

SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF FORMER MODERATORS

To the Venerable, the 145th General Assembly:

The 144th General Assembly (2018) named a special committee of past Moderators of the 2005–2017 General Assemblies. The committee was asked “to propose a way ahead that allows the mission and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to continue”, taking into consideration the sexuality overtures and the related reports from the various committees and agencies of the church, in parallel with the ongoing work of the Rainbow Communion. The Assembly discerned that the formation of this committee was the way through a significant impasse. The decision to name a committee of former Moderators is unprecedented. Though willing to serve, we are concerned that this not become a practice of the church should the Assembly reach a similar impasse in the future.

Having taken into consideration the matters expressed in the sexuality overtures and related reports from the various committees and agencies of the church, our report deals primarily with the questions concerning same sex marriage and the ordination of married same sex clergy and elders. This report does not address the full range of issues related to LGBTQI inclusion.

In this report, the special committee is proposing as a way ahead, a process that is intended to assist the General Assembly in making a decision which properly belongs to it. The report sets before the Assembly four pathways for consideration and a process of discernment and decision in the selection of one of these pathways as a way ahead.

The special committee met three times in person and twice by conference call, as well as continuing conversations by email.

In addition to the referred sexuality overtures, we received in almost 400 pages a spectrum of responses to the Unity and Diversity paper and are aware of the work of various committees and agencies over the years. We also studied the decisions of similar denominations concerning human sexuality. We thank all who took the time to share their insights, concerns and prayers.

As former Moderators we affirm the theology and polity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and underscore that it is the General Assembly (and possibly General Assemblies) which must make this decision under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of the church. As elders we have all “accepted the government of this church by sessions, presbyteries, synods and general assemblies, and have promised to share in and submit ourselves to all lawful oversight therein, and to follow no divisive course but to seek the peace and unity of Christ among our people and throughout the holy catholic Church.” (Book of Forms, 447.3 and 449.3)

We understand the need to move ahead but we also understand the equal importance of how we do that. Therefore, we recommend the following process which we hope will encourage prayerful conversation, patient listening and mutual respect.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FOR THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE'S RECOMMENDATION TO ASSEMBLY

The Assembly moves into Committee of the Whole to follow the process outlined below:

1. A brief introduction by the Special Committee.
2. An opportunity for questions and clarification will be given which the Special Committee would seek to answer. This time is not for speeches.
3. Commissioners as a whole discuss the four pathways.
The Special Committee encourages commissioners to speak in favour of the pathway(s) they support in order to assist all commissioners in the discernment process.
4. Table Group conversation.
5. Guided Prayer.
6. Voting by Preferential Ballot – The method of voting in selecting the General Assembly Moderator

The Voting:

- Each commissioner will receive a ballot with the pathways: Current Practice; Inclusion; One Denomination – Three Streams; and Pastoral Accommodation listed on it. Commissioners will be asked to rank the Pathways 1 to 4 with 1 being your first choice and 2 being your second choice, etc. Commissioners are not required to rank all 4 Pathways; they may leave some of the Pathways unranked. Ballots will be collected and counted by members of the special committee.
 - The Counting: Ballots will be counted a first time on the basis of how many “1”s each Pathway receives. If none of the Pathways has received 50% plus 1 of the votes counted, the Pathway with the least number of “1”s is dropped off and those ballots are distributed on the basis of the Pathway ranked “2”. And the ballots will be recounted.
 - If none of the Pathways has reached 50% plus 1 of the votes counted, the Pathway with the least number of ballots will be dropped and those ballots are distributed on the basis of the next number on the ballot.
 - Ballots with un-selected Pathways will be withdrawn from the count if the Pathways that have been ranked on the ballot are eliminated during the counting process.
7. The Chosen Pathway will be announced as the recommendation of the Committee of the Whole to be reported to the General Assembly. As with voting for a Moderator, no percentages will be shared.

