

Triune God, Three-in-One,  
Perfect Unity in Diversity,  
Hold us together  
in love.

Dear God, give us courage  
to follow where you lead.

Dear God, please  
help us to listen  
to each other  
and discern your will  
by studying the scripture and  
praying with compassion.

Lord, may hurts  
be met by healing,  
and fears  
replaced by trust,  
confidence and peace  
through Jesus.

# Body, Mind and Soul

We want  
to do  
your will.  
Help us.

Dear God,  
teach us  
how to love  
all your  
children.

Thinking together about  
human sexuality and  
sexual orientation in  
The Presbyterian Church in Canada

May we be open  
to seeking, hearing,  
understanding, and  
following the leading  
of the Holy Spirit.



Supplemental Handouts



# Body, Mind and Soul

Thinking together about human sexuality and sexual orientation  
in The Presbyterian Church in Canada

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# Introduction

## PRAYERS FROM THE 141<sup>ST</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Creating God, we pray that we will be the body of Christ: united and diverse; redeemed and transformed; broken but holy.

We pray that this will lead to a greater trust — trust in each other, trust in you, trust that the Spirit will guide us to make the decision you want us to make, and trust that we will move forward, united as your beloved children.

Gracious Lord, at the end of this process, when the decisions are made regarding how the church responds to humanity sexuality, whatever the decisions, may our church family come out stronger.

Sexuality is an essential part of who we are as human beings. In the past year, there has been renewed conversation and questions around human sexuality, sexual orientation and the church. The subject of human sexuality and sexual orientation was a significant focus for The Presbyterian Church in Canada's highest court, the General Assembly, when we met in June of 2015. As a result, the church has asked for a study guide to help us look at the biblical texts, think carefully, talk together, and prayerfully consider this important subject.

The story that follows is a first-person account of the writer's experience as a commissioner at the 141st General Assembly as a participant in the table discussions formed around sexual orientation and related matters. The Assembly gave commissioners a set of listening guidelines intended to help foster honest, forthcoming and authentic sharing within the groups (see guidelines on page 87). The General Assembly hopes that biblical and theological, honest and open conversation will continue to occur across our church so that we can better understand the Word of God and our brothers and sisters in Christ, and discern together the Holy Spirit at work in our midst. The guidelines are listed in full at the end of this introduction, with the hope that they will continue to be used in all conversations about human sexuality and sexual orientation in our church.

## Beginnings: Presbyterians Gather for Conversation

At the 141st General Assembly, commissioners were divided into groups of eight people to discuss our experiences around the issues of human sexuality, sexual orientation and our church. The formation of the groups was a completely random process. As people headed to their numbered tables, they had no idea who they would meet and what the theological and experiential location of the various members of their group would be. As it turned out, my table had five women and three men. We had at least three different ethnic groups represented. We had three ministers and five elders. We covered an age span of about five decades. We came to that table with concerns about our brothers and sisters, our children and grandchildren, our neighbours, and our church.

At our table, some of us knew and stated that we were *against* the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons as ministers in our church and believed that marriage is only between one man and one woman. Some of us knew and stated that we were *in favour of* full inclusion of LGBTQ persons as ministers in our church and of redefining the definition of marriage to include same-sex marriage. Some of us felt conflicted – wanting to be welcoming, or maybe even affirming, yet unsure if our biblical interpretation and church doctrine could allow us to do so faithfully. Some of us found the courage to share hurtful experiences of sexual manipulation that made us fearful. Some of us had siblings or neighbours whom we knew to be part of the LGBTQ community and whom we felt a strong need to defend as full human beings, beloved children of God, who deserve the right to marry and are as capable of being called to ordained ministry as anyone else.

We came as strangers and left as friends. We listened to each other carefully. We respected the experiences that each expressed – sometimes with tears and deep empathy, sometimes with nods of agreement, sometimes with looks of deep puzzlement as we tried to understand what another was saying. We came with different, even opposite, opinions. We left with different, even opposite, opinions. But we were united in our love of God, our love of God's church in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and a renewed desire to love our neighbour. We left our table in a spirit of unity. This study guide is designed to create similar opportunities in congregations and presbyteries around Canada.

