



**Guidance to Help Amend Policy, Procedure and Practice to Reflect the Church's Decisions
about Gender and Sexuality**

In June 2021, the General Assembly instructed church courts, agencies, colleges and camps to ensure that their policies, procedures and practices reflect the full inclusion of all people. This instruction was one of many decisions made by the 2021 General Assembly about the approach of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to gender and sexuality. The following list summarizes decisions that hold particular relevance for the General Assembly's instruction to church courts, agencies, colleges and camps. (A complete list and information about how to access relevant reports are included in Appendix B and Appendix C of this document.)

- adoption of two parallel definitions of marriage—a covenant relationship between a man and a woman, and a covenant relationship between two adult persons
- approval for LGBTQI2+ persons (married or single) to be ordained as ministers and ruling elders
- affirmation that all people whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity are equally beloved by God
- declaration that identifying as LGBTQI2+ and/or being in a same-sex marriage is not grounds for discipline and censure in The Presbyterian Church in Canada
- rejection without qualification of the false claim that those who identify as LGBTQI2+ are any more likely to be involved in paedophilia or the molestation or abuse of children or vulnerable adults than any other persons
- decision that The Presbyterian Church in Canada will prepare and offer a public confession to all congregations and individuals that have been harmed by the church in excluding and marginalizing people who identify as LGBTQI2+. The confession will 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.

These General Assembly decisions commit The Presbyterian Church in Canada to significant changes. The denomination acknowledges that its approach to gender and sexuality has caused harm. Moreover, The Presbyterian Church in Canada intends to learn how to address barriers encountered by LGBTQI2+ persons in the denomination and to prevent further harm.

The changes necessary to acknowledge, accept and respect the full diversity of gender and sexuality will require effort and commitment across the denomination. This responsibility belongs to everyone who participates in the life and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

At the same time, the church courts, agencies, colleges and camps of the denomination are expected to play a central role in making these changes. For this reason, the General Assembly instructed the decision-making, educational and program bodies to review their policies, procedures and practices, including the language used; to identify and revise aspects that fail to reflect the full inclusion of all people; and to complete this work by June 2022. Further, the General Assembly instructed the Life and Mission Agency to provide resources to assist with this work; these guidelines were prepared to meet this need.

Policies, Procedures and Practices

What kinds of documents and practices should be reviewed? Some examples include the following:

- standing orders of church courts
- mandates or terms of reference of committees
- personnel policy manuals for staff and volunteers
- employee search, selection and hiring procedures, including interviews
- contracts for rental of church facilities
- events and programs, such as youth gatherings
- worship services, especially words used to refer to people and to God

Focus for Review and Revision

Where should the review and revision be focused? What elements of policy, procedure and practice hold the potential either to reflect or to fail to reflect the full inclusion of all people?

One focus is the choice of words used to describe or to address people. The full diversity of gender and sexuality cannot be reflected by words that imply that there are only two genders—male and female—or that acknowledge only the intimate relationships between a man and a woman. Such words deny the experience and reality of individuals, and perpetuate an incomplete, binary (two-fold) view of gender and sexuality.

A second focus is the choice of words to describe or to address God. Worship is enhanced by language to refer to God that is expansive, encompassing the rich variety of ways God is described in the scriptures. Where possible, avoiding the use of masculine pronouns for God will help to cultivate an image of God that is not exclusively male.

A third focus is assessing how well facilities like washrooms are accessible and available to people of all genders. The same attention is given to other amenities such as change rooms, either on-site or at a field-trip location, and sleeping accommodations in overnight programs.

A fourth focus is hiring practices, for those church entities with employees. Employment is one of the areas protected against discrimination in Canada. The prohibited grounds of discrimination in all the human rights codes—federal, provincial and territorial—list sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status and family status; in addition, some codes include gender expression.

