

**UNANIMOUS RESPONSE OF THE SESSION OF GRACE CHURCH, PRESBYTERY OF
PICKERING, TO THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF PAST MODERATORS, ON THE
QUESTION OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY**

JANUARY 8, 2019

The mandate of your committee has been “to propose a way ahead that allows the mission and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to continue” and to report back to the 2019 General Assembly with its proposals. Our session recognizes this task is an exceedingly difficult and emotional one and welcomes the opportunity to provide our response. Seeking the counsel of “the many” is a worthwhile undertaking to seek out the wisdom and experience of those within the body. An attitude of humility and understanding is and should be an expectation, however, there are times when the question of unity must first answer two important questions; that being, unity to what, and what is the cost of unity. We offer our response to the committee of moderator’s document below.

The document speaks of the diversification of the denomination that was the result of immigration from nations other than Scotland; following the union in 1939. Surely we can all agree that the denomination has been enriched as a result. Our session values and also is enriched by fellowshipping in a varied and culturally diverse congregation. Notwithstanding the blessing of cultural diversity; we see no similar blessing in exploring such diversity within the theology our denomination adheres to. Ever widening the “tent” that moves us further away from scriptural truth will inevitably lead us down a path that ultimately sees our mission and purpose as the body drift so far that our church will lose its way. We would submit and believe that The Presbyterian Church in Canada does need to continue to *“find unity in a shared commitment to ‘defined theological confessions’,* while continuing to keep these subordinate to Scripture.

We acknowledge that *“Individuals within a congregation today will have different understandings of the issues surrounding human sexuality and doctrines surrounding marriage.”* Notwithstanding these differences, we see these people as friends whom we love and respect. It is because of that fondness and concern as brothers and sisters that we urge consideration and concern for those congregations that will be torn apart if they are forced to decide, as a congregation, between the two sides of the issue. In the light of our understanding of scripture and the understanding of a credible profession of faith it is clear that unrepentant and practicing same-sex people are at variance with a life of obedience to Christ.

The different answers to the question of LGBTQI welcome and inclusion are not simply two different opinions, but two different commitments growing out of profoundly different ways of looking at the world. Our session holds with the historic view that unity must lie in truth; HIS truth. We mourn with what appears to be our denomination disagreeing and struggling to agree on what is scriptural truth. Our position is that it may

be possible to find unity in our relationship with Jesus, providing the parties' understandings of who HE is are not too different.

On Page 9 of the document; the following question is posed: "What does it look like to put on Christ and to be one body? The author's response is to emphasize that it means not judging one another. We agree that this is admirable and can be found in the passage being referenced (Romans 2). However, Matthew 7:3-5 we submit supports the rightful place for brothers and sisters to correct in love based on our understanding of truth.

This passage speaks of the need to clear the "plank" in our own eye before attempting to remove the "speck" in the eye of our brother. This is a call to humility and a right heart when seeking to correct one another. Certainly there is no emphasis in this passage on acting as "judge" but there is also no de-emphasis on the rightful accountability we have to one another to correct each other in love.

We agree with the statement on Page 10 that "*Some disagreements between Christians need to be resolved by those living in error laying aside works of darkness that do harm to one's neighbour*", while noting that one's understanding of truth leads to entirely different understandings from this statement. We need to acknowledge that there are two opposing world views of truth regarding the issue of human sexuality. We believe that people with a different understanding of truth deserve our love and respect. But the way forward requires that we not impose neither our views, nor the consequences of our views, on each other. We must be tolerant of each other.

We see the issue of human sexuality as a symptom of a deeper issue – different approaches to interpreting the Bible. Different interpretations of the Bible lead to different understandings of God and of our place in the world. Our culture has lifted self-fulfillment including sexual fulfillment to the status of a god. This is not the perspective we see in Jesus. When Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly," we at Grace think He was speaking primarily of eternal life rather than our life on earth. We are concerned that the two sides on the issue of human sexuality have different perspectives, not just on human sexuality, but on life. We feel that the people in favour of gay marriage, etc. are interpreting the Bible incorrectly in the attempt to justify their cultural view.

While we consider unity to be desirable, we are concerned with the prospect of accepting leadership – both teaching and governance – from those whose understanding of Scriptural truth, whose whole approach to understanding Scripture, whose consequential perspective on life, is at variance with ours and seems to us to be culture-based rather than Bible-based. Discussions over the past years have made it clear that the two sides of this debate will not convince each other or find a theological middle ground. Yet, we see these people as friends whom we love. Any way forward in partnership within the denomination will require that we can work independently of each other with regard to teaching and governance. Barring this independence it is likely that a split would become necessary, and as there is a significant proportion of the denomination on each side of the split, we think the fair thing to do would be to allow churches to keep their property.

We acknowledge that committed people within our denominational family have been struggling for some time with the place of the LGBTQI community within the church; and our appropriate response as a denomination. We agree that our church is dealing with

a hard issue that is emotional for many and been made complex. We concur with the urging of the committee of former moderators that respectful dialogue and words on this issue must be spoken in love and humility. None of what our session has submitted is presented in anger or as a display of underlying homophobia; rather it is a refusal to acknowledge or accept unrepentant homosexual behavior as being enshrined into and sanctioned into the life, governance and teaching of the church. Our response is presented prayerfully and in love; urging the body to commit to the unity that can only exist through HIM.