI in the church and beyond, it was necessary to honestly name this underlying heteronormativity and to understand the harm it has done and continues to do.

At the General Assembly in 2018, then, the Rainbow Communion brought two recommendations to amend the terms of reference of the committee. The first was to expand the range of people who were being asked to tell their stories from “LGBTQI people” to “LGBTQI people and others”. The second was to add “transphobia” and “heterosexism” to the list of issues to which the special committee was to “provide an appropriate response”. These two recommendations were adopted and became part of the terms of reference.

In discerning how to create as safe a space as possible in which people could tell their stories, the dilemma and indeed the hypocrisy that was to be found in the terms of reference themselves became very apparent. In addition to asking LGBTQI people and others to tell their stories in a church that continued to deny their full participation and would not recognize their committed relationships, the terms of reference required that the special committee “shall include at least two members of the LGBTQI community”. In essence, the Terms of Reference were asking that queer people ‘out’ themselves to tell their stories and to be members of the committee while still being subject to the discipline of the church in relation to its stance on same-sex relationships. Therefore, in 2018, the Rainbow Communion brought a third recommendation “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." This recommendation was also passed with strong support in the Assembly. (A&P 2018, p. 459–64, 29)

In the process developed by the Rainbow Communion for listening to people's stories, a letter written under the letterhead of the General Assembly Office was given to all members of the special committee and to all storytellers assuring them that they would have potential censure with respect to The Presbyterian Church in Canada's stance on same-sex relationships suspended indefinitely. (A&P 2018, p. 459–64, 29)

With these changes in the terms of reference and the assurance that the potential of censure in relation to the church's stance on same-sex relationships would be removed, we felt confident in moving into the phase of listening to stories.

Listening

For decades, even in the prolonged debate related to human sexuality, the church has most often refused to listen to the stories of harm done to LGBTQI members of the body of Christ. The creation of the Special Listening Committee provided a unique opportunity for those harmed to speak and to be heard. However, as the letter of repentance states, deep-seated hurt, fear and distrust had developed among LGBTQI persons in the church. Many felt betrayed by the General Assembly's refusal to distribute the study document developed by the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation. (A&P 2003, p. 43, 545)

The Rainbow Communion developed a process that enabled storytellers to tell their story by whatever means was best for that person including face-to-face meetings, written submissions (letter or email), video conference or by phone and ensured that the stories were recorded and kept only with the express consent of the individual. In some cases, the storyteller preferred not to be recorded and only to have notes taken during the listening session. The Rainbow Communion also respected that there were those who did not wish to have a record of their story kept but simply needed a space to be heard. The location for the listening space was determined in consultation with the storytellers according to what they would consider to be a safe, welcoming and respectful space. Some were open to telling their stories in locations associated with The Presbyterian Church in Canada while others refused to enter into these spaces.

A consent form for the keeping of records was provided. The Rainbow Communion maintained a secure and confidential database that included the number of storytellers, demographic data (age range and province) and the content of the stories. Names of the storytellers would only be associated with the stories where the storytellers had expressly requested that their name be recorded and shared. Storytellers could require that material would only be shared with names redacted or with portions of the material redacted. Any material to be used in the report that was a direct quotation or which would enable the storyteller to be identified was to be confirmed with the person before being used.

Storytellers were informed that, with their consent, the content of their stories would be retained in the Archives of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. If they were not in agreement, their material would be destroyed at the end of the mandate of the Rainbow Communion. If they agreed to have the material retained in the Archives, they were able to indicate restrictions they wanted placed on it including: 1) Accessible to researchers, 2) Accessible only to me and my family, and 3) Accessible to all with names redacted.

Some optional questions were asked of storytellers including what their affiliation was with The Presbyterian Church in Canada, if any, if they wanted to tell their story in a language other than English and which pronouns they preferred to be used in referencing them. They were also asked whether they would like to include prayer in the listening session, how much time they anticipated would be needed to tell their story, the current level of impact of their experiences on their personal/emotional well-being, whether they had considered bringing a companion with them to the listening session and how they heard about the Rainbow Communion.

Some prompting questions were made available on the application form and were used in many of the listening spaces including:

- What would you like to tell us about your experience with The Presbyterian Church in Canada as it relates to homophobia, transphobia and /or heterosexism?
- Why do you feel it is important for us to hear your story at this time?
- If seeking reconciliation, what form might it take?

- How to you define and think of homophobia and/or transphobia? Do you have any suggestions on what the church could do to address it?

The majority of listening spaces and submissions were received between May 15, 2018 and June 15, 2019. A few Listening Spaces were held with people after June 15, 2019, if the person had indicated a desire to tell their story before the deadline. In total, the Rainbow Communion heard 139 stories. Storytellers came from every province and represented a wide range of age, gender and ethnicity. They represented a wide variety of associations with The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Over half told their story primarily through their experience of identifying as a sexual or gender minority. Others told their story primarily through their experience of identifying as a partner, a family member a friend, an ex-partner, a work colleague, a minister, an elder or a member of a church community.

APPENDIX 2

More from The Storytellers

Storytellers commented frequently about homophobia and/or experiencing homophobic situations. They are so numerous that they are included in this section in addition to the ones in the body of the report.

Homophobia is like a seed that contains hatred and self-righteousness.

The expectation that everyone is the same...fear of the 'other'.

I was born in a family where my dad and mom but mostly my dad, taught us to hate 'fags'...before I knew what a 'fag' was...we were to hate that.

As a kid and as a teenager, it was one of those things we said at school all the time. It was to make fun...even though we really didn't know gays. That's the culture I grew up in...'gay, fag, queer...' – that's what you said to people to put them down.

I met a young man when I worked with a youth outreach program...who at a Mother's Day dinner, decided to come out to his family and he was homeless by dessert.

My father reacted very badly to my coming out. I have no idea why my father reacted that way. I have no idea whether it had anything to do with his religious faith. It didn't tell him that it was wrong to react that way.

During a congregational renewal process, one person withdrew from being a small group leader because she would not work with a gay-affirming elder.

An elder shared some harsh comments about sodomy during our church's Body, Mind and Soul study. Overt revulsion was communicated through church channels.

A congregant refused to pass the peace with another member out of fear of catching (assumed) AIDS.

I was at a church where people refused to participate in the choir because the music director was gay.

No challenge to those who hold homophobic views in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Denial of a local option for inclusion at Committee on Church Doctrine. Very disrespectful language was used.

Generally, people think of homophobia as those outright expressions of hate. But I think the much more dangerous and subversive form are all the little ways that people are told 'no'.

Having to choose between experience/career or living out gay identity.

Being outed via report and having no rights over how it was distributed.

(The evaluator) said, 'I will have to tell the church officials you are gay'.

Well, obviously, being gay was not something I wanted to be. And so, then you have this internal state of something you don't want. You have this thing inside you but it's just like, okay, I've gotta deal with it. I've gotta find ways to get through it. Internalized homophobia as it is, is an incredibly real thing.

Homophobic comments are free to be expressed at the General Assembly. The homophobia is institutionalized.

We have this deafening silence that's not healthy. Blindness...and pretending that it's not there.

Being permitted to preach homophobic sentiments outright at my church.

Experienced anxiety in church knowing what has happened to others who came out.

Homophobia is: People responding with a sense of threat to LGBTQI people because...

- There has been an explicit denunciation or censure
- It's personally threatening, i.e., televangelists who have secret lives
- Threat of change – social change – rather just 'fit into a box'.

Homophobia is that which compromises another's ability to love fully and beautifully.

Homophobia: believing that homosexuality arises from child abuse.

Homophobia/Hypocrisy: to welcome but not to be visibly affirming or advocate for LGBTQI people.

Homophobia: the association of homosexuality and infidelity.

Homophobia is sinful behaviour that includes the willful embracing of heterosexist values in a world where you've had an opportunity to learn that some people partner with the same sex and gender.

Homophobia is an irrational fear of gay people.

People saying or doing harm to other people – when it's perpetuating hate. When it is because of the way you feel about gay people...that's homophobia.

Homophobia is fear of change and of those who are different.

Homophobia is rooted in fear...as opposed to hatred. I think there's a fear of that which people do not understand.

Homophobia = pushing away.

Homophobia is less as fear and more as hate. Unwilling to share space.

Homophobia...define fear in general: It's the unwillingness to be transformed.

Homophobia: Telling people there is something inherently wrong with them.

Homophobia: Praying against the idea of including all.

Homophobia and transphobia frequently align right beside racism and anti-immigration beliefs.

Homophobia is a luxury, quite frankly. When a church has enough money, enough people, all of the resources in the world, then the church can afford it. In the past, The Presbyterian Church in Canada could afford to be homophobic and just dismiss LGBTQI people.

Homophobia: the experience of being talked ABOUT from the floor of General Assembly...like those words were not about real people...Presbyterians among them.

Homophobia is having the confidence and clarity and certainty that you are right in a way that precludes the validity of another story or experience.

Be careful about identifying homophobia because there is a lot of diversity of thought. And some anti-gay views are thought through and not essentially a phobia.

That difficulty rationalizing what scripture says with modern realities is not necessarily homophobia, just a problem with hermeneutics.

Some people seem homophobic but they may instead have a hermeneutics issue re...interpretation of scripture.

With respect to anti-homosexual passages in the Bible...they are not about healthy relationships.

On homophobia. It's not just the issue itself but it's all the side issues. Focussing just on the issue ignores so much of what's going on just leaves people feeling that their faith is falling apart. We have to show them that it is not.

Homophobia reduces the mystery of Christ and grace and salvation to a false dichotomy of gay and straight.

I was appointed to the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation that year (1997). That's where things started to get interesting. We spent six or more years on that thing. It was interesting how other people perceived us. Nobody was indifferent. People thought we were either off the wall radical left wingers who were going to destroy the church...and other people just made the assumption that because we were studying it, we must be conservative. So that was a lose-lose thing for a lot of the time and we did the same listening thing. We put out a call for stories. And some of them are pretty hair raising. And because all of the stories, the hate mail was quite fascinating. That was a picture of the church I never expected to see.

APPENDIX 3

DETAILING THE HARM DONE TO ST. ANDREW'S, LACHINE, THE PRESBYTERY OF MONTREAL AND THE REV. DARRYL MACDONALD

The decision of the Presbytery of Montreal to sustain the call to Darryl Macdonald to St. Andrew's, Lachine and to ordain him was overturned by the General Assembly because he had shared that he was in a same-sex relationship. The members of St. Andrew's had given overwhelming support to the Call with the full knowledge that Darryl was in a committed relationship with another man. They had discerned strong gifts for ministry that were well suited to their needs as an aging, suburban congregation.

In his story told to the Rainbow Communion, the Rev. Macdonald recalled the pain of this experience for him, for his family and friends and for the congregation of St. Andrew's, Lachine. The Rev. Macdonald appealed the decision of the General Assembly but that appeal was not allowed to be heard. In effect, the Rev. Macdonald was silenced and his story was never fully heard in the church. For this reason, a large section of his story is included here with his permission.

There are **two very strong images** that have remained with me (since that time in 1996).

The first, was when I was told that St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Lachine session was ready to call me as their minister. They were ready to issue the Preach for a Call...and I thought, 'Whoa, they better know more about me before they do that...because I don't want anyone to be surprised'. So, I told them at that meeting that I was gay. And the only question that they really had was, 'Are you in a relationship?'...which I was and still am. It's been now 25 years that I've been with Chris (my husband). And at that time, it was about eight months that I had been with Chris and I let them know that he was very supportive of me. And...that's all they wanted to know.

I had no idea about what was in their head. I left the room while they talked, after I told them about this (being gay). While I waited, I stood in the sanctuary of St. Andrew's and I was looking out to a beautiful stained-glass window. I was looking on to this one particular window and in the evening, I could see the shadow of a tree outside and one of the images in St. Andrew's above their table and in the Chancel was the burning bush, a beautiful wooden sculpture of the burning bush and of course that sense of being in the

presence of God. So, I saw this tree outside which was a living tree and I was looking at it and I just said, 'God be with me'...and I just felt that presence of God with me. Then, shortly afterwards, when I went back in, I got the news from session that, 'We want you to preach for the call'. So, for me that was an affirmation and I really felt God was present with me. And that was an affirming thing.

