

## SPECIAL COMMITTEE RE CONFESSION TO LGBTQI PEOPLE

To the Venerable, the 147th General Assembly:

In 2021, the General Assembly received the final report of the Special Listening Committee re LGBTQI, also known as the Rainbow Communion. All recommendations of the report, entitled “Not All Are Welcome”, were adopted (A&P 2021, p. 584–704, 22–23).

Two recommendations mandated the creation and public expression of a confession for harm done to LGBTQI persons:

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-003, A&P 2021, p. 654, 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 and recorded and made available for use in the church (Recommendation RCL-004, A&P 2021, 654, 22).

Accordingly, the General Assembly established the Special Committee re Confession to LGBTQI People, with the following terms of reference (A&P 2021, p. 52):

1. That the Special Committee be made up of six people including a diversity of voices and members of the LGBTQI community.
2. That the Special Committee appoint a convener from among its members.
3. That the Special Committee review the full report of the Special Committee on Listening (Rainbow Communion).
4. That the Special Committee prepare a confession for harm done to LGBTQI people and report to the 2022 General Assembly.

The following individuals were appointed to the committee: the Rev. Paulette Brown, Ms. Lela Burt, the Rev. Daniel Cho, the Rev. Dr. Charles Fensham, Mr. David Robinson (convener) and as an advisor, the Rev. Andrew Holmes. Subsequently the Rev. Andrew Holmes withdrew and he was replaced by Mr. Chris Fischer, who was appointed a full committee member. The committee also appointed as its chaplain the Rev. Linda Patton-Cowie.

Warmest thanks are extended to the following individuals who provided material support to the work of the committee: the Rev. Stephen Kendall, Principal Clerk, the Rev. Don Muir, Deputy Clerk, the Rev. Ian Ross McDonald, General Secretary, Life and Mission Agency, Ms. Carragh Erhardt, Program Coordinator, Sexuality and Inclusion, the Rev. Dr. Bob Faris, former co-convener of the Special Committee re LGBTQI Listening (Rainbow Communion), Ms. Sue Senior, former co-convener of the Special Committee re LGBTQI Listening (Rainbow Communion), and the Rev. Dr. Susan Shaffer.

### **THE MEANING OF LGBTQI**

This report uses “LGBTQI” to represent “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersex” people. It has done so because this acronym was imbedded in our terms of reference. The committee had a number of lengthy discussions about expanding upon this acronym to better reflect that fact that many other gender and sexual identities exist. While the committee has decided to continue to employ the acronym assigned in our terms of reference, we also acknowledge that those whose gender and sexual identities are not reflected by LGBTQI may well have also been harmed by the heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia and hypocrisy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and that the following Confession could have great personal significance for those who so identify.

## THE MEANING OF CONFESSION

This confession is addressed to God and to each other in the presence of the whole community of believers. It presupposes the existence of a breach, or a falling short, that runs contrary to God's desire for how people live with and treat each other. It calls the church: to acknowledge harms done; to seek forgiveness from God and those who have been harmed; to stop causing harm; to repent of wrongdoing; and to begin a new journey of reparation, restoration, and reconciliation within the community of believers.

## OUR CONFESSION TO GOD AND LGBTQI PEOPLE

**All:** Let us pray.

**One:** In response to the Holy Spirit's action in its midst  
The Presbyterian Church in Canada comes before God  
in the presence of one another  
to confess its sins to God, and to LGBTQI people.  
The church has wounded many  
through its practices of exclusion and hurtful treatment.  
The church seeks your forgiveness, O God,  
and the forgiveness of all whom we have harmed.

**All:** We offer this confession in humility, desiring to go a new way.

**One:** Creating and Covenanting God,  
you created us in your own image.  
In Christ, you call us to be a welcoming and nurturing community,  
to love one another as Christ has loved us.  
Yet we have ostracized and excluded LGBTQI people  
from full life within the body of Christ.  
We have often turned the courts of the church into places  
where those who are not straight or cisgender  
are attacked, shunned and belittled.  
We confess that we have failed  
to love one another as Christ commanded us  
and we have disrupted our covenantal relationship with you.

**All:** For these wrongful and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

**One:** The church has enacted policies and adopted customs  
that have dehumanized and harmed LGBTQI people.  
In doing so the church has led many people to believe  
they have to choose between  
embracing their sexuality and gender identity  
or being a part of the church.