## Intent of this Study Guide

This study guide is meant to promote biblical study, theological reflection and honest conversation on the subject of human sexuality and sexual orientation. It is not exhaustive and cannot be. Yet we cannot have a constructive conversation about human sexuality, inclusion or exclusion, biblical values, or what it means to be a Presbyterian Christian in Canada today without solid information, tools and reflection. This study guide is not designed to state a position on the issues before us, nor is it supposed to support one particular position or another.

Most certainly, this study guide is not a perfect document. One of the goals of this study guide is to attempt to outline, with integrity, various and even opposite perspectives on a complex and emotionally charged subject. Drawing attention to different ways of interpreting the scripture and understanding our theology is not intended to contribute to our polarization on this topic, but rather to bring us into conversation with each other. This study guide is not a response to the current overtures, but it is hoped that the conversations that it fosters may help prepare the church as a whole to formulate such a response.

The study guide will draw on the resources that are available both within our church and also outside of it, as already recommended by the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Justice Ministries (Life and Mission Agency). It is built upon previous reports to the General Assembly by the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation (1994, 2000, 2003), as well as the study guides that have been produced for the church on this subject before (available online at [presbyterian.ca/sexuality](http://presbyterian.ca/sexuality)).

## The Purpose of the Study Guide is

- to provide resources for members, adherents and leaders in the PCC so that we can effectively study the subject of human sexuality and sexual orientation
- to facilitate informed conversations in congregations, presbyteries and synods
- to invite the church to prayerful discernment for the way ahead regarding matters of human sexuality and Christ's church

In order to accomplish this threefold purpose, this study guide will

1. provide basic tools for biblical interpretation and study as well as engaging specific texts
2. review and explore some essential Reformed understanding of theological categories that are particularly relevant to the discussions about human sexuality
3. provide a summary statement of the current position of The Presbyterian Church in Canada as it has evolved through study and prayer over the last 45 years

4. consider and explore the role of biological and psychological studies in our deliberations as Christians on the topic of human sexuality and sexual orientation
5. offer a process for sharing personal experiences and perspectives regarding human sexuality, sexual orientation and faith in an atmosphere of honest and respectful listening
6. encourage congregations and presbyteries to share feedback with the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Justice Ministries Department of the Life and Mission Agency

In addition, an appendix to this document will provide a brief overview of other denominations' responses to the question of human sexuality. Understanding what our Canadian brothers and sisters have done in response to this subject may help us as we discern the work of the Holy Spirit in the PCC.

## How to Use this Study Guide

- The study guide is meant to be used widely within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, including in congregations, presbyteries and synods.
- In the presbytery setting, where many congregations gather representing different theological perspectives, it could be used by table groups in Bible study, theological reflection, or sharing circles (similar to that of the Assembly and outlined in the Experience chapter of this guide).
- In congregations, this guide could be used *by sessions* (or adapted as session starters over a period of time), *in Bible studies or small groups*, or adapted for use in youth groups or as the focus of *an intergenerational gathering*.
- The study guide can be used as a whole study over the course of six to eight sessions, or it might be useful as independent sections.
- Particularly, if groups are pressed for time, users should feel free to use whatever parts of the guide are most helpful in their own contexts.
  - Some congregations and presbyteries may be struggling with biblical interpretation of particular texts and may find the Scripture chapter the most helpful in their situation.
  - Others may struggle with a way to share experiences in an honest and authentic way and might find the Experience chapter the most helpful.
- The language of the study guide is designed to help all of us use and understand theological vocabulary that all people of the church need to know and feel comfortable with. The Bible study within the guide is designed to give necessary background for all interpreters of the scriptures.
- If leaders discern that the document is too long or too detailed for the groups that are using the resource, a supplemental document has been prepared. Leaders can choose to reproduce just this document for participants in a

group and use the study guide itself as a leader's guide. The supplemental document includes

- the Introduction
- handout summaries of the Scripture, Theology, and Biological and Psychological Studies chapters
- the Tradition chapter
- Scripture and Theology charts (3)
- discussion questions for each chapter
- the Glossary of Terms

The supplemental document may also be helpful if congregations or other groups have limited time to use the resources.