And then the later image is of being at Briarwood Church in Beaconsfield listening to a colleague. I went to school with him. He came from Assembly to read the edict from the Commission which was the one that basically said they would not look at my Appeal. They wouldn't even read it because it was null and void anyway. He never once looked at me and he just read this thing saying **I could no longer be a minister in the church. I could no longer preach. I was stripped of my license. I could not hold any positions in the church in a session or any other positions of authority.** I was welcome to come and sit in the pew and to think about my life.

So, at that point, I just started repeating in my head the prayer of Saint Patrick's breastplate: 'Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left...' I said it over and over in my head. I almost was tuning him out and I was just repeating that prayer in my head. And when I looked over to my left there was one of my parishioners Ruth Taylor on my right was Chris, in front of me were some members who were there to support as well as behind me. And of course...the church beneath me where I preached before. And I just surrounded myself with God's presence. That got me through that whole event.

So, on both occasions, it was my focus on God that helped me to be in those places and to hear those things. And for me, that was an affirmation that what I was doing was right. Because I felt God's presence. And that was my focus. My focus wasn't on being gay or being a minister or being anything else. It was just being in the presence of God. And THAT is what got me through those times.

Those are really strong images for me. And...it was hurtful. It was especially hurtful that when he said, 'We didn't even look at (Darryl's) appeal because it was null and void based on the Committee's ruling at the past Assembly.' And in my head...that was the one time where I broke the prayer...in my head, I'm thinking, 'What? You didn't even look at my appeal? You didn't even read it. What was this all for then? You just shut me out?'

After that happened, St. Andrew's dug their heels in further. They still wanted me. They said, 'Well would you still be with us even though this has now come down?' I said, 'Well I'm not doing anything right now. I feel that what I'm doing with you is right...and that we're good together. So, yah, I'm willing to continue without being ordained and see where this leads.' I said, 'It doesn't look good but I'm willing to take a try and see what the next step is'.

So, in the end they (St. Andrew's) were forced to vote on whether to stay or leave. I preached that Sunday and I told them, 'If you vote to stay in the Presbyterian Church, I completely understand. No ill will. I will walk away from here with my head held high and I expect you to do the same. What you're doing is right for yourselves and for me. And we will go our separate ways and we tried. And that's okay'.

And...they voted to leave! They voted to leave the The Presbyterian Church in Canada. I then told them that if they voted to leave, I'll be there with them; that I'm not going to abandon them. But it was really up to them to do this. I felt it was completely unfair that they had to even had to go that route. So, in the end, I was the only member of the Presbyterian Church left at St. Andrew's Church! My membership stayed. They couldn't take it away. (The Presbyterian Church in Canada) asked St. Columba...they wrote to St. Columba and said to basically excommunicate me...and to take me off the rolls. St. Columba said, 'Absolutely not'. They said, 'No, you're going to have to force us to do that'. And there was no legal force to do that. So, (The Presbyterian Church in Canada) left it alone.

When it came time for me to move into The United Church of Canada...when I made that decision...then I had to transfer my membership...that's when I did it on my own. But for the time between when St. Andrew's voted to leave and I moved into the United Church I was the only member of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in that church. They were independent.

So, that was just a crazy time. I remember back when it all started. It was that session meeting that I mentioned at the first. And that real strong affirmation that...what I was doing was right. I had Chris's approval and Chris is Greek Orthodox. Our connection is singing. We both are singers. He sings in the choir here and has followed me along at St. Andrew's and everywhere else. He was very supportive of me, so that was an affirmation. My parents were, of course, very supportive and were happy that Chris was supportive of me through the whole ordeal that I went through with The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

And actually, when I told my parents that I was gay, it was my dad who said, 'Don't ever bring anyone home'. And so, I said, 'Well Dad, if I ever meet anyone that I would bring home to meet you and Mom, we'll stay in a hotel'. There was DEAD silence on the phone. I was here in Montreal. And then he said, 'Well, we'll talk about that'. Because what was worse for my father was me coming home and not staying with them. That was far worse than anything else I could offer him in life. So, when it came time for me to go home and...that was that the summer of '96 with the decision of The Presbyterian Church in Canada...Chris came home, too.

We had a family reunion in PEI. So, Chris came home with me and he got to meet Mom and Dad. And Mom says, 'Your bedroom's all ready. We have a queen-sized bed in there for you and Chris. It's your old room. It's all set up for you'. And I said, 'Well...is Dad okay with this?' Mom said, 'Your father and I've talked about it and Chris has been there with you through all of this. We know it's been a really tough ordeal and we see him like we would see each other or your sisters' husbands.' I said, 'Oh! Okay.' Because, of course, we couldn't get married at that time. They had great respect for him. So, when Dad met Chris, well...Chris became the favourite son-in-law.

Dad had read a book, when I was growing up, Why I'm a Presbyterian. because of the whole United Church thing. ...he was born in '22...and why we should be staying Presbyterian. What was good about that denomination? He was an elder at a Presbyterian church in Sydney, Nova Scotia. My Mom and Dad sang in the choir. Dad dealt with the people who needed food vouchers and things like that. He was extremely compassionate and kind.

When Dad fell ill during the time when I was going through my ordeal, his minister never came to visit him, all because of me. My mom met (the minister) in the grocery store one day and she laid into him. She said, 'You know Donny has served this church long before you ever got there. He's been an elder in this church. You know the stuff that he did there and you have abandoned him.' And my mom quickly left and went to the United Church after all this happened.

I was having a conversation with Dad one day and he goes, 'I'll always be Presbyterian'. I said, 'Yah Dad, you will, I know you will always be Presbyterian but you know how they treated you. They've abandoned you too because of me. So, you've got a place that will take you in. And when it comes time for your funeral you will want to have a minister who knows you, who knows Mom, who knows us as a family and who could do your funeral.' And he agreed and he transferred his membership to the United Church in Dartmouth with my Mom. And I can just imagine how hard that was for him. But when he died his minister did the funeral and did a fantastic job. And I sat next to my mother and I was there to support her. You know that the minister was there to support the family and still is, still supports my Mom. My dad was really abandoned by the Presbyterian Church and that hurt me more than anything in this whole process, how my family was treated. (My family) did absolutely nothing wrong.

So that just shows you how it just branches out and for what? Because I was in a relationship with a guy? When I went to St. Andrew's, I preached for the call based on the lectionary readings of the day. I wasn't preaching there on the basis of 'gay is the only way' or 'rah rah rah'. It was simply preaching the lectionary readings for the Sunday to show that's what I do. Actually, Ruth Taylor that woman from the church, asked me if I would preach on the topic. I said, 'Well, I don't preach on topics, I preach on scripture. But if there is an example within scripture or that will enlighten the scriptures, that is appropriate for that, then sure I would use that example. But there are tons of other examples as well that I could use in preaching. So, no, I'm not going to focus on that one topic.' And she appreciated that.

When the call was presented at the presbytery, the interim moderator for St. Andrew's presented it as a regular gospel call. There were no issues, no underlying problems. I preached for the call, I met with the congregation. Everything was going well. I had these lovely pieces of paper up here which said that I was okay to go. I had the approval of the presbytery. I was under the care of the Presbytery of Montreal. Everything was fine. It was the chair who said, 'There's information that I've heard that would make this a problem'. And the interim moderator said, 'No'.

So, it was the moderator of presbytery who then, from the chair, stood up and said, 'I hear that he is a practicing homosexual'. And then ten people appealed. The presbytery voted in favour of the call by a two-thirds majority and ten people registered their dissent which then eventually stopped the process.

Then it went to the Assembly because that was the next body meeting. The Assembly then overturned the decision of presbytery to ordain and granted it to the ten people. By then one more had added their voice. So, it was 11 that went to the Assembly. And so, 11 people decided the fate of an entire presbytery.

When that happened, I went, 'Oh, oh, here's the injustice coming out in the church', because the presbytery voted in favour of this. And the Assembly should have granted the presbytery their decision because in the wisdom of the presbytery they said, 'This is not an issue for us. So, it's a regular gospel call. Fine. Ordain him.' It's not like they didn't know of gay ministers in the church before. But I was the first, I guess, 'out' person. I don't know. I'm sure there were others. So that was really unfair. That was unfair to the presbytery and even to this day they feel the reverberations of that. It divided them. It caused colleagues to fight against colleagues. It was not a pretty sight. And then after that, the commissions and the committees...

And I remember being at one meeting. So, they've now closed that church. One of the ministers, stood up and made an argument against my ordination basically by stating, 'What Hitler did to the Jews was wrong because it was religious but what he did to the homosexuals was right because it was a crime.'

I knew about the Triangle camp, part of the concentration camps, because I've learned enough of the history of 'my people'. I was with the chaplaincy program in 1986 and 1987 with the Armed Forces. And so, I was over there in the Reserve Chaplaincy program. When I went to Lahr, a United Church chaplain took me out to Bergen Belsen. And part of the pictures they were showing was the Triangle camp. That's when I learned that the gays and the transsexuals and all the queer community that were marked with triangles were actually imprisoned by the Allies because it was considered criminal at that time. So, they weren't liberated. So, that minister was making reference to this. And there was an audible gasp, needless to say, in the congregation. And I remember an elder had come to that meeting and was against my ordination. After that meeting, he said, 'I can't be on that side' and so moved his support. But by then it was in the Assembly's hands. So, hearing things like that makes your skin run cold. And those things stick with you. It was tough. It was really tough.

So, the committee (appointed by the Assembly) met at Presbyterian College. I think there were seven people but it hinged on one person to make the decision. At the Assembly someone had stood up and said, 'The United Church slit their wrists over this, are we going to slit our throats?' And you know that was like well duh. You make a statement like that and of course what's going to happen? In reality the United Church never slit anything. They closed doors, yeah, they closed doors and they basically said if you're homophobic this is not the denomination for you. And that's okay to say.

I'm fine with being exclusive when it comes to that type of thing. If you don't accept women as equal partners of ministry, then this is not the denomination for you. And The Presbyterian Church in Canada has said that. So, I'm okay with the church saying, 'This is our belief. If you don't like it, then maybe this isn't the place for you. There are other churches that will fit along with your thinking and you're welcome to go there and we'll sing hallelujah as you become a member.'

That's what the United Church did. And some people left and a lot of people came. It's not a perfect denomination by any means. There are many frustrations I have on the administrative level. So, I get frustrated with some of the polity of the church but there's frustrations in the polity of the Presbyterian Church, too.

Theologically though, we're almost equal. There are people with varying degrees of more conservative theology to more liberal theology and both are pretty comfortable within those denominations. So, a United Church minister can be very comfortable in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and vice versa. Interestingly enough through this process once I became ordained as a United Church minister, I was the only United Church minister in Canada who could not serve next to a minister of The Presbyterian Church in Canada because I was denied any of those functions in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

So, I was unique to the United Church of Canada of being the only one who was not able to do that. It was St Columbia by the Lake who then petitioned the presbytery to bring to the Assembly a few years ago that that statement about me participating in the church be revoked and that I be allowed to be considered like every other United Church minister and able to stand next to a Presbyterian doing communion or to be there for the baptism of a child or to preach for a summer pulpit supply or whatever. I couldn't do any of that stuff. Now I can again.

Scripture really is the big issue, I think, with The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Let's face it, we're dealing with translations. What's the context and what are the other words saying. What's the direction that you follow. The Ethiopian eunuch, if that's not an example of what we should be doing about homosexuality in our context, I don't know what is. That is the parable we should be using because that makes sense. What's to stop me from being baptized. Absolutely nothing. And it happens. And it's the Spirit that moves and does

that. We all know that story. So that should be the paradigm that is being used in this discussion. Not a couple of sentences from Leviticus which we would consider a hate crime in our country.

