



NOT ALL ARE WELCOME

A CALL TO CONFESSION AND
HEALING FOR HARM DONE

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's
Special Listening Committee re: LGBTQI

Rainbow Communion

SUMMARY OF WORK 2017–21 FROM THE FINAL REPORT



NOT ALL ARE WELCOME

A CALL TO CONFESSION AND HEALING FOR HARM DONE

THE LISTENING SPACE

The Presbyterian Church in Canada owes a huge debt of gratitude to all those who risked coming forward in telling their deeply personal stories.

The Final Report draws on the 139 stories shared with 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. Storytellers came from every province and represented a wide range of age, gender, ethnicity and theological perspectives.

Storytellers 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.

Members of the Special Listening Committee re: LGBTQI

The Rev. Dr. Robert Faris and
Ms. Sue Senior (co-conveners),
Mr. Robert Hayashi, the Rev. Dr.
Jean Morris, Ms. Sydney O'Brien,
and the Rev. Michael Veenema.

Special thanks to all those who have served but are currently not members of the Special Committee re: LGBTQI and whose contributions have been invaluable to this work include: the Rev. Dr. Timothy Archibald, the Rev. Joseph Bae, Ms. Bassma Younan; and chaplains the Rev. Linda Patton-Cowie and the Rev. William Elliott. Deep gratitude is also extended to all those who have served as deputized listeners and to those whose hospitality provided safe and respectful listening spaces.

TRIGGER WARNING: What you are about to read makes reference to traumatic experiences including, but not limited to, LGBTQI hate crimes, bullying, violence, homelessness, suicide and self-harm. Should you also be experiencing mental health strain or re-traumatization, there are resources and supports that you can access including those listed at the beginning of the full report.

Full 117-page report with 23 recommendations and audio at

presbyterian.ca/listening





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RAINBOW COMMUNION AND THE STORYTELLERS



In 1994, The Presbyterian Church in Canada Committee on Church Doctrine 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, pp. 251-274, 56).

Twenty-three years later in 2017, Rainbow Communion, a Special Listening Committee of the PCC, was mandated to invite LGBTQI people and others to tell stories of harm done to them within and by the church, due to homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy. Recommendations to address the harm done, and to ensure harm does not continue, were formed from these stories and are located in the full report on the PCC website.

Many told their stories during listening sessions at significant risk to themselves, and demonstrating much courage and trust, as they revealed their 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 PCC.

”

ACKNOWLEDGING HARM DONE



In the words of those who shared their stories with Rainbow Communion:

In 2018, the Moderator's Letter of Repentance began to articulate something of the pain that has been experienced by people. 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.”

There were eight areas of repentance included in this Moderator's letter located on pages 30 – 31.

“

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.

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

My relationship with the PCC 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.

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, I would prefer them to leave’.

”

THE PAIN OF CHURCH COMMUNITY



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.

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.

“

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.

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?

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

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.

”

“

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 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.

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.

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.

In the PCC, we are 'talked about', but not 'talked with'. It is the deadliness of silence that also forces people to live in secrecy.

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.

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.

”

DILEMMA OF CONFLICTING IDENTITIES

Trapped between their identity as LGBTQI and their Christian identity, many are forced to live a double life or live in denial instead of living authentically and openly.

“

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

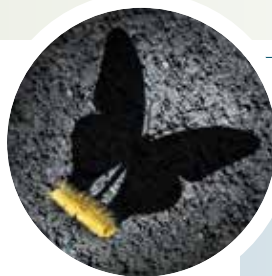
If I wanted to minister in the Presbyterian Church, I needed to go even deeper into the closet and to learn to mirror some of the homophobic attitudes that I was hearing and seeing.

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.

THE IMPACT OF THE PAIN

Trying to manage or succumbing to the pain.

The consequences of coping alone or coming out have taken on a variety of harmful or tragic forms.



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.

To be anything other than straight in the church is to be 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. 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.

”

“My friend was an educator in the PCC and in the closet her whole life. That secrecy led to her suicide.

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.

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

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.

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

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

The exclusionary practices of homophobia, hypocrisy, and heterosexism meant that [my 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.

When he 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.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH COMMUNITY AND GRACE RECEIVED AMIDST CHALLENGE

Many recounted their deep sense of connection to The Presbyterian Church in Canada through long generational ties.

In many stories, there was a contrast between what people experienced in their relationship with God and what they experienced in the church.

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 these years and we've been in Canada for a long time.

“

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. I would really like your final report to say that and I'm sure other people are saying the same thing.

I finally found an affirming church in the PCC... after realising 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.

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.

Some experienced being welcomed and affirmed in their local church community.

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.



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

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

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.

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

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'.

”

Experiences within gracious families

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!



“

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.