**All:** For these wrongful and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

**One:** The church has often perpetuated  
harmful lies that LGBTQI people are dangerous and abusive.  
The resulting stigma fosters an environment  
where gifted people are discouraged and excluded  
from providing leadership in the church.  
The church's prejudice contributes to  
hatred and neglect of LGBTQI people  
making them targets for physical, spiritual and emotional violence.

**All:** For these unloving and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

**One:** The church has no higher calling  
than to offer the worship that belongs to God.  
In worship, we find strength and hope  
for proclaiming God's reign in the world.  
Yet often our language in worship is not inclusive  
and renders many people and their families invisible.  
This makes worship  
a wounding and alienating experience.

**All:** For these unloving and unjust actions, the church asks forgiveness.

**One:** The church has been dismissive of and indifferent to  
LGBTQI people when they have named  
the harm the church has caused  
to their mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

**All:** For these unloving and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

**One:** O God of justice and mercy,  
you have called us to love and nurture the vulnerable among us,  
yet we have not been loving and supportive role models  
to young LGBTQI people.  
We have failed to listen to their cries for healthy pastoral support.  
Our actions have abandoned them to a future  
that often includes internalized homophobia, self-loathing, depression,  
substance abuse, self-harm, homelessness, and suicide.

**All:** For these unloving and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness

**One:** In this church called home,  
some LGBTQI people still long  
for the love and security of home.  
In this church called home,  
some of us have witnessed  
demeaning conversations and attitudes  
that belittle LGBTQI people.  
Yet we choose to be silent in the face of such injustices,  
becoming complicit in the resulting oppression.

**All:** For these unloving and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

**One:** Creating God,  
your creation bears witness  
to the vastness of your diversity.  
In carrying out the mission entrusted to it,  
the church has embraced ideologies and narratives  
that have normalized the exclusion  
of those it deems different.

**All:** For these unloving and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

**One:** To those of you whom we have harmed  
by our unloving and unjust actions,  
we confess that we have failed you.  
We acknowledge that the church has wounded you deeply.

**All:** In humility and with sorrow, we ask for your forgiveness.

**One:** Come Holy Spirit come.  
Be present in this time of silence.

## Silence

**One:** God of justice and mercy,  
we praise you for the presence of the Holy Spirit  
prompting us to work  
purposefully and compassionately,  
to find new and just ways  
of living out that larger story  
of loving God and neighbour.  
Help us to overcome  
the pride that covers up wrongdoings,  
the indifference that stands in the way of feeling,  
and the fear that stalls change.

**All:** God of justice and mercy, we turn to you.  
Only you can help us to do this hard work  
of repairing, restoring, reconciling and healing.  
Fill us with courage and hope  
as we commit to working  
for the restoration of your church and  
our relationship with one another, and  
for the collective flourishing of all people  
for your glory.

**All:** Amen

Although the committee's terms of reference do not so require, the special committee felt that in order for reconciliation to proceed in the most desirable way, it was symbolically and practically important that this Confession be adopted by the 147th General Assembly.

**Recommendation SCC-001      Adopted/Defeated/Amended**  
That the above Confession to God and LGBTQI People be adopted.

## A WAY FORWARD

In adopting Recommendation RCL-003 of the Special Committee re LGBTQI Listening (Rainbow Communion) report, the General Assembly agreed that the Confession would “commit the church to a true change of heart and behaviour” regarding the future treatment of LGBTQI people. The harm caused by homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy in the church was demonstrated clearly through the work of the Special Committee re LGBTQI Listening (Rainbow Communion) and the Confession to God and to LGBTQI people acknowledges the ways all members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada were complicit in this harm.

But confession cannot be words only. The report of the Special Committee re LGBTQI Listening (Rainbow Communion) makes this point:

Although those who told their stories have asked for a public confession or apology, they have also clearly stated that this must be accompanied by actions that address the harm that has been done and ensure that harm will not continue. Otherwise, the church will simply perpetuate the hypocrisy of the “All are welcome” signs (A&P 2021, p. 654).