A fifth focus moves beyond matters of policy and procedure to pastoral care and community life. Changing a congregation's practices to reflect full inclusion more faithfully might begin with the question, "Which aspects of the congregation's ministry need to be changed to better meet the needs of LGBTQI2+ persons and their families in the congregation and in the wider community?" A Session conducting this assessment might invite feedback from within the congregation and might also consult with other congregations and community organizations. The same kind of assessment could be conducted by those providing leadership in a presbytery or synod (including regional youth programs), church camp, college or agency.

This list of areas to review and revise is not exhaustive: it does not encompass all possibilities. Rather, it identifies aspects of the church's life that certainly merit scrutiny. Church groups carrying out the mandated review and revision may well find their attention drawn to other important areas.

Revising Words about People

Documents outlining policy, procedure and practice often refer to unknown individuals or to people broadly as a group using terms that denote male or female gender; this reinforces binary understandings of gender and sexuality.

To revise these documents to reflect the full diversity of gender and sexuality, begin by identifying words that denote male or female gender. Examples are as follows:

- singular personal pronouns, such as he, his, himself, she, her, hers, herself
- alternative constructions of singular personal pronouns, such as he/she, his/hers, himself/herself
- family relationships, such as son, daughter, brother, sister, husband, wife

Where possible, rewrite the text of the policy or procedure to eliminate the words that denote male or female gender. Effective strategies include the following:

- use the position title, such as minister, member, adherent, clerk of Session, committee chair
- replace singular personal pronouns with the position titles, even if this means the position title is used more than once in a sentence
- rewrite the sentence to omit the need for a personal pronoun
- make the sentence plural, so that any personal pronouns will be taken from this list: they, them, their, theirs, themselves
- for family relationships, use words that are not gender-specific, such as child, sibling, spouse

When referring to relationships of Christians within the body of Christ, instead of “brothers and sisters,” use other terms, such as “becoming children of God” (Jn 1:12) or “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17).

After revising the text of the policy or procedure as described above, sometimes the need for a singular personal pronoun remains. In this case, use the words “they, them, their, theirs, themselves, themselves” as singular personal pronouns. This shift away from singular personal pronouns that denote male or female gender is now broadly endorsed as grammatically acceptable.

When referring to a particular individual in conversation or in writing, the approach is different. Here, your task is to ask the person, “What personal pronouns and titles (for example, Ms., Mr.) do you use for yourself?” Options commonly chosen include the following:

- he, him, his, himself
- she, her, hers, herself
- they, them, their, theirs, themselves, themselves

You may also encounter people who use other pronouns or more than one set of pronouns, or who ask to be referred to only by name instead of by pronouns. To learn more, visit <https://www.mypronouns.org>.

Language matters. Words that are used not only reflect thinking and practice, but also shape them. Great care should be taken to avoid language that is demeaning, or that stereotypes or excludes people based on sex, gender, sexual orientation or family structure. Of course, the same care should be taken to avoid language that demeans, stereotypes or excludes people based on race, ethnicity, class, income, geography, mental and physical characteristics, or age. Since language is continually evolving, it is helpful to establish a schedule for reviewing policies and making necessary updates.

Revising Words about God

The scriptures describe God using a rich variety of images, many of which are not gender specific. Aside from Father, King and Lord, other frequently used biblical images include the following:

Advocate, Almighty, Consuming Fire, Creator, Deliverer, Dwelling Place, Friend, God of Peace, Ground of our Being, Guide, Healing One, Judge, Lawgiver, Light, Living God, Loving Kindness, Mighty One, Potter, Power, Radiant, Redeemer, Saviour, Shepherd, Strength, Tower of Strength.

In many cases, the word “God” or “God’s” can be used in place of “He” or “His” in liturgies and sermons.

Providing Facilities for Everyone

When ministries review their facilities, some attention will be directed towards washrooms. When every washroom in a public building is labelled either “Men” or “Women,” individuals who do not identify with these genders are forced to use facilities where they feel uncomfortable. Moreover, when all the washrooms are multiple-occupant spaces labelled either “Men” or “Women,” some individuals may be subjected to negative reactions or danger when they try to access these facilities.