Rise from the Committee of the Whole

The Committee of the Whole reports to the General Assembly the decision made.

On behalf of the Committee of the Whole, two members of the Special Committee of Former Moderators who are commissioners will present the recommendation to the General Assembly.

The General Assembly votes on a motion to adopt the recommendation made in Committee of the Whole as the decision of the Assembly.

A special committee of the Assembly (not including former Moderators) named by the Committee to Confer with the Moderator will report back to this Assembly on implications and next steps arising from the Assembly decision.

Recommendation No. 1

Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That the General Assembly move into Committee of the Whole and follow the process outlined above in steps 1-7.

PATHWAY A: CURRENT PRACTICE

This pathway proposes no change in the current practice of The Presbyterian Church in Canada's definition of marriage as being between a woman and a man. These are the only weddings permitted to be conducted by PCC clergy. LGBTQI persons who are celibate are eligible for ordination as both ruling and teaching elders. Sexual orientation is not a barrier to ordination; sexual practice is.

- Currently the 2018 General Assembly suspended discipline so that LGBTQI persons could tell their story without fear to the Special Committee re Listening (Rainbow Communion). This pathway makes no change from the present, maintaining the doctrine of the church as it presently is and maintaining the practice of the church as it presently is.

Implications

For Congregations

No changes would take place in the life of congregations from the current practice.

For Sessions

Sessions would continue to consider the approval of conducting only heterosexual weddings.

For Clergy

Clergy would continue to conduct only heterosexual marriages. LGBTQI clergy are expected to be celibate.

For Presbyteries

Presbyteries would not be permitted to sustain calls to married same-sex clergy.

Next Steps

If the Assembly were to choose this pathway, notice of this decision would be circulated to synods, presbyteries and sessions. No further action would be required.

Questions Still Remaining

At present there is a suspension of discipline to accommodate the work of the Rainbow Communion, which the Clerks of Assembly indicate could be removed by a simple motion of the Assembly. Will the suspension of discipline be removed in the future?

How this Pathway moves forward the Mission and Ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada?

This pathway provides agreement on the matter, ending uncertainty and speculation. Ending the uncertainty will allow energy to be put into other tasks requiring the church's attention. This pathway keeps The Presbyterian Church in Canada in continuity with much of the majority world church where the PCC has important partnerships.

PATHWAY B: INCLUSION

This pathway proposes to change The Presbyterian Church in Canada's definition of marriage to be a committed/covenanted relationship between two persons (adults). Clergy would be permitted to conduct such marriages. LGBTQI persons in married relationships would be eligible for ordination. This pathway affirms that the context for sexual intimacy is within the vows of marriage.

Implications

For Congregations

Congregations would be free to call as ministers and elect as ruling elders LGBTQI persons in married relationships.

For Sessions

Sessions would be free to approve same-sex weddings. Sessions would be free to approve the election of LGBTQI persons in married relationships to the eldership.

For Clergy

Should the PCC adopt this pathway, all clergy ordained after that time would be expected to affirm same-sex marriage and to participate in the ordinations and inductions of LGBTQI clergy who are in same-sex marriages. Clergy ordained prior to that decision would have liberty of conscience and action regarding the ordination and induction of LGBTQI clergy in married relationships.

For Presbyteries

Presbyteries would support married LGBTQI persons within their bounds who are exercising their calls as ruling elders and teaching elders. Presbyteries would support the liberty of conscience and action of congregations and sessions which are not affirming and would support the liberty of conscience and action of clergy ordained prior to the adoption of inclusion.

Next Steps

If the Assembly were to choose this pathway forward, a remit under the Barrier Act would be required. Only after passing through that Barrier Act process would Inclusion be implemented.

Questions Still Remaining

The sexuality overtures, in general, have focused on ordination and same sex marriage that have shaped this pathway. We recognize that this does not address all issues of LGBTQI inclusivity.

Guidelines will need to be developed ensuring presbyteries sustain calls to married same-sex clergy and support married same-sex elders.