So, there's a lot of hurt. And at the same time there's been a lot of healing too. Because it's forced me to really question this for myself. One of the things that I realized through the debate was that all of the things that were being said about me as a gay person are things that I've heard said about women. Within homophobia is a strong misogyny. Until we address the misogyny, we're never gonna get over the homophobia.

I need the church to say this was wrong. I think that St. Andrew's needs a direct apology from The Presbyterian Church in Canada for what they were put through because they're not gay. And yet they were just slammed by the church for backing me. That's not fair. And it was a way to get at me. You know it's sort of like, we'll get the family so that we can force him to do what we want. That's mafia tactics as far as I'm concerned. And I think a direct letter of apology that is read by a representative of The Presbyterian Church in Canada from the pulpit of Summerlea United to the St. Andrew's, Lachine congregation would be really, really nice for those last few people. For some of the younger ones, who are now getting older, who stuck their necks out, to be able to hear that apology would be really worth it for them. And I don't care about me getting an apology.

Ruth Taylor she's like my dad, she's there all the time now. She's just a part of who I am. I'll never ever not have her by my side. She's like that presence, that really strong divine presence that was in her that is there with me all the time. I bring her with me to every congregation I go to, Ruth is there. She was an awesome member.

Two years after my father died, we were in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. It was a 70s dance and they were playing Donna Summer's version of MacArthur Park and I just was remembering that my Dad and Mom used to love that song and I remember it just felt like being at home again in Sydney in the house. I could picture the house and I could picture Dad there and I just started to miss him and I said to my friends, 'Look I just need to go off and be on my own and I'm going to watch the sunset'. So, I went off on my own to the beach and I stood there and I was watching the sunset and just thinking that this is something my Dad and I could never do because at the end of his life he wasn't able to travel with me like that. And he'd never been to Mexico and I said, 'I wish I could have just shared this experience with you Dad'. And then I felt his presence with me. I felt like he was standing beside me and I could feel his hand on my shoulder and then his voice came in my head and said, 'No we couldn't do this while I was alive but we can do it now'. And then I watched the sunset with him. And then every time I went back after that, one of the nights, I would go and watch the sunset. And this year I told my friends about it. and I said, 'Yeah I do this every year' and one of them said, 'Well let's go watch the sunset'. I said, 'OK, yeah, let's go watch it with my Dad'. And we all went together and we stood and watched the sunset and they put their arms around me. And I just remember my Dad saying, when he was at my wedding, because that was the first time that he met all my friends, he said, 'Darryl, you have great friends'. And I just felt him there again with me.

That, for me, is what church is about. That was a worship service and God was present there, my Dad was present there. It really felt good. It was like a joyous moment of being able to share that with my friends and just tell them that story and have them be part of it. And for me that's where God is and that's where the church needs to focus and get off of this stuff about who puts their 'whatevers' wherever or what person you're sleeping with or the gender of the person. I mean even the gay community can learn from the church how to be inclusive because that's what the church does best. And we keep failing at it. I don't get it. Like why are we losing our basis of who we are? When people say, 'Well that's why people aren't going to church anymore, because of, you know, letting gays in or letting women in,' all this kind of crap that you hear. No, the reason the church is failing is because it's failing in being its true Christ-like mission.

What Christ did is he touched people who most people wouldn't go near. He dined with people who people wouldn't eat with. He hung around people who most of the church has condemned through its history as opposed to accepted. We've really failed at being Christ-like and we need to get back to that. And I think if the church started to do that, we would break down those barriers. So, I would hope that the people can hear that being gay doesn't mean you don't have faith stories. It doesn't mean you can't connect with a living faith in God, being a sexual, a homosexual person or even a heterosexual person. Sexuality itself is a problem within the church. And it's because of our medieval and Puritan values that we've kept. We're so stuck in Augustine and sin, you know sex being a sin as opposed to it being a gift which is obviously in the Bible – I mean you read those passages it's like, 'Why do we think that this is a sin?' Adam and Eve simply realized they were naked and vulnerable. And now, 'Oh no, we know the difference between good and evil!' And

then we took that to mean sex. I don't know where you'd get that from the story? It's not there. And yet you know we are going to take on some ancient theologian's own angst about his own life and say that now we're going to pin it on everyone. I think that the church, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, especially those who are undecided or still saying, 'yah but...', need to know that a group of gay friends standing on the beach can be a worship service. And that group of gay guys on the beach, you're not going to find in a sanctuary somewhere because the sanctuary has told them they don't belong. The gay community is already developing its theology and its connection with God and they're doing it outside of the institution of the church. And the church should be the ones to help in that not to hinder it.

Well, one night in Presbyterian College, I was struggling, just struggling, with the whole...I was coming out at that time. I was twenty-two years old and coming out and I just knew that I was gay. I didn't know what it meant. I didn't know. I had no relationship with a guy before. And then of course I was dealing with being molested at nine years old as well. From a man who was at (...) Presbyterian Church and sat in the pew behind us with us with his wife and kids. And his wife was my grade (...) schoolteacher. So, there was that issue, so was that it? Do I have an illness? You know it was one of the things I was thinking because of course one of the things I was told was that (my abuser) must have been molested as a kid. Now as a kid I'm hearing that going, 'This is gonna be me? Because it happened to him and he became this. So, it's happened to me now, am I going to become that?' I remember my grandmother saying that...my mother's mother saying that, that he must have been. It was just an innocent comment. But as a kid I remember going, 'Oh my God'. Which of course is not what's happened. But I did question that about my homosexuality, did that cause me to be gay? And my Mom asked me that question as well. She said, 'Did you think (the abuser) had anything to do with it?' And by that time, I said, 'No, no it hadn't.' But I remember being in the chapel. I'm lying on the bench and I was sobbing. Just heaving sobbing, saying, 'God take this away from me. Take this away from me. Just don't let me be this.'

And then, like my Dad on the beach, I heard a voice in my head and I said, 'I give you my life, just take this and change it'. And the voice in my head said, 'I take your life and I give it right back to you. You need to be the best person you can be. You need to be the best man you can be. You need to be the best gay person you can be. You need to be the best minister you can be. This is your life. I've given it to you. Now I'm going to help you live it.' That's the voice that came in my head and I stopped my sobbing and I thought, 'Okay this is what I need to do, I just need to be me because this is who God has made me to be and if I take anything away, I'm not being me and I'm no good to anyone. So, I need to be my authentic self.'

And I've not been perfect at it of course but that's been my goal: to be the best I can be in all aspects of my life. So, if I'm going to be the best gay person and Christian and minister and brother and son and colleague, then they have to work together. The minute I take one out it collapses. What I was hearing from the church was that you need to pull one of these out, like they'd said to me that I could be ordained if I just stopped being gay. Or even worse, it was because I was with Chris. Then they said, 'If you give up your relationship to this man then you can be ordained'. But then who would I be? How would I have integrity? That was a really big struggle but by that time, like after that voice in my head, I was quite clear about the path I need to walk or else I may as well give up. I was 22 when I made that decision. And I knew the church's stance. And actually, I remember one of my colleagues, one of the students there, asking the same question like, 'How do you reconcile this?' And I remember saying to him at the time, 'Well I don't reconcile it. For me it just makes sense. This is who I am. This is what I do. I feel called to ministry. I am gay.' And this was in '85.

There's a couple of things in my life experiences that were very formative. One of them was when I was around four or five years old. We went out to a camp in the summer and I got lost. I took the wrong path. I'm a little dyslexic. I came off one path and I kept going down the other path thinking I was going back but I actually should go back the other way. And then they couldn't find me. And I got lost and so I started to cry because I couldn't find our tent and I just remember an old man and an old woman. And they took me in to their tent and calmed me down and said, 'we're going to find your parents, it's okay'. The husband went to the front gate to say that they found me. And actually, when he got there, my father had just arrived, to say, 'I lost my son'. And so, they sent my dad to get me. And I remember her giving me milk and cookies and I felt very sad but they calmed me down and I felt very secure. I felt that I could trust them. And I felt good. Like they said they would take care of me, I believed them.

I remember my Dad; I had my head down on my Mom – I had this red pillow in the car and I had my head down on the pillow on her lap – and my dad driving back never once took his hand off me. He drove back to the campsite with his hand on me and then tucked me into bed and I never left the site after that. That was one of the formative moments of my life. Just feeling and again for me that's a God moment, how I identified God is in my Mom and Dad coming and rescuing me. So, when I grew up hearing the stories of Jesus being

a saviour and all that, that was the image I had, was the old man and the old woman in the tent and Mom and Dad coming and taking me back to the campground and not chastising me but just loving me.

And then the **next formative moment** of course was when Mom and Dad approached me and said, 'What has (that man) been doing? Has (he) been doing things?' That's what they said. And because my Mom was alerted to something; she just felt very uncomfortable with how he was around me. And so, she told Dad about this and Dad said, 'Well let's ask Darryl'. That was my Dad's way. So, they pulled me aside one night and they came to me and said, 'We just want to ask you a question. Has (he) been doing anything?' And I just broke down and cried because again I thought – I was nine – I thought I was going to be in trouble because (he) said I would. He said, 'If you tell anyone you're gonna be in trouble'. And so, I believed him. So, I just cried and cried and cried. And at that point they knew, they didn't have to ask what, they just knew that definitely something was going on. And my Dad just grabbed me and hugged me and said, 'It's not your fault, it's not your fault. We love you. We love you'. And that's the first things I heard after that. (My parents asked), 'Can you tell us anything?' And I did tell them because again I felt secure. So, there was that moment.

It would have been nice to have had the church reach out and say, 'We're here for you'. But they didn't. That wasn't what they did. But I did get it from my parents and for me my parents have always been that spiritual energy that I believed was in the church. I still believe it's in the church. I just know that there's also other powers that are strong and tried to crush that. And those also exist within the church.

Interestingly, we moved to the other side of the church. That's what we did. But (my abuser) remained in the church and was there every Sunday and I would see him every Sunday. It was the only time I would see him and Mom and Dad asked how I felt about that, about seeing him over and over again. I said, 'Well, this is a place where he can't do that'. And so, for me the church was literally a sanctuary and still is to this day in my view. It is that sanctuary. So, you know, hearing what's happened with some people, some kids in the church being – especially with the priests in the Catholic Church although they're not the only ones – that just horrifies me that that becomes, that the church would turn it not into sanctuary. I wouldn't say the same but I had that similar feeling when I was treated the way I was from the church that it was almost like a kid being molested because it was happening in a sanctuary. Like those edicts were written in a sanctuary. I thought boy, this just doesn't feel like church to me. You know this feels like something else. And it was a little too close to home. But it was a good lesson. I learned what I don't want church to be. And I hope they hear that strongly.

I mean really, just to say it really clearly, it felt like the General Assembly molested me on that day. In the sanctuary, in front of everyone. That's what it felt like.

It was a gathering. It was in the evening. They called the presbytery together and they read the edict to myself, St. Andrew's and of course, the Presbytery of Montreal and all of us were slapped. The presbytery too but it was done in a sanctuary from the pulpit of the sanctuary where I had preached. And then he walked out. He didn't even look at me.

In that moment I was that close to walking away from it. They almost succeeded in doing exactly what they wanted me to do. And that was for me to leave the church. And I, like so many others, would have left and never come back. I thought, 'This is it'. But then I thought why should I leave the church to them, to that view. If the Bible was just left to the kings, we wouldn't have the prophets. The Bible's got the prophets, so 'step in line Darryl' – way back in the crowd but still step in line and follow that path as opposed to giving it over to the reigning monarchs and what they believe is right.

I really hope that the church decides soon that this issue has caused too much harm in its debate and it will be far better handled if it's accepted and it becomes part of the ethos of the church to say, 'These people are part of us'. I think that The Presbyterian Church in Canada could be leaders in how to deal with this issue and should be leaders in how to deal with this issue. So that's my hope.

Homophobia for me is not just negative statements against the queer community. I think it's also the language and the theology. Again, part of it is linked with misogyny. So, it's really hard to separate it out because that stuff is really embedded in a lot of our thought. So that for me is where homophobia falls. It's really hard to define it, to narrow it down, because it starts to spread out. And it goes anywhere from: 'We'll be nice and accept you. You're okay to sit here type thing' – that's for me in and of itself enough to say, 'No'...and walk away – to outright statements like what Hitler did to the Jews was wrong but what he did to the gays was right. That is a clear statement of homophobia.

