



---

MODERATOR OF THE 2019 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Rev. Amanda Currie, B.A.Sc., M.Div.

September 3, 2019

To the Presbyterian Church in Canada from the Rev. Amanda Currie, Moderator of the 2019 General Assembly: Grace to you and peace from God and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to God for all of you because of the grace of God that has been given to you in Christ Jesus, because of the spiritual gifts which you have received in abundance, and because of the ministries and missions that we share as one Body in Christ.

The 2019 General Assembly was both difficult and important in the ongoing life of our church. It illustrated our church's current struggle with different theological perspectives, while also demonstrating our desire for unity and peace. We are united in one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, and we are bound together through our commitment to the Reformed Tradition and our belonging to The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

At the same time, there is a diversity of practice and belief among us in many areas, including our understanding of human sexuality. While some within our church hold to a traditional definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman only, others believe that covenanted monogamous relationships between two adults, regardless of gender, can be faithful to God's design for human families.

We have prayed, studied, discussed, and debated these questions for many years, and although individuals have shifted in their perspectives, our denomination continues to include a broad spectrum of belief and it is likely that this will always be the case.

During the 2019 General Assembly, it was apparent that the majority moved towards full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people (married or single) in the ministries of the church, while others were firmly committed to a traditional definition of marriage. As commissioners engaged in debate, discussion, and listened to one another, it was also evident that embracing the shared beliefs and traditions of The Presbyterian Church in Canada was of great importance.

The recommendations passed by the Assembly were to adopt two parallel definitions of marriage (either between a man and a woman only, or between two persons) and to allow for ordination of LGBTQ+ persons, while also allowing for liberty of conscience and action on marriage and participation in ordinations and inductions.

These recommendations represent a desire to make the church fully inclusive – inclusive of both LGBTQ+ members and inclusive of Presbyterians with varying perspectives on same-sex marriage. It is significant that these recommendations were passed by an overwhelming majority of commissioners.

Now the recommendations are being remitted to the presbyteries under the Barrier Act. If they are passed by the majority of presbyteries and then by the 2020 General Assembly, they become the law of the church.

/cont'd

---

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

It is important to note that the liberty of conscience and action included in the remits allow for ministers and sessions not to participate in same-sex marriages or the ordination of married LGBTQ+ individuals. However, liberty of conscience and action do not sanction homophobia or heterosexism in the church.

The 1994 Statement on Human Sexuality called on the church to repent of its homophobia and hypocrisy, but for many years the church failed to act on that call. The 2017 General Assembly asked then Moderator, the Rev. Peter Bush, to write a letter of repentance to the LGBTQ+ Community. It also established a listening committee, the Rainbow Communion, to create safe space for LGTBQ+ persons to tell of their experiences in the church. On recommendations from the Rainbow Communion's interim report, the 2019 General Assembly also adopted several motions that confirm we are united in our affirmation of the dignity of LGBTQ+ persons.

Over the last few years, I have often made the comparison between the unity of the church and the unity of a marriage. For a while now, our denomination has been in conflict over a significant difference of opinion on human sexuality. At times, it has seemed like we had irreconcilable differences and it might be best to get divorced. *Living Faith* says that, "When a marriage is shattered beyond repair, it is sometimes better that it be dissolved than that the family continue to live in bitterness." (8.2.5)

The decisions of the 2019 General Assembly give us new opportunity to choose to live together with differences on this matter, declaring that the question of sexuality need not be a church-dividing issue. They affirm that our love for one another is still strong, and they suggest that staying together and figuring out how to live with our differences is faithful to Christ's prayer for unity.

Holding two definitions of marriage means that we are deciding to love and respect one another with our differences. Since liberty of conscience and action is included, ministers and sessions will be able to follow their consciences and their deeply held beliefs about God's design for human relationships. At the same time, we will be called to respect and honour those with a differing view, and to avoid blocking the ordinations of LGBTQ+ ministers and elders, or the ordinations of others with traditional views.

I would urge those ministers and sessions that choose not to accept same-sex marriage to be compassionate and pastoral in their ministering to those members of the LGBTQ+ community who worship and serve in their churches. Likewise, I would encourage affirming ministers and sessions to be respectful of congregation members who hold to the traditional definition. We must strive to make all our congregations safe and welcoming spaces for everyone.

Like a married couple who have been in conflict for years but still love one another and want to make it work, this General Assembly decided it was not interested in divorce but sought to choose a reasonable accommodation. It will be up to the whole church to pray and discern if we are willing to make space within our churches for difference of opinion and diversity of practice with regard to marriage.

May God give us the gifts of wisdom and love, so that the pathway we follow will lead us to unity and peace with justice for all.

Sincerely,



Rev. Amanda Currie

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