How this Pathway moves forward the Mission and Ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada?

This pathway provides a way forward on this matter, ending uncertainty and speculation concerning the church's doctrine and practice of same sex marriage and ordination. This will allow energy to be put into other tasks requiring the church's attention. This pathway brings The Presbyterian Church in Canada into line with a number of mainline ecumenical partners in North America with whom the denomination has close working relationships.

PATHWAY C: ONE DENOMINATION – THREE STREAMS

This pathway proposes the creation of three distinct streams within the one denomination while still sharing common commitments. Three distinct streams seem likely: Traditional, Accommodating and Affirming. While the streams would be distinct on some matters, they would share other things in common across the multiple streams.

- Each stream would define its theological position on the marriage of LGBTQI persons and the ordination of married LGBTQI persons. Each stream would have distinct ordination requirements but all would be ordained within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The streams would share some programs in common such as PWS&D and Pension and Benefits Board. The General Assembly would continue to provide oversight on matters the streams held in common.

Implications

For Sessions

Sessions would recommend to their congregations which stream they wished to join. Following a congregational vote at a duly called congregational meeting, that choice, determined by simple majority, would be forwarded to the Clerks of Assembly. The Assembly would convene a process to draft together presbyteries of like-minded congregations.

For Congregations

As stated above, there would be a congregational meeting and vote on the matter. Congregations would be free to move from one stream to another. If a congregation selected being part of Stream A and later reached a decision that they wanted to be part of Stream B, congregations would be free to move.

For Clergy

Clergy would choose which stream to join. There would be freedom of movement across streams.

For Presbyteries

Presently existing presbyteries would cease to be and new presbyteries would be erected based on both geography and the three streams. Neighbouring congregations might not be in the same presbytery depending on the stream they were in, yet they would be in the same denomination.

Next Steps

If the Assembly were to choose this pathway forward, a remit under the Barrier Act would be required. Only after passing through that Barrier Act process would the three streams be implemented.

Questions Still Remaining

There would be transitions at the national level of the church. Details about what would be the shared work of the one denomination and what would be the work of the individual streams would need to be worked out.

How this Pathway moves forward the Mission and Ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada?

The present tensions within The Presbyterian Church in Canada are hindering the denomination's functioning. The creation of multiple streams provides space to allow Canadian Presbyterians to discover the mission and ministry we hold in common.

PATHWAY D: PASTORAL ACCOMMODATION

This pathway proposes to leave the doctrine of the denomination unchanged: marriage is between a woman and a man. Notwithstanding, pastoral accommodation creates space within presbyteries for clergy and congregations to conduct same-sex marriages and for congregations to call married LGBTQI clergy. The suspension of discipline which exists at present would become permanent.

Implications

For Sessions

Sessions wishing to enter the space provided by the Pastoral Accommodation would inform the congregation. The Pastoral Accommodation would allow the session to approve same-sex marriages in the church building and to ordain as ruling elders married LGBTQI persons.

For Congregations

Sessions will inform the congregation regarding the desire to offer Pastoral Accommodation. If a congregation wishes to call a married LGBTQI minister, they would be allowed to do so.

For Presbytery

Same-sex married status should not be considered a sole obstacle to process a gospel call. Clergy and representative elders would not be compelled to attend the ordination or induction of married LGBTQI clergy. No special legislation needs to be introduced for this freedom of conscience and action because they are holding a position consistent with the doctrine of the church.

Next Steps

If the Assembly were to choose this pathway forward, a remit under the Barrier Act would be required. Only after passing through that Barrier Act process would the pastoral accommodation be implemented.

Questions Still Remaining

Guidelines will need to be developed for presbyteries in providing oversight to Pastorally Accommodating congregations.

How this Pathway moves forward the Mission and Ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada?

In developing this pathway, The Presbyterian Church in Canada demonstrates how to live with difference while staying together. Such forbearance is a witness to the world.

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