### A Note about the Acronym LGBTQ

On the whole, this study guide deals primarily with the issues of same-sex orientation, same-gender sexual relationships, and long-term, committed relationships between persons of the same sex. It also focuses on issues surrounding the question of gay and lesbian people and the office of minister of Word and Sacrament in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. In our society, persons who identify their sexuality as gay or lesbian are often described as LGBTQ. This acronym includes those who identify themselves as gay or lesbian, as well as those who identify as bisexual and transgender individuals. For full definitions of all of these terms please see the glossary included in this document (page 115). The overtures to the General Assembly that call upon the PCC to move toward full inclusion of all persons regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity are referring not only to gay and lesbian persons but to the whole LGBTQ community.

It is significant to note that conversation and study regarding persons who identify as bisexual or transgender are new additions to any official report of the PCC. The Church Doctrine Report on Human Sexuality (1994) and the Special Committee Report Re Sexual Orientation (2003) reflect on homosexual orientation and behaviour, but do not expand those categories to include a broader spectrum of sexuality, such as bisexual or transgender persons. Bisexual and transgender persons, along with heterosexual or homosexual persons, are capable of entering into committed, loving and mutual relationships with another human being. In this regard, the reflections here that explore the question of marriage pertain to all people. In the same way, reflections here on questions about ordination, on whether or not it is sinful for persons to act on their innate sexual attractions, and on appropriate sexual ethics for Christians pertain to all categories included in the LGBTQ acronym.

However, it is also important to note that for some, there are additional questions that might be asked about people who identify as bisexual or transgender or as the broader category of queer. On the issue of gender, these questions include whether one's gender (male or female) is essential to a person's identity at birth or if gender is *both* a God-given understanding of the self *as well as* a socially constructed reality. On the issue of sexuality, these questions include whether sexual attraction is confined to one sex or the other, or if it is possible to be attracted to both sexes. All of these questions point to a larger question about whether sexuality and gender are fixed and

unchanging features of a person's identity or if sexuality and gender are more fluid and complex categories that are shaped by many factors.

In the interest of having and fostering honest conversation, it must be noted that this study guide does not take up these larger questions. Hopefully, many parts of the study guide that refer to gay and lesbian persons refer also to the broader LGBTQ community, and the conversation and questions can pertain to people who experience their sexuality in a diversity of ways.

Pastorally the church has been clear: homophobia and any anger, hatred and acts of denigration toward gay and lesbian people should not be tolerated within a congregation or the greater community.<sup>1</sup> (See Appendix B on page 74 for a Summary of statements approved by General Assembly on homosexuality.) These statements are unequivocally understood to refer to the whole of the LGBTQ community of persons. The church must affirm its commitment to be a welcoming, nurturing, loving and supporting community, a true church family where all are welcomed, nurtured, loved and supported.<sup>2</sup> For LGBTQ persons who often face great struggle and sometimes harsh rejection from family and friends, the church has particular responsibility for compassionate, holistic pastoral care. This includes care for families of LGBTQ persons who may be struggling to understand or accept the sexual identity of one whom they love.

## Methodology

The study guide is based loosely on a historical method of theological reflection often credited to the Methodist Reformer, John Wesley. As such, it has been called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and invites Christians to examine issues of theological significance through the lenses of scripture, tradition, reason and experience. The 1994 Report on Human Sexuality used this framework as well.<sup>3</sup> Examining a theological topic from these multiple perspectives is not meant to dissect the topic into separate, equal pieces. Rather, it is a recognition that we need all of these perspectives in order to faithfully understand any significant topic. One might liken the method to looking at a precious jewel. By turning the jewel around, you can see the cuts and angles of the stone and appreciate the whole even more. (This method has been adopted by the preaching community as a sermon model as well, known as the Jewel Sermon.) Perhaps it would be helpful to understand scripture itself as the jewel and the topics of theology, science and tradition as different ways of engaging and understanding the scripture. In order to emphasize that all these angles should not be read in isolation from one another, this document seeks to highlight where the perspectives “cross over” or overlap with each other.

It is important to note that this method did not originate with Wesley. Wesley's methodology is a faithful witness to scripture. Indeed, the very writing of scripture itself involved the elements of tradition, reason and experience as well as developing understandings of who God is and who humanity is in relation to God (theology).

