

GUIDELINES RE ORDINATION AND MARRIAGE

At the request of the 2019 General Assembly, the Clerks of Assembly prepared guidelines intended to ensure that calls to LGBTQI ministers and the election of LGBTQI elders are facilitated in presbyteries and congregations. (A&P 2019, p. 48; A&P 2021 p. 306–08)

Presbyteries and congregations were invited to comment on these guidelines in anticipation of possible amendments to them. Eight sessions and seven presbyteries and one individual offered comments, for which the Clerks of Assembly are grateful. Of these, most (79 percent) indicated that they were satisfied with the guidelines as they were and believed they would be helpful. Others expressed thoughts for the consideration of the Clerks.

In their 2021 report to the Assembly, the Clerks raised several issues that might be needed in future versions of the guidelines but that were not directly related to the original request.

These included the following:

1. **Should the guidelines also apply to those who wish to absent themselves from an ordination of someone NOT in favour of same-sex marriage?** The Clerks previously commented that they hoped such guidance would not be necessary and they continue to hold that view.
2. **Guidance for search committees regarding appropriate questions** to explore how a candidate and a session or congregation would navigate their respective views on same-sex marriage. The Clerks of Assembly have received a small number of enquiries in this area and have been able to offer suggestions on a case-by-case basis. They have encouraged search committees to be open with candidates about what, if any, policy on marriage has been established by a session and suggested that candidates could offer their perspective on the policy and how it might fit with their own perspectives.
3. **Guidance for sessions in preparing marriage policies** that make clear whether same-sex marriages would or would not be considered as part of the congregation's ministry. Soon after the General Assembly, the Clerks took steps to prepare such guidance and they are referred to in the revised guidelines.
4. **The Clerks of Assembly have reviewed legal opinions** obtained by the church's counsel regarding same-sex marriage and the remits. The church has been advised to establish a policy that ministers who do not wish to conduct same-sex marriages respectfully refer such couples to another minister who would be willing to consider conducting such a marriage. The Clerks of Assembly believe this is an appropriate pastoral response and would come naturally to ministers. A recommendation to that effect is included with the revised guidelines.

GUIDELINES REGARDING BOOK OF FORMS APPENDIX L, ORDINATION AND MARRIAGE

Ministry

The Lord continues his ministry in and through the church.

All Christians are called
to participate in the ministry of Christ.
As his body on earth
we all have gifts to use
in the church and in the world
to the glory of Christ, our King and Head.

Through the church God orders this ministry
by calling some to special tasks
in the equipping of the saints
for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ.

(Living Faith 7.2.1–2)

Living Faith affirms it is Christ's ministry that is exercised through the church and all Christians are called to this ministry. It also affirms that God orders ministry by calling some to particular tasks. Some of these tasks are carried out by ministers of Word and Sacraments and ruling elders for building up the body of Christ.

These guidelines seek to assist the church to be a diverse and inclusive community, encouraging hospitality, respect and welcome to all. At the same time, they seek to address liberty of conscience and action for those who believe, in accordance with our church's policy, that marriage is between a man and a woman.

The Calling, Election and Ordination of LGBTQI Persons

With the decision of the 2021 General Assembly to approve Remit C, 2019, LGBTQI persons, married or single, may be called and ordained as ministers or elected and ordained as elders.

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. (Remit C, 2019)

Interviews and Human Rights Considerations

Candidates for ministry and eldership should not be asked about their status as an LGBTQI person, just as non-LGBTQI persons are not asked questions related to their sexuality. Indeed, for many years, the document *Calling a Minister – guidelines for presbyteries, interim moderators and search committees* (1999, updated 2019) has included guidance on questions permitted under Human Rights Legislation. This is a reminder of the approach our church has taken for decades.

LGBTQI persons must be free from an uncomfortable or even untenable silence about this important aspect of their lives. In the same way that non-LGBTQI persons have been able to speak comfortably of their family situation, LGBTQI persons must be free to talk about their relationship without fear of discrimination or alienation within the church.

The facilitation of calls and elections must still be within the context of our usual discernment processes. These guidelines, therefore, do not make special provisions for certain people but seek to ensure equality of consideration.