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.

”

LGBTQI people are not only recipients of God's grace; God's grace also flows through them.

“

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

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.

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.

Beloved by God



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'.

”

THE CHALLENGES OF RESPONDING TO THE CALL TO LEADERSHIP

Many have struggled with the call to leadership within a church that continues to impose harm.

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.

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...

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.

“

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

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.

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 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.

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In Darryl's words:

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 we have a faith story.

That was, for me, the biggest sin done to me by the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

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.

THE IMPACT OF THE 1996 GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S DECISION RE: THE REV. DARRYL MACDONALD

The decision of the Presbytery of Montreal in 1995 to sustain the Call to Darryl Macdonald to St. Andrew's Lachine and to ordain him was overturned by the General Assembly. The members of St. Andrew's had given overwhelming support to the Call with the full knowledge that Rev. Macdonald 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. Rev. Macdonald was silenced, and his story was never fully heard in the Church until now. **See Appendix 3 in the full report for Rev. Macdonald's full account**, including his decision to become a Minister in the United Church in Canada, where he was welcomed.

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.

Another storyteller shared:

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.

IDENTIFYING HARM DONE



THE PARTICULARITY OF HARM DONE TO DIVERSE GROUPS

The intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity with other identities impacts how people have experienced harm by the Church.

Some storytellers recounted their experiences of being LGBTQI and also identifying as a racialized person or belonging to particular ethno-cultural communities.

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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.

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 people or allies.

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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 grew up in Hong Kong. I learned that the British Government... when they took over Hong Kong... they did not ban the Ching dynasty law. 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... those places are particularly bad when it comes to homophobia.

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 & People of Colour]

Several Indigenous people, off the record, expressed their reluctance to speak directly to Rainbow Communion. The deep fear of further traumatization made them decide they could not fully trust the process and be vulnerable with the Church. So, they declined to participate.

HARM DONE ACROSS THE LGBTQI SPECTRUM

The PCC has currently adopted the term 'LGBTQI' to refer to those who are not heterosexual or cisgender.

It is important to acknowledge the harm that has been perpetuated through false and misleading stereotypes across the entire acronym that further marginalizes individuals.

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

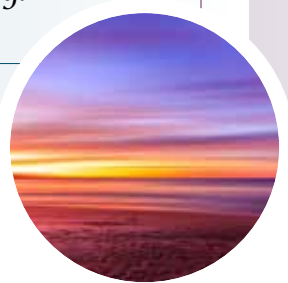
A transphobic response is one that is directed towards someone who does not fall into that masculine or feminine 'ideal' or cultural 'norm' regarding the way one should dress and speak and present yourself.

Transphobia appears whenever someone wants to shame, belittle or physically harm that person, or even keep them from using a bathroom. That's hatred.

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.

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 cisgender any longer.

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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.

The few times that the [trans] 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.

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 does not consider 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.

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.

”

HARM DONE TO THOSE WHO IDENTIFY AS HETEROSEXUAL AND CISGENDER DUE TO HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA AND HETEROSEXISM

Often people who identify themselves as allies find themselves to be marginalized, abused or silenced because of their supportive words and actions.

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 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 marrying this couple fall under the category of a 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 of 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.

“

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 PCC minister anymore and won't have a pension.' And that was just because I expressed affirming views. I identify as an ally and parent of an LGBTQI adult.

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.

”

Harm done to straight spouses and partners.

The shock and shame often associated with discovering that those who were in an opposite-sex romantic relationship with a person who now identifies as LGBTQI can be profound.

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We are the collateral damage. We get victimized twice, because people don't know what to do. We 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'.

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 straight and cisgender people wrongly perceived to be 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 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.

”



HARM DONE IN THE COURTS OF THE CHURCH

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.

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

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

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.

Imagine having the prospect of inclusion be compared to receiving a diagnosis of cancer... from the floor of General Assembly... and no one objected.

”



CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CHURCH

The pain that has been recounted in many of the stories told to Rainbow Communion has deeply wounded individuals, families and communities, but it has also wounded the whole church.

“

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 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.

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.

The more we get fixated on this [sexuality], the less ministry we do.

While attending a funeral at a PCC 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.

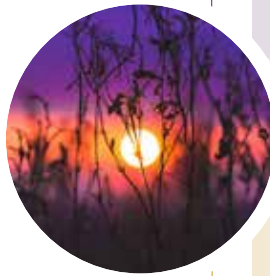
”

THE SIN OF HYPOCRISY

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.

What the Church said or proclaimed and what the Church did were two different things.

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.



“

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.’”

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.

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.

The Session approved that our wedding would be held in the sanctuary – apparently there was 100% support. That felt good, but the wedding had to be officiated by a United minister.