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1 (A&P 1985, p. 238–241, 31); (A&P 1994, p. 251–274, 56); (A&P 2003, p. 526–547, 26, 34, 37–41, 43–45).

2 (A&P 1994, p. 251–274, 56).

3 (A&P 1994, p. 251–254).

In this way, theology precedes scripture and also flows out of scripture. Categories of theology, such as creation and sin for example, have been employed in all our discussions about sexual orientation up to this point. For this reason, we are adding theology as its own separate category of consideration. As such, it is regarded as one more perspective in the discussion as a whole as we seek to understand human sexuality and sexual orientation in light of our faith in Jesus Christ. In addition, the Wesleyan model has been adapted to include the specific category of biological and psychological sciences instead of the more general category of reason. Generally reason points to areas of critical thought and reflection from disciplines outside of biblical scholarship and theology. In this study, the more narrow focus on biological and psychological studies more adequately reflects the work that has been done previously on this topic in the PCC.

### An Invitation to Prayer

Finally, this study guide is an invitation to prayer. Sometimes Presbyterians are the butt of jokes for being too “cerebral,” too much in our heads. Our pictures of John Calvin, the father of Presbyterianism, have carried over into the reputation of Presbyterians as stodgy, stern and serious. We joke, even among ourselves, that Presbyterians aren’t often “moved by the Spirit,” at least when it comes to demonstrative emotion, enthusiastic worship or spontaneous prayer. Of course, this is a stereotype, and like any stereotype, it is both true and a distortion of the truth.

The truth is that Presbyterians do value education, the life of the mind and decency and order. These are indeed God-given gifts. And at the same time, John Calvin and those who have followed in his thinking understand that all of those intellectual matters are also spiritual endeavors. That is, they require trust in the Holy Spirit and openness to movement of the Spirit. Presbyterians believe that study, critical thinking and informed conversation are not only important to the life of faith but are part of the practice of prayer.

When we pray, we listen for God and talk to God, and sometimes wrestle with God. We seek God’s will. We crave God’s wisdom. We search for the right path. In the PCC’s *A Catechism for Today*, prayer is described as “openness to the presence of God” (Question 127).

When we study, we are doing those exact same things.

In 1972, Fred Kaan wrote a hymn, which is #555 (Worship the Lord) in the Book of Praise. At the end of each verse, he includes the line, “worship and work must be one.” Study is hard work. Study is also crucial to mission. We study human sexuality and sexual orientation so that we can be the church of God – in word and action – as faithfully as possible. Prayer and study, worship and work go hand in hand.

It is our hope that this study guide will invite the church into prayerful consideration about how we can best be faithful when it comes to questions of human sexuality and sexual orientation. This study guide isn’t about an issue. It is about real people, real lives and a desire to be open to God’s presence and God’s calling to us as a church of Jesus Christ. Study and pray, pray and study. Let’s do both together and trust that in so doing, we will hear the voice of God.

# Listening Circles Group Guidelines

Adapted from "Vocation CARE:  
A Social and Spiritual Process for Discerning Christian Vocation"  
The Fund for Theological Education

- 1 Be fully present, extending and presuming welcome.**  
Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Welcome others into this story space and presume you are welcome as well.
- 2 Listen generously.**  
Listen intently to what is said; listen to the feelings beneath the words. As Quaker Douglas Steere writes, "To listen another's soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest gift we can offer to another."
- 3 Author your story.**  
We all have a story. Some might say, "I don't have a story" or "a story worth telling," but you do, and the world is in need of hearing it. You must claim authorship of your own story and learn to tell it to others so they might understand you, be inspired by you and discover what calls you to be who you are, to do what you do or to love what you love.
- 4 We come as equals.**  
We don't have the same gifts, limits or experiences, but no person's gifts, limits or experiences are more or less important than another's.
- 5 It is never "share or die."**  
You will be invited to share stories and comments in small groups. The invitation is exactly that. You will determine the extent to which you want to participate.
- 6 No fixing.**  
We are not here to set someone else straight, right a wrong or provide therapy. We are here to witness God's presence and movement in the sacred stories and comments we share.
- 7 Suspend judgment.**  
Set aside your judgments. By creating a space between judgments and reactions, we can listen to another person, and to ourselves, more fully.