The simplest and often the best approach is to provide some single-occupant washrooms and to remove the labels “Men” or “Women” from those particular washrooms. There are several sign formats currently in use in public spaces. For instance, some have no words, but only pictograms of the particular fixtures in the room (toilet, urinal, sink, shower); some post the word “Washroom,” while others post the words “All-Gender Restroom”; some use words and pictograms together. In buildings that have only multiple-stall washrooms, it is fairly straightforward to designate one or several of these for single-occupancy: a lock is installed on the inside of the door to the room and users are asked to lock the door after they enter; the sign indicating “Men” or “Women” is replaced by an alternative that does not specify gender.

Other approaches to providing washrooms for everyone may be considered, with appropriate care for the privacy and safety of all users. The same care should be taken with other amenities requiring privacy and safety, such as change rooms and sleeping accommodations.

Hiring Practices

The prohibited grounds of discrimination in all the human rights codes in Canada—federal, provincial and territorial—list sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status and family status; in addition, some codes include gender expression. During interviews, employers must take care to seek only information pertaining to the job’s essential duties and bona fide requirements. Questions that, directly or indirectly, enquire about one of the protected grounds are not permitted.

For some basic information on this topic, church employers may wish to review resources in *Calling a Minister: Guidelines for Presbyteries, Interim Moderators and Search Committees*, which is available at <https://presbyterian.ca/mcv>. Supplement 4 discusses principles to consider when interviewing prospective employees. Supplement 15 briefly introduces human rights legislation and provides links to websites of provincial human rights commissions.

In addition, for calls to ordained ministry positions, the Clerks of Assembly have prepared guidelines to facilitate calls to LGBTQI2+ candidates.

Pastoral Care and Community Life

The ways the church lives together and exercises ministry among its people have the potential to nourish, nurture, support and guide God's people. Pastoral care is an essential part of the church's care for individuals and contributes to the health of the church community. Elders, ministers and other leaders have a responsibility to ensure that the church's programs and practices meet the needs of all who participate in them.

The phrase "all are welcome" is common on church signs and websites, and on the screens and bulletins used in worship services. However, not everyone who enters a congregation feels welcome. In the case of LGBTQI2+ people, many have described feeling isolated in their congregation because they feared what would happen or because they experienced negative responses when they disclosed information about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Similarly, family members of LGBTQI2+ people reported feeling silenced and becoming the targets of gossip and judgement when they spoke at church about their loved ones. These experiences are cause for all congregations to question how welcoming and inclusive their ministries are to LGBTQI2+ people and their families.

Identifying changes that would allow a congregation to better meet the needs of LGBTQI2+ people could involve inviting feedback from within the congregation, as well as consulting with other churches and community organizations. LGBTQI2+ people who are part of a congregation may or may not want to be involved in this process; their input should be invited but without any pressure to participate. Leaders might wish to contact other churches in their area that are publicly LGBTQI2+ affirming to ask for advice. Local LGBTQI2+ community organizations or consultants can also be good resources.

The following are examples of aspects of community life and pastoral care for ministers, Sessions and other leaders to consider:

- Pastoral care: While there are elements of good pastoral care that are relevant to all people, there are also experiences that are specific to or more common among LGBTQI2+ people. Leaders who are responsible for pastoral care may take a course or engage in study groups to learn about ways of offering pastoral care to LGBTQI2+ people and their families. Which organizations in the community specialize in care of LGBTQI2+ persons if a referral is needed?
- Worship: In addition to reviewing language used in liturgy and preaching (see above), to what extent do sermons, prayers and other elements of the worship service include the stories, celebrations and concerns of LGBTQI2+ people? How extensively do hymns reflect the rich diversity of the people of God?
- Celebrations and special dates: Congregations often celebrate landmark events such as graduations, retirements and other special anniversaries. These are brought to the attention of the congregation, always with the individual's permission, in a variety of ways: in pastoral prayer, during announcements in the worship service, in a newsletter, or with cake at coffee hour. Pivotal transitions unique to the experience of individual LGBTQI2+ people and their families—for instance, when an individual chooses to disclose publicly their sexual orientation or gender identity—may be treated in the same way.
- Programs: A review should be conducted of the number and nature of programs that are intended only for individuals of a specified gender or whose families are structured in a specific way. To what extent do those groups meet the needs of the congregation or the wider

community? If the criteria for who can participate in an existing program were widened, what effect would this have? What new programs might be implemented to fulfill unmet needs?

