

## **Response to Referral of “On The Question of Unity and Diversity” From the Session of Grace Orleans**

**Committee on Church Doctrine, Recommendation No. 1.** The document “On the question of Unity and Diversity” has been reviewed and discussed by Session. Of all items presented at GA2018, this is our greatest concern. Other denominations have broken over the sexuality issue. It is only our own hubris that would suggest otherwise in our case. To take away the assets and real estate of congregations troubled by a slim majority decision at best on these matters and not even be open to a process of allowing congregations to leave the denomination via gracious dismissal is just another way to see the gravity of this issue. It points out real concern over those who perceive themselves as holding power within the denomination, and those who feel oppressed by such. Suggesting that the current sexual ethics of the Church is a direct cause of suicide is unfounded and unfair, and cannot be shown to be true. Equally as unfounded and unfair is portraying the Renewal Fellowship and PSALT as violent and bullying groups as one commissioner at the 2018 GA microphone suggested, which was then supported by the Moderator and Clerks of Assembly. Our comments on the paper itself follow:

- a. This paper attempts to underscore the need for the unity of the Church, from Scripture, history, subordinate standards and rational discourse. It notes three kinds of unity: the whole Church, our denomination (the PCC), and congregational unity. The latter two are in question more than the first.
- b. Page 5, paragraph 1 states that our denomination emphasizes “the supreme authority of Scripture, defined theological confessions, shared leadership, and orderly record keeping.” It then goes on to say the PCC is “a reformed church, always reforming,” “according to the word of God” (A&P 2003, p. 252). Then, on Page 6, in the section titled “What is essential?”, it appears the Committee is trying to say that the change of status to marriage and sexual ethics, is something like whether Christians believe in drinking alcohol or not, or the use of musical instruments in worship historically or traditional vs. contemporary worship styles - or how the Lord’s Supper is celebrated. Yet there are limits to our room for diversity, e.g. if a Minister, unwilling to baptize an infant, would be disciplined (Page 7, para 6). The ordination of women is also raised as a parallel to the homosexual and self-defined sexualities discussion. Yet the Scripture clearly paints homosexual practice as sinful and immoral, whereas there is no sinfulness or immorality connected to being or acting as a woman in Scripture.
- c. “Can we agree to disagree?”(Page 8). Agreeing to disagree, notes that deep division will occur if same sex marriage is adopted by a slim majority of the church and self-defined sexuality individuals are given the “right” to be church leaders, no matter what their behavior. The non-disciplining of homosexual leaders, who have confessed breaking the current sexual ethics of the PCC and who have left their marriages to take up an active homosexual relationship, is clear in at least one example of an East Toronto Minister who stated this to be the case at the 2015 GA. Some presbyteries already defy the current ethics and practice of the Church, based on what they want to do, which is simply contumacious. Should Assembly reaffirm the 1994 statement on Sexuality, we believe this defiance would continue. What does unity mean in our current context and in that context?
- d. Going back to Page 5, para 5, it is suggested that congregations are not independent bodies within our churches, which we all know. If they were independent, there would

be no discussion around dismissal, because an independent organization simply does as it pleases without asking. We wonder if Presbyteries are acting as independent entities by virtue of the oft omitted phrase “secundum verbum Dei”, cited in the paragraph above this one.

- e. Can the CCD be serious in suggesting Romans 14 as the answer to this? Surely the changing of marriage – affirmed as only between a man and a woman in Scripture, in all subordinate standards, and by GA decisions of 2005 and 2009 – is more than a dietary difference or a ritual difference: i.e. how you celebrate Christmas or Easter, or Jewish holidays. Surely the change to our understanding that there are only two genders, and two persons in sexual partnerships is more than a peripheral issue such as fasting or not in your prayer life.
- f. It seems strange to quote the Westminster Confession of Faith regarding suicide (page 10), but to be unwilling to hear what it says regarding marriage. Such is another example of miscommunication within the PCC currently.
- g. What unity do we currently experience as a denomination? Do we really want to follow either the United Church or the Anglican Church in these matters? Two General Assemblies, one in 2005 and one in 2009 said “no,” by overwhelming majorities.
- h. Will those wishing to change our sexual ethics and marriage ever be content? Over the last three decades, homosexual groups have lobbied the GA on this matter, at least once with illicit mailings to GA commissioners. (e.g. PGLA) The GA committees and the LMA seem to want to hide the Church’s direct response materials on these matters (e.g. *Body, Soul and Spirit*; the recent CCD polls, etc.) What is being hidden by holding the results of such?
- i. Unity is achieved by agreement with the truth, the truth of Scripture, the truth of our subordinate standards, which then brings trust toward one another. Disregard for such necessarily harbors disunity.

Donna Dawson  
Clerk of Session  
Grace Presbyterian Church  
Orleans, Ontario