Well language for one is a big thing for me. Addressing the language that we use and being mindful of using the politically correct terms...and I know some people go, 'Oh, political correctness stuff is so crazy!' It hurts

people when you use the wrong term for them because it's basically saying, 'I don't care about you. I'm just going to use what I want.' And if we're really true to our faith, we're going to listen to people. So listening is the big thing. And when people say things like, 'Well, we'll accept it as long as we don't have to walk in pride parades'. I respond, 'Well, have you ever been to one? Do you know what it's about? Do you know what happens there?' I went to the parade this past year and hadn't been in a long time. And it was a great experience. Standing there with my friends and it came time for the moment of silence and up went the hands and mine went up too and I immediately started to cry because I remembered all the people I knew who died of AIDS. And that's exactly what that moment is for. And it's just such a moving moment. And then the cheer comes up from the front through and it was just, oh, to be standing there for that again. It was like my Dad on the beach, you know, that those people were there again.

So again, how can the church not celebrate that? I don't get it. You go to the St. Patrick's Day parade, why not Pride? We'll lay the poppies at the cenotaph which is a thing we need to do. There were gay people who fought in the war and died in the war. Young men who fell in love and gave their lives just as much as anyone else. And if we're part of a culture that says that they don't count, I don't want to be part of that culture.

Reconciliation looks like this, right now, what we're doing here. Just hearing the stories, is the really big thing for me. And the other thing that would be when The Presbyterian Church in Canada has its vote and says, 'Enough, gays and lesbians are a part of our community and we value them'. I know that there are people who are coming up for ministry. There are young people who are struggling with their sexuality and they need a church there to help them and to be supportive of them as they develop. And to see that there are stories, faith stories, that they can connect with and to give those stories for that purpose.

Again, thinking of Pride, the gay community every year walks down the street, through the streets of our country. And they carry one of the best symbols from the Bible and that's the story of the promise of God never to let a flood happen again. And that the rainbow flag was marched in the streets at a time when the people were dying of AIDS. And they raised that flag not knowing that they were connecting to the story of Noah and the promise that God made. The way I see it, the gay community at that time was forcing God to see the rainbow and to stop the flood. And that's a powerful image. That the church doesn't make that connection just means that there's so little vision. It's so powerful, that the flood that was coming was AIDS and it affects more than just the gay community; it affects countries around the world. Look at some of the places in Africa where (AIDS) just decimates communities and generations. So why can't the church join in? And say, 'Yes, we need to grab a corner of that flag with you'.

The church doesn't have to be gay. It just has gay people in it and that's it. We walk together. It's not a gay or straight institution. It's an institution of believers. And within that body of believers are people who have faith stories and they're gay faith stories and straight faith stories and elderly faith stories and youth faith stories, et cetera, et cetera and they all can come together and inform each other.

I realized that I had been holding onto this stuff for so long and never got the opportunity to sit down and tell my story to The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Because they said, 'We don't want to hear it actually. We're not even going to listen to it because we're gonna go on a decision of the Assembly.' That was just devastating to hear that the church doesn't want to hear our faith story and doesn't even acknowledge that you have a faith story. **That was for me the biggest sin done to me by The Presbyterian Church in Canada.**

They tried actually to have me excommunicated. And then I was thinking, they basically did that with my Dad. My Dad was the one with his hand on me when he rescued me. And he was the one who hugged me and said he loved me when they asked me about (my abuser). And he was the one who cried every time he left me at the airport and was worried about me and how I'm living here and just wanted the best for me. For me that's what the church should be.

I got lots of support – that was the good thing. And from Presbyterians. I mean I felt really supported. That's why I went through the process. I didn't feel alone. I felt in some ways that if I left, I'd be disappointing a lot of people. It was hard to transfer my membership over. That was a tough day when I wrote a letter to St. Columba, to the session. It was a tough letter to write you know and they wrote back and they accepted it and they understood and all that. I thanked them for the years that they were there for me. And again, St. Andrew's, when I left them and went to Christ Church it was so emotional. It's also 11 years I could have been getting a pension but it's part of the compromise.

You know it is just ridiculous how much it affects everyone. The Presbyterian Church in Canada needs to hear that as well. It's sort of like firing shrapnel. You're not just firing a bullet you're firing shrapnel and it's affecting so many people. It's like a weapon that's used. Part of the homophobia, I think, is the finger pointing

and the three pointing back. Now, whether it's a traumatic experience they had that they've not dealt with or whether they're actually doing what they're against. You listen to those voices and you think, now this is not going to run our church. That voice is not going to run the church. And the church let that voice run it. I'm frustrated that that happened. I was young. I've grown a lot older but I was very young back then. And I was someone they could get but they didn't realize that I had moved well beyond what they thought I was. It's just because I was trying to be, authentic and courageous to myself and to who I felt God had called me to be in all aspects of my life. And maybe the Presbyterian Church wasn't the place for me to find that. But that is where I found it.

A lot of my colleagues left and came as well to the United Church after what had happened. They were fearful of what was going to happen to them. They came in and that's because many were gay too. They went, 'Oh, oh there's going to be a witch hunt and people are going to start looking for all these gay people in the church'. Well, you don't have to look far, we're all over the place. We're playing your organs. We're sitting in your sessions. We're teaching Sunday School. We're sitting in the pew or on the councils. We're all there. We're arranging the flowers for funerals and weddings or we're making cookies for the bazaar. Start looking at who's in your church.

In 1999, there was a group of ministers who went to Queen's for a conference. We were driving back and (a colleague), who was a United Church minister said, 'We gotta do something for Darryl. Let's have an ordination or something'. How are we going to do this and make this work? I wasn't in the United Church at the time, we were now an "independent". And they said, 'Well, we can't be perceived as doing something that the denomination is going to slap us with.' So, what they did was to have the ministers present come up and lay their hands on the members of the session of St. Andrew's independent church, to affirm their ministry in the community. Then the session turned to the ministers present and said, 'Would you join us in laying hands on Darryl who we have called to be our Minister for our community'. Just like the Presbyterians invite other clergy to do, we had the session lay their hands on me and the clergy lay their hands on me and the session and we had this ordination in 1999.

It felt so good to have that affirmation from the United, Presbyterian, Anglican. It was wonderful – we even had, a Catholic priest, who founded, the 'Dans la Rue' program here in Montreal and he died last year. So, I'm part of the apostolic succession of the Catholic Church. It was very powerful, very, very powerful.

Then in 2005, when I was ordained in the United Church, I made a stole. Now, one of the funny things, I was cross stitching this during meetings in the church and someone on the 'No' side was upset that I was being 'too gay'. And...so I said, 'I am not aware of any gay cross-stitching leagues myself. I'm the only gay person I know who is doing this.'

For the people who are struggling with being in the church and being a sexual minority, I would hope that my story would help them to understand that they can be a sexual being and a person of faith, hand-in-hand and actually that they need to go hand-in-hand. They need to be part of each other because the stories that we live in our life are both secular and divine. I mean this is God's world. It's not our world. We live in God's world. And so, everything for me is connected to the divine. And if it doesn't that's where we run into the problems, it's when we lose that connection. So, our sexuality needs to develop with God in mind and our social work needs to develop with God in mind and our science needs to develop with God in mind. You know, for me it's all connected.

And I pray for The Presbyterian Church in Canada in its journey through this as well. I hope that especially the members who identify as people of faith who are gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, etc. and their friends and families who support them within the church too, will find that God's presence is there for them. And you know it's just to remember that I say this with funerals we don't get over death we learn how to live with it and we don't get over the hurts, we learn how to live with those. And the pain or the hurts that I have experienced in The Presbyterian Church in Canada is something I've learned to live with and learned to grow with. And I know the church will be able to do that too, I trust. I have every confidence that the Presbyterian Church and the Christian Church in general will heal from those wounds because I believe in Christ and I believe in resurrection and I believe that's where we're going. So, I thank God for all that. And thank God for you.

In addition, a presentation made by Ruth Taylor an elder and member of the Search Committee at St. Andrew's, Lachine, describing her perspective on this experience, is included here. Darryl referred the Rainbow Communion to this historical account written by Ruth Taylor as part of his story. It is posted at: summerlea.ca/en/history4.htm.

My Path of Faith by Ruth Taylor

(Presented March 22, 2007, at Alexandria United Church, Alexandria, Ontario)

January 2005 marks the joining of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church with Summerlea United Church, both of Lachine, Quebec, Canada. On this occasion we summarize the inter-linked history of the two congregations since the inception of St. Andrew's Presbyterian in 1818, One hundred eighty-seven years ago.

This particular path of faith in my life began late in 1994 in my church, St. Andrew's Presbyterian, Lachine, Quebec. It was a rather small, active, faith congregation in the English sector of our small city, a suburb of Montreal. The area was increasingly becoming French, good neighbours but ever lessening our chance of growing in numbers. Our concern was our need to focus on finances when we would have preferred to be focusing on being His hands, a Christian influence and help to our schools on either side of us, to the community in general. But life abounds in challenge and we could not possibly foresee the scope of the one to face us.

I was a member of our search committee and after two years we had made no progress. Then we welcomed an application that resulted in our church family more closely united than ever, The Presbyterian Church in Canada was shaken to its roots. Our faith in our national church tested.

This application came from Darryl Macdonald, Master of Divinity, a Licentiate of the Presbytery of Montreal of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. He had come to Montreal from his home church in Sydney, Nova Scotia to complete his studies for the ministry at McGill University and Presbyterian College, while attending St. Columba Church, Pointe Claire, a nearby suburb. He was fully appreciated there by the ministry staff and the congregation.

After meeting with him our hopes were high – we could not believe our good fortune. We carefully checked all his references, which were impeccable. He had been active on a part-time basis for ten years within the Presbytery of Montreal.

We called him to meet with us a second time to discuss further. At this time, he told us he was a homosexual with a fully committed relationship with his partner. That didn't dissuade us at all and it was with much enthusiasm that we recommended him to our session and our congregation, who then were in complete agreement.

At the regular meeting of the Presbytery of Montreal, April 1995, we made our request that Darryl Macdonald be called to our church and therefore ordained. In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the local presbytery must first ratify a call to a church before proceeding to ordain.

This became our first introduction to the trouble that loomed ahead. There was a lengthy procedural wrangling but finally the vote was taken. By over two-thirds majority it was declared a gospel call. We felt so happy, so thankful and excited about our future.

Unfortunately, this was followed by a dissent and appeal made to the national church. Darryl's outstanding attributes were disregarded.

The problem of being without a minister was solved by presbytery's approval of Darryl's accepting to fill in as Interim part-time supply. His preaching was top-notch, inspiring – his warm caring for the families – his good humour and infectious laugh was just what we needed. Added to this he had a McGill trained singing voice which he shared.

The General Assembly in Charlottetown arrived and our delegate delivered an open letter, a presentation and video, pleading to our brothers and sisters from coast to coast to help us by honouring the decisions of St. Andrew's, Lachine and the Presbytery of Montreal. Regardless, the vote was a shocking 227–24 against Darryl being ordained, thus setting a precedent by denying Presbytery to sustain the call.

A committee of nine was formed to examine the recommendations of General Assembly.

The national church Pastoral Care Committee made a visit to our congregation. We were pleased to welcome them. We were encouraged to speak freely and we did. It was a very emotional meeting, our members for the first time able to express the anguish, emotional outrage and sense of friction to which we had all been subjected and about our future hopes.

Quoting one member – he put it in a nutshell – the congregation saw Darryl as the pastor the preacher, a teacher to our children, the visitor to the sick, not Darryl the homosexual.

This Pastoral Care Committee was very understanding and recommended to the Presbytery of Montreal that no preceptive steps be taken that would break up the wholly supportive relationship between Darryl and our congregation.