- Communication: How clear and readily accessible on the website are the congregation or ministry's policies about LGBTQI2+ inclusion? With respect to same-sex marriages, the General Assembly granted congregations, Sessions, ministers and ruling elders freedom to determine whether the congregation or ministry will conduct same-sex marriages. Whichever decision is made, this information should be stated clearly on the website, so that individuals can make informed decisions about whether this congregation is a good fit for them. For congregations or ministries that are committed to welcoming and supporting people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, how easily could someone unfamiliar with the congregation or ministry learn of this commitment by reading the website?

While the review and revision outlined in these guidelines focus on welcome and inclusion of LGBTQI2+ people, similar principles could be applied to assessing how well a ministry welcomes and includes other marginalized communities.

Additional Information

More information is provided in the appendices at the end of this document:

- Appendix A: Resources for Further Support
- Appendix B: General Assembly Decisions
- Appendix C: Reports to General Assembly

Concluding Remarks

Working to acknowledge, address, and transform the barriers and harm that LGBTQI2+ people face in the church is spiritual work. It calls the church to cultivate receptivity to God's Holy Spirit, to listen, to develop openness and flexibility, to act with diligence and intention, and to grow in compassion.

The scope of this work is broad: it encompasses all the ways that the denomination understands and practises what it is to be a community of Christian faith. Nevertheless, the work of changing policy, procedure and practice to reflect the full diversity of gender and sexuality is an essential part. For this reason, the role of church courts, agencies, colleges and camps in examining and revising the ways the church conducts its life cannot be overestimated. May God guide and care for us on this journey.

Appendix A: Resources for Further Support

Clerks of Assembly Advice on How to Implement Remits

Following the General Assembly in 2021, the Clerks of Assembly prepared a resource outlining how Sessions and presbyteries might implement the changes of church law and doctrine pertaining to marriage and ordination. Topics discussed include the following:

- Session decisions and definitions of marriage
- wedding policies
- guidelines to facilitate calls and election of LGBTQI2+ candidates
- liberty of conscience and action (July 2019)
<https://presbyterian.ca/sexuality>

The Presbyterian Church in Canada Writers' Style Guide and Web Standards

The chapter on language and word usage discusses inclusive language and personal pronouns. The Style Guide is reviewed periodically for necessary updates. Please note: at the time this set of guidelines was published (February 2022), the Style Guide was under review and an updated version is forthcoming.

<https://presbyterian.ca/communications>

Calling a Minister: Guidelines for Presbyteries, Interim Moderators and Search Committees

Supplement 4 discusses principles to consider when interviewing prospective employees. Supplement 15 briefly introduces human rights legislation and provides links to websites of provincial human rights commissions.

<https://presbyterian.ca/mcv>

Definitions of commonly used words in discussions about sexuality

A glossary compiled by the Rainbow Communion.

<https://presbyterian.ca/downloads/61802>

Well Chosen Words

A brochure that explains why inclusive and expansive language is important and suggests ways to express the fullness of God's presence including guidelines for speaking and writing. Produced by the Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries in collaboration with the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (PCUSA).

<https://presbyterianmission.org/resource/well-chosen-words>

Gender-Inclusive Washrooms in Your Workplace: A Guide for Employees and Managers

This four-page primer from the Public Service Alliance of Canada offers guidance on instituting gender-inclusive washrooms in public spaces.

http://psacunion.ca/sites/psac/files/attachments/pdfs/gender-inclusive-washroom-en-4page_0.pdf

Ministry Among God's Queer Folk: LGBT Pastoral Care, Second Edition by Bernard Schlager and David Kundtz

Made, Known, Loved: Developing LGBTQ-Inclusive Youth Ministry by Ross Murray

Appendix B: General Assembly Decisions

Definitions of Marriage

In 2021, the General Assembly adopted two parallel definitions of marriage:

Remit B, 2019 re Definition of Marriage (A&P 2021 p. 27)

The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds two parallel definitions of marriage and recognizes that faithful, Holy Spirit filled, Christ centered, God honouring people can understand marriage as a covenant relationship between a man and a woman or as a covenant relationship between two adult persons. That congregations, Sessions, ruling and teaching elders be granted liberty of conscience and action on marriage.