The Confession to God and to LGBTQI People is only one step in a longer journey of reconciliation with LGBTQI people, their families, and allies. Demonstrating a change of heart and behaviour will require concrete actions by the denomination and its many parts to advance reconciliation. What will this entail? The report of the Special Committee re LGBTQI Listening Rainbow Communion posed this question in these terms:

What is the new and different story that The Presbyterian Church in Canada and those who identify as LGBTQI are being called to tell that will begin to pave a new road through our collective brain and heart that will ensure that harm stops, that God's covenantal embrace is extended to all, and that the gifts of all are welcomed and celebrated?” (A&P 2021, p. 659)

While the Confession to God and to LGBTQI People voices the commitment of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to a change of heart and behaviour, the way forward is not one clear and simple path. The pastoral listening conducted by the Special Committee re LGBTQI Listening (Rainbow Communion) has taught the church just how complex are the attitudes and practices that have inflicted harm on LGBTQI people and their families. The journey of reparation, restoration and reconciliation within the community of believers will be similarly complex and multi-faceted. It will require prayerful and Spirit-led study, dialogue, listening, and action by many across The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

## **CONCLUSION**

Having completed the mandate assigned to it in 2021, the special committee requests that it be dismissed.

**Recommendation SCC-002      Adopted/Defeated/Amended**  
That the Special Committee re Confession to LGBTQI People be discharged.

## **APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY**

### **Allies**

People who believe in the dignity and respect of all people and take action by supporting and/or advocating with groups experiencing social injustice.

### **Bisexual**

A person who experiences attraction to both men and women. Some bisexual people use this term to express attraction to both their own sex and/or gender, as well as to people of a different sex and/or gender.

### **Cisgender**

Individuals whose assigned sex at birth is congruent with their gender identity.

### **Gay**

The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, lesbian is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the term gay to describe themselves. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determine orientation.

### **Gender identity**

A person's own understanding of themselves in gendered categories such as woman, man, boy, girl, transgender, genderqueer, etc. How an individual feels inside and believes themselves to be.

### **Heterosexism**

The systemic bias that favours heterosexuals and heterosexuality. It stems from the idea that male and female roles, thoughts and expressions are separate and distinct. A common example of heterosexism is assuming that everyone is straight.

### **Heterosexual**

A person who experiences attraction to people of a different sex and/or gender. Also referred to as "straight".

### **Homophobia**

A fear and/or hatred of lesbian or gay individuals, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination or acts of violence towards anyone who is lesbian or gay. In other words, any aversion to those who are not heterosexual.

### **Intersex/differences of sexual development (DSD)**

Individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from hormonal, chromosomal anomalies, or ambiguous genitalia. Medical professionals often assign a gender to the individual and proceed to perform surgeries to "align" their physical appearance with typical male or female sex characteristics beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child is able to give informed

consent. Formerly the medical terms hermaphrodite and pseudo-hermaphrodite were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate. Some intersex people identify with their assigned sex, while others do not, and some choose to identify as intersex. Intersex people may or may not identify as trans or transgender.

### **Lesbian**

A woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbian need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determine orientation.

### **LGBTQI**

An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, or intersex. This acronym is one of many that is used to refer to LGBTQI people. Although this acronym was chosen for the purpose of this report, a more inclusive/updated version used within the context of the church today is LGBTQI2+.

### **LGBTQI2+**

An acronym currently being employed within The Presbyterian Church in Canada to refer to a wide range of sexual and gender identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, two spirit (Indigenous spirituality), and others.

### **Queer**

Term used by some people who identify as a sexual and/or gender-sexual minority. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be an umbrella term that is inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, queer is still sometimes disliked by LGBTQI individuals.

### **Questioning**

Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or a combination thereof.

### **Sexual orientation**

Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. While sexual behaviour involves the choices one makes in acting on one's sexual orientation, sexual orientation is part of the human condition. One's sexual activity does not define one's sexual orientation; typically, it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

### **Straight**

A person who experiences attraction to people of a different sex and/or gender. Also referred to as "heterosexual".

### **Transgender**

A person who does not identify either fully or in part with the gender associated with the sex assigned to them at birth – often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions. Transgender has its origin in the Latin-derived prefix trans, meaning "across from" or "on the other side of" – which is the opposite of cis, meaning "on this side of". In the case of gender, trans- describes that the gender identity is not aligned with the assigned sex. This is a broad term that can reflect a spectrum of experiences. Many transgender individuals take steps to express their gender identity by changing their style of dress and mannerisms, taking hormone therapy, and/or undergoing gender-affirmation surgery. However, the extent to which they do, if at all, is a personal decision unique to the individual

### **Transphobia**

A fear and/or hatred of transgender individuals, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, or acts of violence towards anyone who is or is assumed to be transgender, thought to be transgender, or whose gender expression does not conform to traditional gender roles.