In the meantime, there was a leaking to the press of the General Assembly negative report. We had been sworn to silence on the issue and agreed wholeheartedly. We did not want publicity. However, we were in the news, due to no fault of our own. The Montreal Gazette, the Globe and Mail, La Presse Montreal, all took interest. Following the initial 'leaking' a Montreal Gazette reporter called persistently for comments – she was going to write a story whether or not we had input. For this reason, we were given permission by Presbytery. Her initial headline in large print was 'Openly Gay Preacher Rankles Church Hierarchy'.

This reporter came to the church by permission following our service – after speaking to several members was directed to me. I was quoted in the newspapers the next day and my brother learned about it in the French paper, in the Laurentians. My comments, in part, were that, 'we had been so set in our ways and were considering what changes we could make but when change came it was in a big way – a bolt out of the blue, with receiving of Darryl's excellent application. Others enthusiastically called Darryl Macdonald a wonderful caring person – they were impressed by his compassion. They really felt he had a true calling.'

CBC had us on their television news and I was shown approaching the church with my cane, indicative of the age of the congregation.

Thus – Darryl Macdonald, dedicated Christian and preacher, with a calling to the ministry, emerged as Darryl Macdonald Homosexual – but not to us.

Our church life was full, busy as ever but we were not forgotten. The appointed committee of nine came to Montreal twice, one meeting at our church, one at Presbyterian College. We attended with great interest and great hope. Unlovely, unkind words were spoken by some who obviously feared his homosexuality and we listened with utter dismay. Darryl was present but said not a word. To us it was heart breaking. NO Christian deserves this disdain!

We were able to ask many questions, one being, 'Why was there an objection now to his answering a call, when he held his license to do so?' The answer really shook us up – 'We didn't think he'd tell' – Simply that.

The Presbytery of Montreal made their own objection known. They had the historic right to process a call and this was now being denied – a Precedent. 'When, it asked, is the General Assembly free to do this?'

In spite of it all, the committee's vote of 5–4 was upheld in favour of denying ordination to Darryl Macdonald and therefore denying our church call. The four members of this appointed committee – those in the minority, stated that, 'Darryl's only 'sin' was honesty – he is not a category of person but an individual with a deep sense of God's call, faithful to commitment to the church and a recognized gift of ministry'.

We continued our church work as if under no pressure. We requested Darryl's part time hours be increased to full time. We obtained the permission though with rumblings. Nevertheless, all too soon we were called to a special meeting by Presbytery, regarding the General Assembly decision after the report of the committee 5–4.

We were ordered officially to remove Darryl from our pulpit. We were given no opportunity to ask questions – for the chairman and accompanying elder had left. The cold finality stunned us.

Darryl again insisted there be no bitterness and to keep our faith.

It was such a strange time – peace within our church yet a storm raging outside. I think it wasn't defiance we felt but a very real sadness, yet a very sure knowing that it was right to continue with our very special minister. We hope that we have helped open the door to full inclusiveness within the Presbyterian Church and in general.

At our kirk session meeting Darryl's devotion began with, 'These are not the actions of people who have given up but the actions of committed people, who have heard the words "Be strong and let your heart take courage, all who wait for the Lord" – quoting Psalm 31'.

We advised presbytery by fax that we individually and collectively would be continuing as we have been by reason that we did not accept this decision. We were immediately served with directives that our action would be considered an act of defiance.

We carried on, as St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Lachine Independent and prayed that the national church would before long adopt its own subordinate standards that 'Justice opposes prejudice in every form' (from their Living Faith Chapter 8 verse 4).

We were aware of the seriousness of what we had done but each had examined ourselves closely and believed we did as we knew was right. This was 1998 and we were now free, after the initial shock, to fulfill our mission to the community and to move forward.

But first the final formal ending: A minister representing the presbytery with an attending elder chaired a final meeting together with our clerk of session to hold a formal vote. We were advised again that to continue with Darryl in the pulpit would place the session and each elder in violation of their ordination and result in disciplinary charges. Each member was also included in the warning.

The Vote by secret ballot was for:

A: – to remain and cease and desist from our contumacious behaviour.

B: – to leave The Presbyterian Church of Canada and we would be wished God speed.

The result was that a clear majority of our members voted "B" though heartrending, especially those who had been lifelong Presbyterians as had their forefathers. We felt the sympathy of the minister who presided. We lost eight valuable members at that time, seven of whom wished to remain in the national church, even though they were supporters of Darryl.

In February of the next year, 1999, a magnificent 'Service of Blessing and Recognition' was held in our packed Sanctuary. There were 40 clergy present and 250 lay people from near and far who poured out their love and support for our minister Darryl and for our congregation. What a celebration! The 'laying on of hands' on Darryl was tantamount to ordination, we considered and henceforth he was the Rev. Darryl Macdonald.

Our church life continued meaningfully – Bible studies were held; much beautiful music enriched us; Darryl held Celtic meditation services monthly on Sunday evenings which were rich experiences. I was proud to be the attending elder in a new baptismal ceremony initiated by Darryl. The baby baptized was my great grandson Benjamin, grandson of my daughter Pam Hellstrom.

We now recognized our finances were not sufficient to maintain our present building and we looked into future possibilities. We received a letter from Summerlea United Church, during the time of the Rev. Dean Moffat, with an invitation to meet and discuss our possible future together. We did this and chose to hold separate services in their building, renting the needed space, (our wish). Before this huge move we held our final service at our beautiful building June 24, 2001. Hearts were heavy with memories but full of hope for our future. We left that building but we the church moved on to a new location. We were warmly welcomed to Summerlea. The cooperation between our two congregations was excellent, greatly helped and encouraged by their Rev. Howard Clark. We immediately were asked to join their outreach committee. I did, with one or two others of our members. Our cooperating grew to other areas and to our holding joint services.

For the last five years, with our encouragement, Darryl had been studying and preparing to become a United Church minister. He was ordained at the beautiful historic St. James United Church downtown Montreal in the fall of 2004. Many Summerlea folk joined with us at that absolutely memorable event, 10 years after our first interview. What a journey that had been.

A not-to-be forgotten ceremony was held in Summerlea, to officially designate the closing of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Independent Congregation, in November of that year (2004). Shortly after, January 2005, we were officially welcomed as members of the United Church of Canada, our minister to be, the Rev. Howard Clark, our congregation now partners with the congregation of Summerlea United. One hall at Summerlea is now named St. Andrew's and one day one of our stained-glass windows, perhaps with a light behind, will be installed on a wall there. (ed note 2007/07/09) The Summerlea sanctuary south window is now fitted with St. Andrew's stained-glass windows and a wall under construction behind the choir will be fitted with three more. Two have gone to Wyman Memorial United Church in Hudson and two others to Christ Church United in Two Mountains – Darryl's church.)

Looking back at those years of struggle we are forever thankful for our minister Darryl who gave us ten years of life as an active, meaningful church. We had, before his arrival on the scene, predicted three years.

I must mention the huge moral support we had received from so many in the presbytery and further away. The clergy in Lachine and all along our Montreal West Island accepted Darryl freely as our minister. Our

finances had been helped from donations from individuals across the country who encouraged us. We were blest.

I did not decide to go against the national church but rather to stand up for the right of inclusiveness, the equality of each person, a child of God.

I am proud to have been ordained an elder by Darryl, proud that he Baptized my great- grandson and thankful that he came here to Alexandria to conduct the funeral service of my son-in-law John Hellstrom, in 2001. I feel as if my husband should have been with me on this walk. Perhaps he was. Now I am most happy and thankful to be part of the Church-on-the Hill with its warm and welcoming congregation and with the Rev. Gwen Hennann, Mr. Andrew Love and Mr. Charles Barnhardt and choir.

Darryl is an Associate of the Celtic Iona Community and believes, as they do, that his journey is into the Heart of God.

I would like to conclude with the Celtic prayer Darryl first said in our Service of Recognition and Blessing:

Christ with us; Christ before us; Christ behind us, Christ in us,
Christ above us; Christ beneath us, Christ on our right, Christ on our left,
Christ when we lie down; Christ when we sit down,
Christ when we arise; Christ to shield us,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of us,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of us.
Amen.

Timeline of St. Andrew's, Lachine

- 1818, January: Founding of St. Andrew's Scottish Presbyterian Church in Lachine.
- 1832: St. Andrew's Scottish Presbyterian Church and manse built on 15th Avenue at St. Joseph.
- 1876: Union of the Presbyterian Churches in Canada.
- 1904: First meetings of the Summerlea mission of St. Andrew's Presbyterian in a "little red schoolhouse" on the Lakeshore Road in western Lachine.
- 1925: Summerlea and St. Andrew's Presbyterian congregations joined the new United Church of Canada. About 100 members remained with The Presbyterian Church in Canada and began holding services in the Masonic Hall on Notre Dame Street, retaining the name St. Andrew's Presbyterian. The Rev. Dr. Ross was inducted as minister on September 22, 1925.
- 1957, April 5: Dedication of new St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church building at 5065 Sherbrooke.
- 1997, June: St. Andrew's congregation severed ties with The Presbyterian Church in Canada, which refused to ordain a homosexual minister.
- 2001: St. Andrew's Presbyterian congregation decided to leave their home of 44 years and accept a Summerlea United invitation to share facilities.
- 2004, September: Summerlea United and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church voted to amalgamate, retaining the name Summerlea United. Fellowship Hall to become St. Andrew's Hall, with articles from St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, to commemorate the St. Andrew's congregation.
- 2005, January 16: Covenanting Service for the joining of St. Andrew's Presbyterian with Summerlea United.
- 2011, December 18: Last service of St. Andrew's United Church, the congregation having decided earlier in the year to close the church. Thus ends the history of St. Andrew's Presbyterian and St. Andrew's United Churches in Lachine. (There is no longer a St. Andrew's Church in Lachine.)

APPENDIX 4

THE CHURCH'S HISTORY OF HARMING SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITIES

(Prepared by the Rev. Dr. Charles Fensham)

TRIGGER WARNING: This section makes frequent reference to violence, brutality, killing, torture, homophobia, transphobia and misogyny. Prior to the Introduction of this report is a list of help resources, including LGBTQI+-specific and youth-specific help lines and mental health supports.

Acknowledging the brutal history behind the church's overt condemnation of homosexuality exposes the extent of harm done to LGBTQI people. Simply reading this history can be traumatizing. It can also be a source of dismay

for many that the church could be involved in such brutalizing actions. However, it can also help in understanding the church's long-standing practice of harming LGBTQI persons, often for political reasons or reasons of social control.

Timeline of the History of Religious Homophobia in Western Traditions

1. Appropriating Scripture: The Hebrew Scriptures

The Book of Leviticus took shape between 1000 BCE and 538 to 332 BCE. This book contains two apparent legal prohibitions against male same-sex sexual intercourse. These can be found in Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13. The translation of these texts are complex. Their intended purpose and context are also a matter of debate. However, these texts and their translations take on strongly homophobic meanings from the second century of the Christian era onwards.

The Implication of these two texts for the rise of homophobia in Christian traditions:

The Christian translation of the texts interpret the classical Hebrew in a way that make the prohibitions appear universal. The original seems to indicate a specific context: same-sex sexual intercourse of a married man that violates his responsibility to his wife (See Rabbi Jacob Milgrom's – Anchor Bible Commentary). The second part of both versus refer to "beds of wives" which supports this specific reading. Jewish Rabbis have long debated the correct interpretation of these texts. Contemporary Jewish biblical scholars read these texts not as universal prohibitions against homosexuality but rather as a prohibition against homosexual adultery and incest, based in the ancient patriarchal code of the law.

Later, medieval, Christian interpretations of these texts started emphasizing the death penalty based on Romans 1:32 "...people like this deserve death".

Christian interpretations started associating the universalised Christian reading of these texts with the creation narratives thus arguing that male-female sexual complementarity is required for Christian sexuality.