## **8 Turn to wonder.**

If you find yourself becoming judgmental or cynical, try turning to wonder: “I wonder why she shared that story or made those choices?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me?” “I wonder what he’s feeling right now?”

## **9 Hold these stories and comments with care.**

There are many people who will benefit from the stories and comments they hear during our time together. Imagine hearing another as you would listen to scripture – attentively, mindfully and open to the Holy.

## **10 Be mindful and respectful of time.**

We all have something important to share, and the discipline of time invites us to focus and make particular choices about what to share and how much to share so that we might hear the deep longings of another’s soul.

## **11 Practice confidentiality care.**

We create a safe space by respecting the nature and content of the stories and comments heard. If anyone asks that a story or comment shared be kept in confidence, the group will honour that request.

## **12 Welcome discomfort and dislocation.**

In the midst of new and uncomfortable places and the company of strangers, move against an instinct to construct a mental space of safety or to check out. In what causes unease, see another world to be discovered. Perhaps it already lives secretly within you.

## **13 Love the questions themselves.**

Let your questions linger. Release the compulsion to answer them or to have them answered. Trust the questions to guide you toward loving first what you do not altogether understand. As the poet Rainer Maria Rilke says, “Have patience with all that remains unsolved within your heart.”

## **14 Believe that it is possible for us to emerge from our time together refreshed, surprised and less burdened than when we came.**

Expect that our work together can provide renewal, refreshment and possibilities for what we can do together to create the future that is waiting to be born, and that seeds planted here will keep growing and flourish in the days ahead in service to God’s church and renewing work in the world.

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# Scripture

## Read:

*Living Faith* 5.1 and 5.2

## Fear and Love:

Questions about human sexuality, sexual orientation and the church can bring up a lot of strong emotions, especially fear and love. People throughout our denomination are wondering if there is a conflict between loving and affirming LGBTQ persons and being faithful to the Bible. We may fear for ourselves or others. We may fear for the church. And we love the church and want to be loving toward others as we live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Tenets of the Reformed Tradition for Reading the Bible

- Jesus Christ is the Living Word, to whom the written word bears witness.
- The scriptures are the basis of all church doctrine.
- The Holy Spirit is needed to illumine the scriptures.
- All people have access to and can read and interpret the scriptures by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.
- The life of the mind is of high importance and value in Christian faith, which leads to a focus on educated clergy and educated laity.
- The community of faith is necessary for interpretation.
- The Holy Spirit's guidance can lead to a change in the way we read or interpret the scriptures.

## 1. Tools for Biblical Reading and Interpretation (read *Living Faith* 5.4)

### **"Minding the Gap" – The distance between us and the Bible is multi-layered**

- Time – a span of at least 1800 years.
- Language – none of the Bible was originally written in English or French or Korean! What we read is always a translation from a different language.
- Geographical place.
- Culture – cultural norms and values shift over time.

- Historical location – this includes social, economic, intellectual, technological and other knowledge and experience that is available to us, but wasn't to the writers of scripture (and vice versa)!

### Historical Context

- It is essential to note that whenever we read the Bible we do so experientially.
- Gender Roles and Understandings
  - In the ancient context, the household or family, rather than the individual, was the basic unit of society. In the biblical context, gender roles were more strictly adhered to and well-entrenched.
- Codes for Living
  - In every culture, there are spoken and unspoken rules for how people live their lives (for example, in our time, think of “the glass ceiling”).
  - Many ancient societies were based on codes of honour and shame. Honour could be inherited, acquired or lost. Honour was associated with characteristics thought to be embodied by the male gender, such as rationality, strength and self-control.

