

Interim Minister
18 May 2022

For the past several years The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been contemplating a change in our views on human sexuality. During the 2021 General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church in Canada made changes to its theology and practice regarding marriage, permitting people to choose to define marriage either as a covenant relationship between a man and a woman or as a covenant relationship between two adult people. This decision provides Presbyterian ministers with liberty of conscience and the freedom to choose to officiate or not officiate at the marriages of same-sex couples. LGBTQI+ people (whether married or single) can be ordained and may serve as ministers and ruling elders in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

St. Andrew's has been reflecting on LGBTQI+ for many years as well. This winter we held the well-attended "Sexuality and Faith Explored" (SAFE) workshops. A survey of congregants informed us that 89% of respondents were in "support of the ordination of LGBTQI ministers and ruling elders." I addressed the issue in a sermon and hosted a discussion opportunity for anyone with concerns about the new directions in our denomination (one person attended). Our youth were engaged on the topic as well. The sense we have gathered through all these engagements is that St. Andrew's is open to embracing our denomination's expanded definition of marriage and is accepting of LGBTQI+ persons in congregational leadership as clergy and elders.

Consequently, our SAFE Team has brought forward to Session a series of motions that (if adopted) will state our congregation's alignment with the new direction of our denomination. These recommendations are not yet adopted by Session. The Session wants to bring them to your attention to create another opportunity for dialogue with you on this topic. The recommendations are:

- The Session of St. Andrew's affirms its understanding of the covenant of marriage as a covenant between two persons.
- The Session of St. Andrew's affirms that sexual orientation or gender identity shall not be a barrier to being called as a minister or ruling elder.
- The Session of St. Andrew's is an affirming congregation who publicly, intentionally, and explicitly welcomes LGBTQI+ persons to full participation in the life of our community.
- The Session of St. Andrew's commits to carrying the work of diversity and inclusion forward in an intentional way. Eg. Continuing education with the congregation (conversation groups); partner with churches that are on this path (Varsity, Knox); create a team or partner with Leading with Care to develop goals and monitor progress.

An important reason for considering these recommendations at this time is the fact that we anticipate commencing this year a search for a new Lead Minister. The General Assembly decision allows ministers to have freedom of conscience on whether they will conduct same-sex marriages. This means that ministers we interview in the future will want to know if our congregation's views on LGBTQI+ concerns align with theirs. For these conversations we need to know how we feel.

Please reflect prayerfully on the direction represented by the above recommendations. Also, please share your reflections with an elder or with me, especially if you have any concerns.

Rev. Peter Coutts