2. Philo of Alexandria (around 20 CE) – Associating the story of Sodom and Gomorrah with Homosexuality (Genesis 19)

Philo of Alexandria (25 BCE-50CE) was a Jewish scholar in Alexandria. He can be identified as the prime architect to Christian homophobia. Because his classical Hebrew skills were not strong, he read the Old Testament by means of its Greek translation. This led him to interpret the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19 as a story about God's disgust against homosexuality in general. Philo's conclusions on this goes against all the other biblical references in the Old Testament to this story. It is also important to note that the New Testament never links the story of Genesis 19 with homosexual sexual intercourse. His interpretation was determined by a strong sense of personal disgust he had against same-sex practices in the city of Alexandria of his time. His primary concern was rooted in Patriarchal assumptions of the superiority of males and a profound inferiority of females. He argued that male same-sex sexual relationships will make women out of men. He considered women inferior to men and subject to uncontrollable passions. Men who start behaving like women thus indulge in scandalous behaviour. It is so scandalous that he believed that men caught in same-sex sexual relationships should immediately and without any legal process, be put to death. Even though he was a Jewish scholar, his work was collected by bishop Clement of Alexandria in the second century. Over time Christian scholars started to believe that Philo was a Christian bishop and his writings gained great authority. They would become primary influences in the thinking of Chrysostom and Augustine in the fourth century. His arguments started cementing the idea that male same-sex sexual relations must be described as "the sin of Sodom." By the 11th century this idea would become the abstract idea of "sodomy" and "sodomites" with disastrous consequences for those accused of such transgressions.

3. Appropriating Scripture

The New Testament Debates continue today about the implications of Romans 1:26–32 in relation to same-sex relationships. Romans was written c. 57–58 CE, so Paul, the writer, might have had in mind the sexual immorality and excess of the court of Emperor Gaius Caligula (12–41 CE) and others when writing this chapter. In early Christianity this passage was rarely associated with the rejection of homosexual relationships. The first interpreter to read Romans 1:26 as referring to female same-sex sexual relationships was Chrysostom (349–407 CE). Before that time that text was read as general female immorality. Christian arguments against male same-sex sexuality made in the first three centuries were generally based on what was considered to be "natural" and "unnatural" behaviour within Roman philosophical high culture which was deeply influenced by Stoic philosophy. However, in later Christianity and particularly under the

influence of contemporary religious homophobia Romans 1:26–32 has become one of the key biblical texts invoked. In these cases, the text is read without reference to its historical and rhetorical context in the letter to the Romans.

4. Clement of Alexandria (150–215 CE)

Clement of Alexandria debated his opponent Tatian on the acceptability of sexual intercourse. Tatian argued that all forms of sexual intercourse are by definition “passionate” and therefore sinful. As a monastic Clement agreed with him but argued that without sex there would be no more Christians so he theorized that sexual intercourse for the sake of procreation and conducted without any “passion” could be acceptable in some limited circumstances. Male, same-sex activity is therefore sinful because it engages in passion without the potential of procreation and because it denigrates a male to become like a female. Women were commonly considered inferior to men in the culture of the time and later Christian theologians assumed this to be true. He did not base his primary arguments in Scripture but rather in Stoic Roman custom and in popular myths about evil animals like hares and hyenas which he argued engaged in inappropriate same-sex sexual activity. He also picked up on Philo of Alexandria’s claim that God’s judgment of fire sent down on Sodom and Gomorrah expressed God’s displeasure on all forms of male on male sexual relationships.

5. Jerome and the Latin Translation of the Bible (known as the Vulgate) (347–420 CE)

What Jerome’s brilliant translation of the Bible in Latin added to anti-homosexual ideas was the use of the Latin word *luxuria* in his translation of Galatians 5:19. This word, that in its Latin context of the time meant a kind of frivolous and loose attitude to life including a tendency to drunkenness and sexual immorality, slowly, particularly in the theology of Pope Gregory the Great, became associated with homosexual sexual intercourse. Jerome also translated the Greek word *malakos* (1 Corinthians 6:9) with the Latin *molles*. This word, in its time indicated a form of moral weakness, particularly a weakness by not standing up against injustice. Over time this term became associated with physical weakness and by the time of the King James Translation this word is translated as “effeminate” which subsequently became associated with men in same-sex relationships that take a passive role.

6. John Chrysostom (349–407 CE)

John Chrysostom was one of the most vehement preachers against homosexual sexual intercourse. He argued that people who engage in homoerotic acts should be put to death. His argument was based partly on the common cultural misogyny that considered men who became the assumed “passive” partner in such sexual intercourse as becoming “womanly” and thus weak and contemptible. He also picks up the idea that homosexual intercourse is the vice of Sodom under the influence of Philo of Alexandria. Historians like Boswell point out that his fiery preaching against homosexual relationships is one strong piece of evidence that same-sex relationships were fairly common and tolerated in Christian communities of the time.

7. Augustine (354–430 CE)

Although homosexual erotic relationships do not play a big part in Augustine’s theology, he also associates it with Sodom and also refers specifically to Romans Chapter 1. However, he also seems to take the custom of high Roman culture and Stoic philosophy that saw men “subjecting” themselves to other men as something that is culturally unacceptable because of misogynistic assumptions about the inferiority of women. Augustine did not seem very concerned about female same-sex intercourse. He only seems to refer to such practices once in an oblique statement that advises cloistered nuns not to “play” with each other.

8. Christian Emperor Constantius II (317–361 CE)

In 341 CE Christian Emperor Constantius II banned same-sex marriage in the Roman Empire. This clearly meant that such a practice was still engaged at the time. The reason given for the ban in the edict is that such same-sex marriage would denigrate men into women. Penalty for breaking this ban was banishment. However, by 390 CE the Emperor Theodosius, adds the death penalty for anyone engaging in same-sex marriage.

9. Gregory the Great (540–604 CE)

Pope Gregory the Great is the architect of medieval Christianity. He was a monastic who believed strongly that any form of sexual activity engages the loins which he considered the source of evil and sin. He takes up

Jerome's use of the idea of the vice of luxuria and argues that this vice is primarily a sexual vice exemplified in same-sex sexual intercourse. Gregory developed the idea of the Seven Deadly Sins, of which he considered luxuria a prime sin to avoid. Gregory associates the divine judgment that comes down upon Sodom and Gomorrah as a judgement against of form of idolatry that he describes as the crime of the sodomite and which he associates with sexual passion. The mistranslation of his work leads to a medieval teaching against the "sin of sodomy" which could only be cured by means of the live burning at the stake of such a sinner. Out of this system of Seven Deadly Sins arise the practice of writing manuals for priests who had to hear confessions during the medieval period and these manuals became more and more focused on the "sin of Sodom" and particularly on the idea that this sin is the most grievous sin one could commit. It was considered worse than having incestuous sexual intercourse and became described as "the sin against nature." Although many different sexual practices became associated with the sin of Sodom including many heterosexual practices, it also included particularly male same-sex activity.

10. University of Bologna Rediscovered Emperor Justinian's Corpus Juris Civilis (1100 CE)

The legal penalties, including those against people in same sex relationships developed by Roman Emperor Justinian is rediscovered at the primary legal institution of the time, the University of Bologna. Here the medieval development of civil law in close co-operation with canon law institutionalises severe penalties against those accused of sodomy. This sets the basis for all major homophobic legal developments based in Roman law as developed and accepted throughout the Western world including constituting the death penalty as an appropriate penalty. The 3rd and 4th church lateran councils develop severe ecclesial penalties against sodomy based on these legal developments.

11. Philip IV of France and the Templars (1268–1314 CE)

As a bankrupt king Philip IV of France started to use religious homophobia to accuse the Knight's Templar – the powerful medieval order with great financial assets – of secret sodomitic acts which allowed him to arrest, execute and seize their property.

12. The City of Venice – (15th Century CE)

Religious homophobia rises steadily in Europe under the influence of the legal developments in Bologna and the development of canon law and severe penalties prescribed by confessional manuals against the sin of sodomy. The city of Venice would become the site of the most severe and consistent violent persecution of those accused of sodomy. The city fathers deemed heterosexual prostitution an acceptable practice and sponsored brothels. However, religious homophobia led them to believe that the city's prosperity would be threatened by God's judgment if any grace is shown to those accused of sodomy. In addition, with the rise of the plague and the devastation it brought it was believed that the plague was God's judgment against male same-sex activity. At first the Night Police was charged with seeking out and charging sodomites. Later the City Fathers themselves took charge of the effort in their fear of divine reprisal. The historian Louis Crompton notes that the greatest toll to have been exacted from the homosexual population in Europe before the persecutions of the Nazi holocaust, occurred when Venetians accused of sodomy were burned to death in the square in front of the city's Doge's Palace during this period.

13. Savonarola The City of Florence (1494–1498 CE)

The Dominican Reformer, Savonarola, was a profoundly homophobic religious leader who worked his supporters in the city of Florence into a frenzy against people accused of sodomy and he instigated secret campaigns for accusing people of this crime. Such accused were burned alive on the central city square.

14. The Spanish Inquisition (1478–1834 CE)

The Spanish Inquisition used the reigning religious homophobia as instigated by the church to deal with opponents to its power. It created groups of volunteers, called familiars, to seek out and deal with sodomites. Those accused stripped naked, their genitals were cut off and hung around their necks and then they were paraded to great religious festivals, called auto da fe, with crowds gathered who watched as they were hung upside-down until they died. All this occurred in the midst of great religious fervour and Christian devotion. Property and possessions of those so executed was seized by the crown. Homophobia thus also gained the added benefit of financial gain for those in power.

15. The Reformation Period (16th Century)

During the Reformation Period in Europe one of the most common accusations levelled at religious opponents was that they were sodomites. This speaks of the frenzied religious homophobia on all sides. Protestants accused Roman Catholic monks and nuns of homosexuality and Protestant leaders including John Calvin and Theodore Beza were accused by Roman Catholic opponents of being sodomites. Beza was a particularly easy target because of love poems he wrote to another boy when he was young. In Protestant Geneva, many were executed on charges of sodomy. Such accused were “broken on the wheel,” that is they were tied to a large wheel while alive and then clubbed until their bones broke and they died. A woman accused of lesbianism was executed by holding her down under water until she drowned.

16. Henry VIII and the clergy lands (1491–1547 CE)

Henry VIII, after his schism from Rome, found his kingdom in financial trouble. He used charges of sodomy against Roman Catholic Convents and Monasteries to seize their land and other possessions for the crown. Henry created the formalized English laws against homosexuality, for the purpose of economic gain, that would spread around the world through the British Empire in its colonial properties. In many of these jurisdictions those laws are still in force.

17. 18th Century the Dutch Republic

Although the Dutch Republic in the 18th century was one of the most tolerant Protestant domains in Europe it was not tolerant of those accused of sodomy. A series of natural disasters, a spire hit by lightning and the disastrous collapse of dikes, under the influence of religious homophobia led to the belief that these disasters were God’s judgment against sodomites in the community. This led to a period of severe persecution and many executions, usually either by means of hanging or drowning people in barrels of water by holding them down. This was done under the instigation of the Reformed Church. In a small village called Faan, many teenage boys were executed after confessions were extracted by means of torture. All this under the instigation of the local Reformed Church minister.

18. 8th and 19th Century England

During the 18th and 19th Century religious homophobia in England was very strong. Christian societies were created to work against sodomites and to expose them. Many clergy wrote and preached against the evil of sodomy and it was even named as the sin so evil one could not “speak its name.” Many newspaper accounts remain of the events where those accused were publicly executed. If not executed culprits would be placed in stocks on the town square where people could insult, beat and throw things at them. Often this form of torture led to death.

19. The Development of the Homophobic Medical Paradigm

In the 19th century there was a slow process by which sodomy was moved from being considered only a religious matter to the medicalization of same-sex attraction as a disease. This led to the use of the term “homosexuality”. This medical paradigm led to many forms of medical and psychological abuse in attempts to “heal” people of this “disease.” Medical homophobia has lingered into the 21st century through electro-shock treatment and other attempts at “reparative or conversion therapy” with people who experience same-sex sexual attraction.

20. Homosexualization in the Christian Scriptures (20th Century)

New Bible translations during the 20th century started to use the pejorative medical language of “homosexual” or “homosexuality” in translating texts that use very different concepts from a very different period of time. These translations led to a resurgence of religious homophobia in conservative Christian circles where the argument became that the Bible is against homosexuality because “the word is literally in the Bible”.