### The Texture and Movement of Scripture

- Scripture interprets scripture
  - It has long been a practice of biblical interpreters, both scholars and lay people, to use other scriptures to help interpret and understand difficult passages or subjects.
- The canon of scripture is not flat
  - There is movement within the Bible – different cultures and genres.
  - For Christian readers, there is also a trajectory through the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings of the Old Testament toward the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and beyond to the early church.
  - There is also the movement of the unfolding kingdom of God. In the scriptures, there is always a “time that is coming” and that indeed breaks in, occasionally, in the time that is. Our hope in that future informs and shapes how we understand the world today.
- The interpretive principle of love
  - How do we read biblical texts that uphold social practices we no longer endorse or that record episodes of violence, without endorsing violence or unjust practices?
  - People have struggled with this question for as long as they have been guided by scripture. The interpretive principle of love has long been offered as an appropriate response.
  - The greatest commandment: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “*You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:35–40)

## 2. The Specific Texts and What They Say: seven texts mention same-gender sexual activity

### Genesis 19:4–8 and Judges 19 – An Ultimate Crime Against Hospitality

- Both of these stories are texts of violence. The sexual activity that they refer to – both in terms of what is demanded and what is carried out – is violent, abusive, misogynistic and morally abhorrent. Most biblical scholars have argued that the primary evil in these two stories is that of violence, inhospitality and injustice. The previous reports of the PCC in 2003 and 1994 acknowledge this as well.

### Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 – The Levitical Law

- The Holiness Code is a term given to Leviticus 17–26, which is a comprehensive set of laws regarding every aspect of life. The laws are meant to allow people of faith to live in purity, in cleanliness and in proper relation to God, one another and the earth. The holiness code divides all things into two groups – what is holy and what is common, or profane. What is holy is generally what was clean, pure and whole. What was profane included anything unclean (polluted) or mixed (or mixed-up).
- On the whole, most scholars agree that through Jesus Christ the purity laws were set aside and are no longer considered binding on Christians.
- **True:** The rules about sexual purity are placed in the same category alongside other purity laws that are no longer relevant to us in the 21st century, such as the prohibition against mixing fabrics (cotton-polyester blends), consuming the blood of animals, and touching dead pig's skin (a football, for example).
- **False:** Modern Christians and Christian traditions have uniformly understood that all the laws in this section of the Holiness Code except the one regarding same-sex sexual activity are no longer applicable to Christian living today.
- Paul and the Levitical Law: Some Christians argue that the laws concerning same-sex activity belong to a different category (more enduring or transcendent, such as the Ten Commandments) than the purity laws. Other Christians argue that Paul's understanding of same-sex relationships remains culturally bound, similar to other laws in the Holiness Code.
- Jesus and the Torah: There is not a one-size-fits-all answer to how Jesus interprets the law.
- Jesus' treatment of the law is neither systematic nor comprehensive. The only place that Jesus addresses the whole of the law is when he is asked which is the greatest commandment.
- In Jesus Christ, God enters the profane, and the profane takes on holiness.

## 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and 1 Timothy 1:9–10 – Tricky Translations

- Presbyterians value the insight and depth that comes from being able to study the Bible in its original language. This is particularly helpful when there are difficult translations issues, such as in these two texts. Some Greek words to wrestle with:
  - *arsenokoitēs* (literally “male” and “bed”) – a compound of two words found in Leviticus. A very rare word that is difficult to translate
  - *malakos* (literally “soft”) – a widely used word that refers a broad category to things such as laziness, decadence, lack of courage, weakness, and in general anything feminine
  - *pornos* (male prostitute) and *andropodistēs* (“slave-trader” and refers to the practice of sexual slavery)
- All agree, however, that the terms are ambiguous and are difficult to translate accurately. Difference in interpretation is still hotly debated. There are also cultural issues at work here: do these words, when translated as “homosexual,” correspond to the way that we use that word in 21st century Canada?

## Romans 1:26–27 – A Debate about Natural vs. Unnatural

- Most sources from both sides recognize that the passage in Romans 1 is at the heart of the scriptural debate about homosexuality.
- The passage is set in a long argument about the universality of human sin, and this section focuses on idolatry and pagan worship practices.
- It is the only place where women are included in the discussion.
- See the Scripture Chart on page 94 for two readings of the text.

