



## Keeping our Promises - General Assembly

March 17, 2021

Dear Friends in The Presbyterian Church in Canada,

Sunday by Sunday, the church proclaims the sure and certain hope that is ours in Jesus Christ – that goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, and life is stronger than death. Yet even as we prepare to celebrate Christ’s victory over sin and death at Easter, we must acknowledge our own sin and turn our lives towards Jesus’ way of compassion and grace. I write to you in this Season of Lent, with a deep awareness of the brokenness and division within our denomination. My particular concern at this time is the growing sense of fear and betrayal among those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Like others who follow the Revised Common Lectionary, I began this season by preaching about The Great Flood and God’s covenant promise to never again destroy humanity and the world. I spoke about the rainbow, of course, God’s own reminder of the promise and guarantee of God’s gracious faithfulness going forward. Although we will never be as good as God is at keeping promises, we must strive to do so. And perhaps, just as God used the rainbow as a reminder of God’s covenant, the church needs to be reminded of the promises that we have made to one another.

It was three years ago during the Season of Lent that the Moderator of the 2017 General Assembly, the Rev. Peter Bush, shared a Letter of Repentance for the church’s homophobia and hypocrisy.<sup>i</sup> The letter was commissioned by the 2017 General Assembly as an interim response to these concerns, with the expectation that the Special Committee re: Listening (LGBTQI People) (Rainbow Communion) would bring recommendations to a future Assembly for concrete actions addressing these issues for implementation within the church.

With terms of reference set by the 2017 GA and revised by the 2018 GA, the Rainbow Communion implemented a listening process for LGBTQI people and others to tell their stories of harm done to them and/or God’s grace experienced in the church.<sup>ii</sup> Recognizing that the invitation to participate in the listening process could produce a high level of fear for LGBTQI people to tell their stories and reveal their identities, especially for those who are subject to the discipline of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the 2018 General Assembly adopted the following recommendation:

“That those who are subject to the discipline of The Presbyterian Church in Canada who accepted the invitation to serve on the Special Committee re Listening (LGBTQI People) or who accept the invitation to tell their stories... would have potential censure with respect to The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s stance on same-sex relationships suspended indefinitely in order to allow them to participate freely and honestly in the work of the special committee.” (A&P 2018, p. 29, 462.)

Individuals who have served on the Listening Committee or shared their stories are given a Letter of Certification as an attestation of the decision of the 2018 General Assembly. Those who have made themselves vulnerable by sharing openly and honestly in the listening process have a certificate in their

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



hand to remind them of the promise made to them by The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It is our responsibility, as the church, to remember and to keep that promise.

At the 2019 General Assembly, the Rainbow Communion's interim report indicated that "as people have found the courage to tell their stories it has become clear that the need for rebuilding broken communities and relationships and to respond pastorally to those who have been harmed cannot wait for another year."<sup>iii</sup> The 2019 Assembly then adopted a number of recommendations including an encouragement to the church to find ways to give public expression to the Letter of Repentance and a commitment to develop and gather resources for those who have been harmed by these issues.<sup>iv</sup>

The cancellation of the 2020 General Assembly due to Covid-19 has meant a delay in receiving the Final Report of the Rainbow Communion and further recommendations for concrete actions. It has undoubtedly been very difficult for those who continue to be personally impacted by hypocrisy, homophobia or harm directed towards LGBTQI people in the church as they wait even longer for the church to move our repentance from mere words in a letter to changes in the ways our communities welcome, care for, and receive the gifts of LGBTQI people. My fervent hope is that the 2021 Assembly will agree to address the important and urgent work of the church, including the Final Report of the Rainbow Communion.

Lent is a time for repentance. It begins with acknowledging our errors, as the Moderator's Letter of Repentance began to do three years ago. It continues with listening for the Spirit's guidance and turning in a new direction. I encourage the church to enact our repentance by giving public expression to the Letter of Repentance in our local contexts, by engaging with the resources being developed related to sexuality and inclusion in our church,<sup>v</sup> and most urgently, by remembering and keeping the promise the church made to those who participated in the listening process.

As God has graciously kept covenant with us, may God give us the courage and compassion we need to keep our promises to one another.

In Christ,

Rev. Amanda Currie  
Moderator of the 2019 General Assembly  
The Presbyterian Church in Canada

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<sup>i</sup> Read the Moderator's Letter of Repentance here: <https://presbyterian.ca/2018/02/13/moderator-issues-letter-repentance-lgbtqi-community/>

<sup>ii</sup> Learn more about the Special Committee re: Listening (LGBTQI People) or Rainbow Communion here: <https://presbyterian.ca/listening/>

<sup>iii</sup> A&P 2019, p. 486.

<sup>iv</sup> A&P 2019, p. 19, 46, 486.

<sup>v</sup> See <https://presbyterian.ca/sexuality/> for resources related to sexuality and inclusion in the church.