21. The Nazi Holocaust (1939–45 CE)

Besides millions of Jewish people and many Roma people, people considered to be homosexual were also sent, enslaved, medically experimented on and executed in the Nazi concentration camps. Some 15,000 people accused of homosexuality both men and women, were sent to these camps. Many died due to mistreatment and medical experiments conducted on them. The exact number of deaths of sexual and gender

minority people who died in the camps is not known. The mistreatment and homophobia did not stop there, upon the liberation of these camps, those accused of homosexuality were not set free but re-imprisoned by the Allied and German authorities. This happened with the support of the Christian churches of the time.

22. Religious Homophobia today and Marriage Equality (21st Century)

Religious homophobia continues in Christian communities around the world. This is demonstrated in the way children who come out are treated in many Christian families by means of rejection or the treatment of such young people in their local Christian churches. Social research has now shown that this religious homophobia plays an important and instrumental role in the cause of much elevated rates of suicide, suicidal ideation, substance abuse and depression among religiously involved youth who are sexual and gender minorities. Christian churches have also played a key role around the world in opposing equal legal rights for same-sex couples in matters of marriage, adoption and other legal equalities. This opposition includes The Presbyterian Church in Canada advocating against marriage equality in Canada and continued teaching that puts sexual and gender minority youth at great risk. Several youth and adults within the Presbyterian Church in Canada are known to have died by suicide due to the religious despair inculcated by the church's teaching and attitude.

For further information consult the book *Misguided Love: Christians and the Rupture of LGBTQI2+ People* by the Rev. Dr. Charles James Fensham (2019), Atlanta: The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling.

APPENDIX 5

THE STRUGGLE FOR LGBTQI RIGHTS AND THE CHURCH

(prepared by the Rev. Dr. Robert Faris and Ms. Sue Senior)

Introduction

The history of the contemporary struggle for the rights of LGBTQI people in Canada has unfolded over a period of sixty years. It has resulted in changes in both attitudes and the legal framework in relation to the fuller inclusion of people who identify as LGBTQI to varying degrees in countries throughout the world. Consequently, it has created spaces where people who identify as LGBTQI can live more authentically. These achievements have included marriage equality, the right to adopt children, freedom from discrimination in work and access to government and commercial services, state support for gender transition.

These achievements have benefitted the lives of people who identify as LGBTQI both inside and outside the church. However, in most instances, the church initially opposed the recognition of these rights. Only after the fact did churches respond and change their own doctrine and policy to reflect these achievements.

Each section provides information on some significant events in Canada and the world and then, is followed by actions taken by The Presbyterian Church in Canada and other churches.

1960s

The question of the rights of LGBTQI people has been before The Presbyterian Church in Canada, as it has been before other churches in Canada, since significant changes were made to the criminal code in the late 1960s. Prior to this, LGBTQI people were openly discriminated against in almost every area of Canadian life. The infamous so-called "Fruit Machine" was created as an ostensibly scientific way to detect homosexuals, so they could be fired from their government jobs or pre-screened before being offered employment in the first place. (cbc.ca/arts/the-fruit-machine-why-every-canadian-should-learn-about-this-country-s-gay-purge-1.4678718)

The "Stonewall Riots" in New York City in 1968 are considered by many to mark the beginning of the modern movement for LGBTQI rights and their impact was felt in countries around the world.

The General Assembly approved the 1969 Report of the Board of Evangelism and Social Action which included the communication of its approval of the Government of Canada's proposed legislation to remove homosexual acts between consenting adults in private from the Criminal Code. Homosexual acts between consenting adults are a private matter and should not be criminalized. (A&P 1969, p. 316–17). This did not change The Presbyterian Church in Canada's position on these acts as being sinful in the eyes of God and in the doctrine of the church but recognized that not all sinful acts needed to be criminalized and that this legislation simply represented the current practice in Canada of not prosecuting people on the basis of these laws.

1970s

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Despite the changes in law and medical categorization, however, the prosecution of people involved in homosexual acts in what were considered to be public spaces continued and neither the government nor the church moved to challenge this practice at the time. Harassment of LGBTQI people and “bashing” people who were assumed to be homosexual continued and grew throughout the 1970s, particularly in Canadian cities with larger and more organized communities including Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary and Hamilton. Police raids on bars and bathhouses, frequented predominately by gay men, increased with names of people arrested made public and family and workplaces being informed. These raids reached a peak in Toronto in 1981 in a series of coordinated raids in the so-called “Operation Soap”. This provoked a strong reaction from LGBTQI people and others who organized marches and other forms of protest which began to reduce the actions of police.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the beginnings of groups and networks of people within The Presbyterian Church in Canada that affirmed and advocated for the inclusion of LGBTQI people. This happened in parallel with the emergence of similar groups in other denominations and the beginnings of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC).

The best known of these in The Presbyterian Church in Canada was the St. Andrew’s Gay Association (SAGA) at St. Andrew’s Church in Toronto, Ontario. At first, the church simply provided a space for gay men, including some of its members to meet but later and especially in the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the city in the 1980s, to be considered a group that was formally associated with the congregation. SAGA continues to meet and to be a vital part of the life of St. Andrew’s.

1980s

The HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s had a significant impact on LGBTQI people in Canada, particularly gay men. Worldwide, HIV/AIDS killed millions of people with the greatest number of people infected and deaths in sub-Saharan Africa. In the North American context, it was sometimes known as “gay cancer” or the “gay plague” and gay men were further stigmatized as being responsible for the epidemic and putting all at risk. Treatment and research was suppressed because of the link with homosexuality. There was increased pressure in Canada, including in the churches, to address the myths related to LGBTQI people and HIV/AIDS and the place of LGBTQI people in the church.

In a statement from the Committee on Church Doctrine, approved by the General Assembly in 1985, a distinction was made between homosexual orientation and practice. Homosexual orientation in and of itself was not understood to be sinful but same sex intimate acts were to be considered to be so. In 1988, the General Council of the United Church of Canada (UCC), approved a recommendation that “all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, who profess their faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to be or become members of The United Church of Canada” and that “all members of the United Church are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry.” This decision reversed the UCC’s own position and set it on a different course from most other mainline churches in the country including The Presbyterian Church in Canada and provided a point of comparison for those churches that maintained a position that denied inclusion to LGBTQI people.

1990s

The 1990s witnessed significant changes in legislation relating to LGBTQI rights in countries around the world. Civil unions were legalized, anti-discrimination laws in employment and benefits were passed and the unbanning of LGBTQI people in the military began. 1992 saw the repeal of Canadian Forces Administrative Order (CFAO) 19–20, Sexual Deviation – Investigation, Medical Investigation and Disposal (1967), which required members of the military suspected of being homosexual to be investigated and then subsequently released.

In 1994, The Presbyterian Church in Canada produced its most significant study of human sexuality, including homosexuality, to date. Like the 1985 statement, the Committee on Church Doctrine’s Report on Human Sexuality, reaffirmed that homosexual orientation was not to be considered a sin but that homosexual acts were. Both reports condemned homophobia as being without basis and the 1994 report called on the church to repent of its homophobia and hypocrisy. In addition to the call for repentance and in many people’s understanding in direct contradiction to it in perpetuating homophobia, the report also stated: “Whatever our interpretation of The Fall in Genesis 3, the church recognizes that we are all part of a distorted creation, where the power of sin has marred the image of God in humans and dislocated all relationships, whether with God, with our neighbour or with ourselves. Sexual identity and desire

are not exempt. Scripture sees evidence of sexual distortion to God's creation pattern in adultery, rape, incest, promiscuity and homosexual relationships." (A&P 1994, p. 266)

In 1995, the congregation of St. Andrew's, Lachine, in suburban Montreal, extended a call to Darryl Macdonald, a recent graduate of Presbyterian College and licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Montreal. Macdonald had revealed to the congregation that he was in a committed long-term relationship with a male partner. The Presbytery of Montreal sustained the call but a minority group appealed the decision to the General Assembly. The 1995 General Assembly established a Special Committee to report to the next Assembly. In 1996, the General Assembly overturned the presbytery's decision by a vote of 237 to 24.

2000s

Beginning in 2003, same-sex marriage began to be legalized in Canadian provinces through a series of court decisions. It was legally recognized nationwide with the enactment of the Civil Marriage Act on July 20, 2005. Churches were invited to make representation to the Parliament on this legislation. In its submission, The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirmed its position that marriage was between one man and one woman. The legalisation of same-sex marriage, however, raised new questions in the church regarding same-sex marriage in the church and the relation of the rights of LGBTQI people in the country and religious rights.

In the wake of the Macdonald controversy, the General Assembly established the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation which brought forward its report and recommendations in 2003. It had prepared a study guide entitled "Listening..." but its recommendation that the guide be encouraged for use in congregations was defeated. However, the report itself was commended for study and use in educational resources of the church and congregations and presbyteries were encouraged to create safer spaces for encounter for "people of different sexual orientations and different views on sexual orientation." (A&P 2003, p. 545, 40, 43–44) Although it strongly affirmed that sexual orientation in and of itself was not a barrier to ordination in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and although it did provide a broader and more detailed study of sexual orientation than The Presbyterian Church in Canada had ever been presented, its recommendations did not challenge the doctrinal understanding that marriage is to be exclusively between one man and one woman and that only single and celibate or married people were to be allowed to be ordained.

Also, in the wake of the Macdonald controversy, a group called "A New Network" (ANN) which advocated for the full inclusion of people who identify as LGBTQI developed in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It was based in Toronto but had members across the country and it produced a newsletter that was circulated to all its members. It also held occasional gatherings to address issues related to inclusion. It remained active until 2006 when the last edition of the newsletter was published.

Other than the work of "A New Network" there was a prolonged silence in The Presbyterian Church in Canada in relation to issues of human sexuality and the inclusion of LGBTQI people in this period.

2010s to present

In 2017, Bill C 16, was passed in Parliament and added the words "gender identity and expression" to the Canadian Human Rights Act as prohibited grounds for discrimination and to the Criminal Code in two sections, the first dealing with hate speech and hate incitement and the second regarding sentencing for hate crimes. This made Canada among the most progressive countries in relation to rights of those who identify as transgender.

In 2018, at a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, Prime Minister Theresa May acknowledged Britain's responsibility for laws that criminalize male-to-male sexual relations that still continue in many former British colonies and deeply regretted the persistence of discrimination, violence and death.

In 2015, an "open letter" appeared online advocating for full inclusion of LGBTQI in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. To date it has received 951 publicly displayed signatures. In the same year, three presbyteries sent overtures to the General Assembly asking the Assembly to allow for same-sex marriage in the denomination and to allow for the ordination of persons in these relationships. Many other overtures advocating to maintain the existing polity and some advocating for less than full inclusion were received as well. These overtures were referred to the Committee on Church Doctrine and to Justice Ministries in the Life and Mission Agency. A joint study guide entitled, "Body, Mind and Soul" was produced and distributed for use across the denomination in 2015 (A&P 2015, p. 539–41, 46).

In 2017, a joint report was produced that recommended the establishment of a special committee to hear the stories of LGBTQI people harmed by homophobia and hypocrisy which was to bring a final report by 2020. A motion from the floor of the Assembly directed the Moderator to write a Letter of Repentance for the church's homophobia and hypocrisy in response to the call for this in the 1994 Report on Human Sexuality. Other recommendations were tabled and in 2018 the Assembly decided to establish another Special Committee, this time made up of Former Moderators of the General Assembly, to propose a way forward for the denomination from this impasse which led to decision in 2019 to follow a pathway toward full inclusion. Subsequently two recommendations were passed which allowed for two definitions of marriage and for complete liberty of conscience and of action in relation to same-sex marriage and the ordination of individuals married to a partner of the same sex which were remitted to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act. A majority of presbyteries agreed to the remits and they await a final decision in a subsequent Assembly.