Ordination of LGBTQI Persons (married or single)

In 2021, the General Assembly adopted a remit approving ordination of LGBTQI persons:

Remit C, 2019 re Ordination of LGBTQI Persons (married or single) (A&P 2021, p. 28)

That congregations and presbyteries may call and ordain as ministers and elect and ordain as ruling elders LGBTQI persons (married or single) with the provision that liberty of conscience and action regarding participation in ordinations, inductions and installations be granted to ministers and ruling elders.

Special Listening Committee re LGBTQI (also known as the Rainbow Communion)

Recommendations of the Rainbow Communion Adopted by the General Assembly in 2021

Recommendation RCL-001 (p. 593, adopted p. 22)

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).

Recommendation No. RCL-002 (p. 617, adopted p. 22)

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

Recommendation RCL-003 (p. 654, adopted p. 22)

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 RCL-004 (p. 654, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation RCL-005 (p. 654, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation RCL-006 (p. 655, adopted p. 23)

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.

Recommendation RCL-007 (p. 657, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation RCL-008 (p. 657, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation RCL-009 (p. 658, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation RCL-010 (p. 659, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation No. RCL-011 (p. 661, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation RCL-012 (p. 663, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation No. RCL-013 (p. 663, adopted p. 22)

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

Recommendation RCL-014 (p. 664, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation No. RCL-015 (p. 665, adopted p. 22)

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 the General Assembly.

Recommendation No. RCL-016 (p. 667, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation RCL-017 (p. 668, adopted p. 22)

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 (p. 668, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation RCL-019 (p. 670, adopted p. 22)

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.

Recommendation RCL-020 (p. 670, adopted p. 22)

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 RCL-021 (p. 670, adopted p. 22)

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 RCL-022 (p. 671, adopted p. 22)

That gratitude be extended to all those who have served as deputized listeners.

Recommendation RCL-023 (p. 671, adopted p. 22)

That the Special Committee re Listening (LGBTQI People) be dismissed.

Recommendations of the Rainbow Communion Adopted by the General Assembly in 2019

Recommendation No. 1 (p. 486, adopted p. 19)

That congregations, Sessions, presbyteries, synods and other bodies of the church be urged to give public expression to the Moderator's Letter of Repentance and to seek ways to live out that repentance for harm done and that continues to be done, to LGBTQI people and others as a result of homophobia, hypocrisy, transphobia and heterosexism in The Presbyterian Church in Canada including developing discussion spaces with leadership drawn from a diversity of people.

Recommendation No. 2 (p. 486, adopted p. 46)

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.

Recommendation No. 3 (p. 486, adopted p. 46)

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada reaffirm its statements that homosexual orientation is not a sin and that studies have not revealed any scriptural, scientific or pastoral basis or justification for programs

to change a person's sexual orientation and therefore acknowledge that any form of conversion or reparative therapy is not a helpful or appropriate pastoral response to those who identify as LGBTQI.

Appendix C: Reports to 2021 General Assembly

To read the following reports, download the 2021 Acts and Proceedings at <https://presbyterian.ca/acts-and-proceedings>.

Remits under the Barrier Act 2021

(A&P 2021, p. 583 – 584)

Special Listening Committee re LGBTQI (also known as the Rainbow Communion)

(A&P 2021, p. 584 – 704)

Feedback re Remit B and Remit C Proposing Changes to Church Law and Doctrine Pertaining to Marriage and Ordination (Life and Mission Agency)

(A&P 2021, p. 366 – 378)