As a PCC minister, I am able to baptize or bury gay friends in the church. I am not able to marry them.

As someone who works with kids and youth in the PCC, I realize that I may be hurting these kids, because I belong to this institution that says they cannot love who they love.

I had someone say to me, [an openly gay person], “It’s okay to be gay, just as long as it’s not my kid.”

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There are kids who have killed themselves and they were part of the PCC and were gay. We are very sinful, in that we are complicit in their deaths.

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 hypocrisy of following the 'anti-gay' biblical rules, but not all the other ones like eating shrimp, wearing veils...

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?'

The church is fine with taking my money, and people are just fine 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.

I was singled out to take a vow of celibacy when other candidates – single, hetero – were not required to do so.

I've never been betrayed by someone I know that hates me. I've only been betrayed by people I thought loved me.

”

RESPONDING TO HARM DONE AND ENSURING THAT HARM DOES NOT CONTINUE

Repentance requires a full recognition of the harm done by the Church.

Over and over again, 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.

“

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 repented for these actions. It is possible.

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 who have been hurt for so long.

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.

For healing to truly happen, we must listen to the voices of LGBTQI in the PCC 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'.

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STOP STIGMATIZING

The demonstrably false myth that links paedophilia to 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 accusation has been used as a weapon to harm LGBTQI people within our church... and must stop.

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My sister's husband wouldn't let my gay brother into their house because they had boys. I said to them, 'He's gay. He's not a paedophile!'

I have come to understand that the PCC doesn't trust me because of my orientation and links my identity to the abuse of children.



There was an elder at our table who said, 'I will not allow somebody who identifies as LGBTQI to teach my children.'

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.

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A CALL TO CONFESSION AND HEALING



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.

Many storytellers clearly stated that an apology or confession must be accompanied by actions.

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.

People should not ever communicate 'disgust' about homosexuality because there may be a struggling LGBTQI person present... and therefore made to feel unsafe.

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.

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.

It would be helpful to have someone on national level as animator for education on gender and sexuality.

[The PCC's Program Coordinator, Sexuality and Inclusion role was created and hired in 2020.]

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 with.

I want the PCC to follow up on its letter of repentance through substantive action/changes that demonstrate its repentance in acts of restitution, contrition and penance.



HEALING ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

We heard and recognized in the stories shared, the deep trauma of people who have been wounded by violence or have been witnesses to it, much like the disciples who travelled on the Road to Emmaus as recorded in Luke 24.

I was at my first Pride Parade 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.

It was in the breaking of the bread, of being in communion with one another, that the possibility of healing was made known. When we are truly in communion with one another, we welcome and embrace each other and lose our fear. Through the words of one who was a stranger, a new conversation begins. We break bread together and give thanks to God.

Communion 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 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 all invited by the One who is Love to a new and transformed communion in the Body of Christ.



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.

Supper at Emmaus by He Qi

The Presbyterian Church in Canada L'Église presbytérienne au Canada



MODERATOR OF THE 2017 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

February 12, 2018

The Rev. Peter Bush

To The Presbyterian Church in Canada and all those harmed by homophobia and hypocrisy by and within the church:

The 2017 General Assembly asked the moderator to write a letter of repentance to the LGBTQI community. Although, in 1994, the General Assembly received The Human Sexuality Report that called on The Presbyterian Church in Canada to repent of its homophobia and hypocrisy, the church to this point has not acted on that call and publicly repented. However, the 2017 General Assembly established a listening committee, the Rainbow Communion, to create a safe space for LGBTQI persons and others to tell of their experiences in the church, and to report back to Assembly no later than 2020. This letter of repentance is an interim response between the call of the 1994 document and the work of the Rainbow Communion.

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.

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.

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.

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."¹ 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.

¹ *Living Faith* 2.5.6

Clerks of Assembly: The Rev. Stephen Kendall and The Rev. Donald Muir

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

This letter of repentance is neither the beginning nor the end; it is but a part of a longer conversation. This conversation is being taken up in part by the Rainbow Communion, a committee with the important mandate of creating a safe space where experiences of LGBTQI people will be told and heard.

Those who wish to respond to this Letter of Repentance can do so by sending their e-mail response to repentance@presbyterian.ca.

In Christ,



The Rev. Peter Bush
Moderator of the 2017 (143rd) General Assembly
The Presbyterian Church in Canada



NOT ALL ARE WELCOME

A CALL TO CONFESSION AND HEALING FOR HARM DONE

SUMMARY OF WORK 2017–21 FROM THE FINAL REPORT

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's
Special Listening Committee re: LGBTQI

Rainbow Communion

Mandated to invite LGBTQI people and others to tell stories
of harm done to them within and by the church, due to
homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy.
Final Report submitted to General Assembly, June 2021.



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