

A Brief Response to:  
**JOIN THE CONVERSATION:**

**Support as the Church Studies and Responds to the Biblical and Theological  
Response to Overtures Submitted by the Life and Mission Agency on Sexuality**

**2017**

The LMA has encouraged response to what they have formulated in regard to human sexuality. We trust they are open to all responses. We fear that they are not. The onus of response appears to be even more so on those who are not in support of changing historic Christian marriage and historic Christian sexual ethics.

The missing pieces in this discussion continue to be: 1) "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29) The key in this discussion is not first of all sensitivity to all parties, nor is it openness to all points of view, but first of all openness to what God is saying. We turn to the Scripture not mainly because *Living Faith* directs us there (p. 7, paragraphs 1-4), but because that is where we hear God speaking. We will give an account to God ultimately for what we say and do as individuals and as a denomination.

The other missing piece in this discussion is 2) Division has come, is coming and will come over this important theological and biblical issue. Such division also comes over the Gospel. 1 Corinthians 15: 1-2 "I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain."

We all need help in our sexual and emotional lives, no matter how we self-define ourselves. The Church is called to minister to all in this area, not simply affirm whatever sexual choices and practices the individual prefers. This applies to heterosexuals, homosexuals and any other self defined sexuality. This also applies to those with sexual addictions and pornographic addictions.

We are not the first to make decisions about LGBTQ persons in our midst. Other denominations have done the same and have experienced division. We are no better in this regard and deny the historic reality if we think we are.

The LMA is trying to lead us into same sex marriage, homosexual (and other sexuality) leadership, and affirmation of the behaviors and choices of the LGBTQ community. The contact persons mentioned on page 6 are not neutral or unbiased parties in this regard.

What they have not told you is that the General Assembly has affirmed historic Christian marriage in decisions made between 2003 and 2015. In their time line, they have left out the decisions of 2005 and 2009. In 2005, the General Assembly

affirms the historic definition of marriage as only between a man and a woman, against the decision of the federal government to change the definition of marriage to include same sex marriage. They decided to affirm traditional marriage in spite of the United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada choosing a different way.

A&P 2005, p. 41: “That the 131st General Assembly, on the basis of its subordinate standards, reaffirm that marriage is the union of a man and a woman and that The Presbyterian Church in Canada inform the Government of Canada on this matter.” Adopted.

In 2009, the Assembly does not receive a Session’s overture to accept the federal government’s definition of marriage including same sex marriage, on the basis of the Assembly clearly stating it is only in favour of the historic Christian definition of marriage, thus re-affirming the traditional understanding of marriage, passed in 2005 (A&P 2009, pp. 21 and 526). In fairness to all sides on these votes, both in 2005 and 2009, there were dissents, but clearly a small proportion of the overall Assembly. Again, this decision was taken with the full knowledge of other denominations choosing to accept same sex marriage.

The Clerks of Assembly, in response to questions following the redefinition of marriage in the federal government, and as directed by Assembly in 2005 (A&P 2005, p. 43), issued statements to the Clerks of Presbytery that any performing of same sex marriages could be disciplined by the Presbytery, if the Presbytery “wished to pursue the matter.” Some presbyteries did not wish to pursue the matter. Rumours of same sex marriages performed by or encouraged by PCC Ministers and the private statements of openly gay ministers culminated in the “coming out” of a Minister at the 2015 Assembly who left his spouse to be with his lover, thus clearly showed that no discipline nor upholding of the current standards of sexual ethics was or is taking place.

The LMA has also not mentioned the case of Darryl Macdonald, a homosexual who was about to be ordained by the Presbytery of Montreal, but the case was appealed to the General Assembly, which appointed a Special Commission that in 1996 decided that he would not be ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. (A&P 1996, p. 31, 435ff.) This was adopted by the Assembly with a published vote of 237 in favour, and 24 against.

Now we are being asked to consider handling this topic by either the model of divorce or 1 Cor. 14. (pp. 7-8)

Divorce is not encouraged in Scripture nor by *Living Faith*. Jesus made it clear that Moses allowed certificates of divorce due to your “hardness of hearts.” (Matthew 19:8) He allowed an exception of infidelity in Matthew 19:9, hardly a carte blanche encouragement for people to divorce. And I have yet to hear of any one putting into their marriage vows, that they promise fidelity to their partner “unless the

relationship is shattered beyond repair.” *Living Faith 8.2.5* acknowledges the exception of divorce, not the full acceptance of every instance of divorce, nor the encouragement of divorce as a ready option for any couple undergoing marital difficulties. This model of accepting divorce as a rare exception is not what the LMA is asking us to consider in regard to LGBTQ members. The LMA wants us to embrace this community whole heartedly as they are, not as an exception to the rules. The LMA wants the rules changed.

1 Corinthians 14 has Paul confronting disunity in worship. In this chapter, Paul does a fascinating exposition of congregational liturgy, in which he explores the place of tongues and prophecy in worship. While the LMA would have us believe that we are missing the gifts of those with non-traditional self-defined sexualities, if you read the whole context of the chapter, it is more about what to do with the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. I am currently unaware of any congregation that uses the gift of tongues (prayer language, not known or learned languages) in any PCC context publically on a Sunday morning. Paul teaches the use of tongues with interpretation, otherwise the speaker (whether a prophet or a gift of tongues person) should stay quiet (v. 28).

Discipline, and refraining from activity seems to be the last thing the LMA wishes to tell us in relation to the LGBTQ community.

Where do we go from here? Is the denomination changing its mind on human sexuality, to be in line with the federal government, which changed its mind on marriage without widely consulting Canadians, and with one former Liberal Prime Minister, the Right Hon. John Turner vowing that his party would never change the legislation on marriage?

Previous declarations by General Assemblies have clearly, by great majorities, honoured historic Christian marriage. What will we choose to do? And what will the minority left choose to do? These are just some of the difficult issues left unaddressed by the LMA.