Equality of Consideration and Liberty of Conscience and Action

Equality of consideration means that a presbytery or a session would ask the same interview questions of all candidates regardless of the person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexual orientation or identity itself has never been a barrier to office in our church (A&P 2003, p. 545, 40). If a candidate freely chooses to disclose that they are LGBTQI, married or single, it should make no difference in our process.

Since the adoption of Remit B, 2019 (see below) permits the acceptance of two parallel definitions of marriage, members of courts have liberty of conscience to believe that marriage is between a man and a woman or between two adults.

Since the adoption of Remit C, 2019 permits the ordination of LGBTQI persons (married or single), such a person should be welcomed and feel welcomed by the courts of the church.

Exercising Liberty of Conscience and Action

An individual who holds the belief that marriage is between a man and a woman is permitted to exercise liberty of conscience and action in this situation and be assured that they will not be censured on account of this exercise. Limits to these liberties are stipulated in the remits and described below.

How does a member of a church court exercise liberty of conscience and action regarding the potential call, ordination or induction of an LGBTQI person? The legislation in Remit C, 2019 stipulates that liberty of conscience and action applies to 'participation' in ordinations (ruling and teaching elders), inductions (teaching elders) and installations (ruling elders).

Such a person may, without fear of censure:

- Abstain from voting for the ordination, induction, or installation.
- Vote against the ordination, induction, or installation.
- Send regrets to any meeting dealing with the ordination, induction, or installation.

This would apply in the context of a presbytery considering a call, ordination or induction of a minister of Word and Sacraments or of a session considering candidates for ruling eldership.

This does not apply in a situation where a candidate has chosen not to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Under no circumstances it is appropriate to enquire or pry into that part of a person's life (See Calling a Minister – Human Rights considerations).

Liturgical and Pastoral Considerations

The presbytery is responsible for the conduct of worship at an ordination or induction of ministers of Word and Sacraments and this is normally left in the hands of the moderator. As usual, care should be taken that the language used in any service is appropriate and pastoral. The Clerks of Assembly do not anticipate the need for changes to the ordination and induction services found in the Book of Common Worship but suggest that each liturgy be conducted with sensitivity. For example, if a candidate has identified a preference for the use of a particular identifying pronoun, that should be respected. The Life and Mission Agency is available for consultation on liturgy. When there is an opportunity to welcome members of a family (perhaps at a reception), care should be taken to acknowledge and welcome a same-sex spouse, if appropriate, after consulting with the candidate.

Once an ordination has been approved by a presbytery or session and taken place through prayer and the laying on of hands, the ordination is valid throughout the church.

Remit B, 2019 – Definition of Marriage

Remit B, 2019 was approved by the 2021 General Assembly, thereby permitting (but not requiring) ministers to conduct same-sex marriages:

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.

Session Decisions and Definitions of Marriage

A resource to help sessions develop a wedding policy that makes clear which definition of marriage the minister and congregation, along with a sample wedding policy, is available from the General Assembly Office and at presbyterian.ca/2021/11/01/session-decisions-definition-marriage.

The advice offered in the above document follows legal advice obtained by the church regarding the fact that The Presbyterian Church in Canada now permits a dual definition of marriage. This legal advice recommended that the church ensure that a same-sex couple requesting marriage, who come to a minister holding the view that marriage is between a man and a woman, be treated with respect and referred to another minister who is willing to consider conducting their wedding. Any member of The Presbyterian Church in Canada who desires a same-sex marriage, should be accommodated because the church now permits such weddings. The accommodation, in the case of a congregation or minister that hold the definition of marriage is one man and one woman, is to offer such a referral. If a congregation typically hosts weddings of non-members, then, while there is no obligation to conduct same-sex weddings, these couples should also be accommodated by a referral.

The experience to date of the Clerks of Assembly is that referring a same-sex couple to another minister or church comes very naturally to our ministers and in the cases we are aware of, the couples were grateful for the generous referral and understood the policy of the minister and/or congregation not to conduct same-sex weddings.