A Changed Context

Of course, this changed context has impacted other churches in Canada as well. In addition to the fact that same-sex marriage has been legal across Canada since 2005, there are now two major denominations in Canada, the United Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada which celebrate same-sex marriages and which do not put any additional restrictions on LGBTQI people pursuing ordination. The Anglican Church of Canada and the Mennonite Church of Canada have allowed for same-sex marriage and ordination of LGBTQI people on a local basis. The debate has also been significant in the Christian Reformed Church in North America and in the Reformed Church of America. Some Baptists and other evangelical churches have allowed for congregations to accept same-sex marriage and ordination of LGBTQI people.

In the United States, in 2018, the Presbyterian Church (USA) accepted full inclusion. The United Church of Christ has been a strong advocate for the rights of people who identify as LGBTQI and allows for full inclusion on a local basis. The United Methodist Church is moving toward a split after a very bitter debate and vote affirmed the current understanding of marriage as between a man and a woman and that people in same-sex relationships could not be ordained. In 2017, the Church of Scotland agreed to accept same-sex marriage and to allow for ordination of people in same-sex marriages and to offer an apology to LGBTQI people.

APPENDIX 6

Studies and Statistics Re Death by Suicide, Homelessness, Depression and More Among Sexual and Gender Minorities

Studies show that individuals who identify as sexual and gender minorities are at a significantly higher risk of developing mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive and phobic disorders, PTSD, suicidality and engaging in self-harm and substance abuse.

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario
- Centre for Health Promotion – University of Toronto, Health Nexus
- Ontario Public Health Association. Mental Health Promotion in Ontario
- A Call to Action, 2008

Global Persecution Based on Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons are subject to imprisonment in more than 73 countries and to the death penalty in nine countries, based on laws against same-sex relationships and activities.

Despite the advancement of rights in terms of same-sex unions and joint adoption recognition in some countries, individuals who self-identify as LGBTI are still targets of persecution, death threats, the death penalty and killings, corporal punishment, imprisonment, sexual and gender-based violence, physical assault, torture, forced “corrective therapies” (e.g., institutionalization, sex-reassignment operations, sexual assault and rape, drug injections, hormonal therapy, electroshock therapy, etc.) and accusations of immoral or deviant behavior; face denial of the right to assembly, expression and information, to marry and to adopt children in addition to discrimination in employment, health and education in many parts of the world.

Persecution based on Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity. (n.d.). 2021 Refugee Sponsorship Training Program: Catholic Crosscultural Services: Toronto.

Enze Han Associate Professor and Joseph O'Mahoney Lecturer in Politics and International Relations. (April 16, 2019). How Britain's colonial legacy still affects LGBT politics around the world.

Homelessness

Socio-economic factors also contribute to overall mental health and statistics show that gender and sexual minorities are at higher risk of experiencing social exclusion, discrimination and lower access to economic resources and opportunity. In particular, bi-sexual and transgender people are over-represented among low-income Canadians. In Ontario specifically, half of trans people report living on less than \$15,000 a year. These social and economic strains, felt much more often by LGBTQI persons, are significant contributory factors to homelessness, mental illness, addiction and suicidal ideation.

M. Tjepkema. Health care use among gay, lesbian and bisexual Canadians. Statistics Canada. Canada: Statistics Canada, 2008; G. Bauer, Boyce M, Coleman T, Kaay M, Scanlon K, Travers R.

As a result of family and community rejection, criminalization and discrimination, anywhere from 25% to 40% of homeless youth in Canada identify as LGBTQI. The shelter system is often a dangerous place for LGBTQI persons due to homophobia, biphobia and transphobia existing in the system, leading to increased risk of violence for homeless LGBTQI persons.

Who are trans people in Ontario? Toronto: Trans PULSE E-Bulletin; 2010. Report No.: 1(1).

Substance Abuse and Addiction

According to the Canadian Centre for Addictions, compared to the population as a whole, the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community has a much higher rate of substance abuse. Studies have shown that an estimated 20% to 30% of the LGBTQ community abuses drugs and/or alcohol. This can be attributed to the obstacles they face daily, that those who are heterosexual men and heterosexual woman do not encounter.

Some of the challenges include:

- Discrimination or stigma based on their sexual orientation
- Emotional abuse, threats and public humiliation
- Hate crimes directed toward the LGBTQ population
- Rejection from family members and friends, especially right after coming out
- Mental illness such as depression, that can lead to suicidal thoughts
- Self-hatred or internalized homophobia

These challenges can lead LGBTQ individuals to seek a way to numb their pain and often, that will mean drugs or alcohol to self-medicate. The prejudice that the gay and transgender population faces in society can be so overwhelming and isolating that alcohol or drugs can help the individuals deal with their feelings. They may feel anxiety, anger, depression or fear and escaping those feelings becomes a top priority.

One segment of the LGBTQ population that is especially vulnerable to becoming addicted is transgender individuals. One recent study found that transgender youth are 2.5 times more likely than the general population to use cocaine or crystal meth and they are twice as likely to abuse prescription medications such as opioids.

Addiction in the LGBTQ Community: CCFA. (2020, June 10)

LGBTQ youth face approximately 14 times the risk of suicide and substance abuse than heterosexual peers. Gibson P. Gay and lesbian youth suicide. 2011

Experiences of Sexual Minorities

In 2018, 32% of Canadians that identified as sexual minorities considered their mental health to be poor or fair, compared with only 11% of heterosexual Canadians. Compared to heterosexual Canadians, Canadians who identify as sexual minorities are more likely to:

- Report poor mental health (32% versus 11%)
- Seriously contemplate suicide (40% versus 15%)
- Be diagnosed with a mood or anxiety disorder (41% versus 16%)

Hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation more than doubled in Canada from 2007 to 2008 and were found to be the most violent of all hate crimes. 59% of Canadians of sexual minorities reported being physically or sexually assaulted for their sexual orientation, compared to only 37% of heterosexual Canadians. Despite this, Canadians who

identify as sexual minorities are less likely to report physical assaults that they experience to the police and so are less likely to receive help for these incidents.

M. Dauvergne. Police reported hate crime in Canada, 2008. Juristat (Internet). 2010; 30(2). Available from: statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2010002/article/11233-eng.pdf.

Those who identify as both racial and sexual minorities are at even greater risk of experiencing violence and discrimination. 73% of Indigenous sexual minorities report being physically assaulted and 65% report being sexually assaulted, compared with 45% and 37% of sexual minorities who did not self-identify as Indigenous.

Experiences of Gender Minorities

According to a 2018 report from Statistics Canada, transgender people and gender minorities often experience different risks than individuals identifying as sexual minorities. 77% of trans respondents in an Ontario-based survey had seriously considered suicide and 45% had attempted suicide. An Ontario study showed that 34% of transgender individuals had been the subject of verbal threats or harassment and that 20% had experienced physical or sexual assault due to their gender identity.

Bauer et al. Suicidality among trans people in Ontario:

Implications for social work and social justice. *Service social*, 2013; 59 (1): 35–62, G. R. Bauer and Scheim, 2015.

Trans people also experience higher rates of discrimination and harassment than their cisgender counterparts and as a result, experience poorer mental health outcomes. They are also at a greater risk for suicide as they are twice as likely to think about and attempt suicide than LGB people.

Transgender people and suicide. (2020, November 26), Centre For Suicide Prevention, Calgary, Alberta.

Context

While statistics portray approximate numbers surrounding the increased health and safety risks which LGBTQI people face, it is important to remember that violence and discrimination towards LGBTQI persons is an under-reported issue. The unique nature of homophobia, transphobia and heteronormativity means that they are not sufficiently captured in police reports or administrative data. Due to fears of violence, being outed, discrimination and disbelief from their friends, family and community, many LGBTQI victims of violence and discrimination will refrain from reporting incidents of verbal, physical and sexual assault.

Conroy, S. and A. Cotter. 2017. "Self-reported sexual assault in Canada, 2014.", Juristat. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

APPENDIX 7

Debunking the Myth that Falsely Links Paedophilia with Those who Identify as LGBTQI

From 2003 Report of the Special Committee re Sexual Orientation

Is there any reliable data that indicate the incidence of pedophilia among heterosexual people and among homosexual people?" (With Dr. Richard Barham) One study (Freund and Watson, 1992) has reported the ratio of hetero-to-homosexual pedophiles as being about 11:1. That is within the approximate population ratio of straight-to-gay men (i.e., the rate of offending for the two groups appears to be much the same). Other studies indicate that, for straight or for gay offenders, the fact that the victim is a child is a greater determinant than the gender of the child. A child's risk of being molested by his or her mother's heterosexual partner is over 100 times greater than by someone who might be identifiable as being homosexual, lesbian or bisexual.

The matter of language and word usage deserves attention in this discussion. Any adult-child sexual interaction is designated as being an instance of child abuse, within specific age limits which vary between jurisdictions. They are also all instances of pedophilia according to some common uses of the term. At times child abuse is labelled as incest (i.e., between family members). Where non-family members are involved, such adult/child sexual interactions are commonly referred to as child sexual abuse or less commonly, as pedophilia. There are some who will call all familial cases of child sexual abuse incest and all non-familial cases as pedophilia.

None of the italicized terms have positive connotations but the term pedophilia is especially ominous. It is often used selectively in debate to have an impact on listeners' attitudes and sympathies. (A&P 2003, p. 537)

Persecution Through Stereotyping

Members of disliked minority groups are often stereotyped as representing a danger to the majority's most vulnerable members. For example, Jews in the Middle Ages were accused of murdering Christian babies in ritual sacrifices. Black men in the United States were often lynched after being falsely accused of raping White women. In a similar fashion, gay people have often been portrayed as a threat to children.

Steinback, Evelyn Schlatter and Robert. "10 Anti-Gay Myths Debunked." Southern Poverty Law Center, Feb. 2011.

Myths versus Facts

Sexual abuse of children occurs primarily within the family. Over 95% of abuse that is reported has been perpetrated by a male relative. A child is over 100 times more likely to be sexually molested by a heterosexual relative than by a homosexual (Paediatrics, 1994). Most sexual abuse of children outside the family is committed by pedophiles. Pedophiles do not distinguish between male or female victims; however, girls are victimized twice as often as boys are. The perpetrators are motivated by power and control, not by sexual desire. 90% of all pedophiles self-identify as heterosexuals.

LGBT people are just as concerned as heterosexuals that children are protected from pedophiles. The pedophile myth is the basis of the most damaging charges leveled against queer teachers, to keep them in the closet and out of the classroom.

Myths vs. Facts about Child Sexual Abuse and Prevention Education. (2016).

International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR), 5(3), 660–62. doi:10.21275/v5i3.mob162), adm.viu.ca/positive-space/igtb-myths-facts | Vancouver Island University.

The empirical research does not show that gay or bisexual men are any more likely than heterosexual men to molest children. This is not to argue that homosexual and bisexual men never molest children. But there is no scientific basis for asserting that they are more likely than heterosexual men to do so.

Herek, Gregory M. PhD, University of California at Davis, 2018. "Facts About Homosexuality and Child Molestation."

APPENDIX 8

Glossary

Vocabulary Found in the Committee's 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

Queer is used by some people who identify as a sexual and/or gender-sexual minority. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be an umbrella term that is 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 the 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 or 'Cis'

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. For most people, their gender matches up with the cultural expectations of the sex they were assigned at birth. This means they are cisgender. Others may self-identify as being transgender, agender, Two-Spirit, gender queer, non-binary, gender fluid or any number of terms.

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 expression

Gender expression is how gender identity is expressed through name, pronouns, clothing, hair style, behaviour, voice or body features. Gender expression also includes using facilities (like washrooms and change rooms) that match up with one's sense of gender. Society often thinks of these cues as being male/masculine and female/feminine. But what is thought to be masculine and feminine changes over time and within different cultures.

Gender identity

One's deeply held core sense of being a girl/woman, boy/man, some of both or neither. A person's gender identity is not seen by others and does not always correspond to biological sex. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old. Gender non-conforming, non-binary and gender fluid means the individual does not identify fully as a man or a boy (male, masculine) or a woman or a girl (female, feminine).

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.

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