## 3. The Bible, Sexual Norms and Family Structures

- Normal vs. Normative in the Bible
  - “Normal” is **descriptive** of a practice *in a particular time and particular place* such as first century Palestinian culture or 21st century Canadian culture.
  - “Normative” is **prescriptive** and therefore is meant to apply a practice in a more universal way *for all times and all places*.
- Marriage – normal but not normative in the Bible
  - Marriage is not essential to Christian faith. A person is not more complete when married, rather than single. Like other God-given gifts, marriage is intended for the building up of the body of Christ and for the purpose of making the world a more loving, more just place.
- Celibacy – a spiritual gift that is given, rather than just a decision that is made
  - Celibacy in Paul’s writings
    - ◆ 1 Corinthians 7
  - Celibacy in church tradition
    - ◆ The Reformers rejected the idea that the celibate lifestyle is a purer or higher moral good.

- Celibacy and abstinence
  - ◆ Abstinence is refraining from sexual activity.
  - ◆ Celibacy is more than a call to repress sexual desires, but is also a commitment to set aside sexual desire entirely as an important component of a fulfilled and satisfying life.

## Diversity of Interpretation

- Consider this quotation from Wendy VanderWal-Gritter in her book *Generous Spaciousness*:

*“If individuals of differing perspectives are to find a way to listen well, extend respect, and embody the priority of peace-making over proselytizing, we will need to recognize the potential within our interpretive lenses for diversity. And we will need to refrain from automatically assuming that someone whose perspective differs from our own is failing to honor the authority of Scripture or submit to the lordship of Christ. Generous spaciousness humbly acknowledges our limitations and intentionally chooses a posture of listening and learning. It recognizes that among those who identify as followers of Jesus and have a high regard for Scripture, there are diverse perspectives on many different questions (including but not limited to the matter of same-sex sexuality) in regard to how to live as a faithful disciple of Christ. Despite those differences, generous spaciousness makes room for us to join in conversations together in a shared quest for a deeper and more robust relationship with Christ.”<sup>1</sup>*

- As we seek to interpret the scriptures, we will have to face the reality that we will not all agree on how they are best understood. We will continue to hold different, even opposite, opinions. The real question for us is whether we can offer those differing opinions to God, respect one another as each seeking to be faithful to Christ, and continue to be a community of disciples together in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

## Fear and Love

- All agree that the Bible does have significant things to say about sexual ethics, intimate relationships between human beings and healthy and life-giving understandings of sexuality within communities.
- We still disagree on what those specifically are, and perhaps we always will. But we need not fear that our Presbyterian brothers and sisters in faith are either “sticking with the Bible” or “rejecting the Bible.” Traditionalists and progressives both recognize the authority of the Bible.
- We are all wrestling with how to read the Bible faithfully. Perhaps if we can set this fear aside and listen to each other’s perspectives, we can live together in love and not fear.

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<sup>1</sup> VanderWal-Gritter, Wendy. *Generous Spaciousness: Responding to Gay Christians in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014), 167–168.

## Romans 1:26–27

The chart that follows is a synopsis of how people with different understandings of human sexuality and sexual orientation tend to interpret this text in Romans.<sup>37</sup> While certainly these categories are oversimplified, they seek to fairly represent a continuum of perspectives while highlighting the differences of interpretation. In an effort to name the two groups, those who think that same-gender relationships and sexual activity are prohibited by the Bible are called “traditionalists” and those who are in favour of full inclusion of LGBTQ persons and expanding the definition of marriage to include same-sex union are called “progressives.”<sup>38</sup> Within these two poles is a range of perspectives, which will be nuanced differently by different readers.

Users can read this chart in several ways. It might be helpful to think of it as an eye chart at the optometrist’s office. You can cover the right side of the chart and read down the rows. In doing so, you can see how a person who reads this text as a prohibition of same-sex relations interprets Romans 1. Then you can cover the left side of the chart and see how a person who has revisited the text in favour of same-sex relations interprets Romans 1. In addition, you can use the key words or themes on the far left side to help you understand how the different understandings compare on particular sections of Romans 1.

Key words or phrases	A Traditionalist Reading	A Progressive Reading
<b>natural and unnatural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Paul’s context, what is “natural” is aligned with God’s created intention for man and woman in sexual relationships.</li> <li>• “Natural” and “unnatural” in this passage are predominantly biological terms. “Natural” is in keeping with the will or intentions of God. “Unnatural” goes against the divine standard. Heterosexuality is understood as the natural sexual inclination of all human beings, as created by God.</li> <li>• In this reading, what is “natural” refers to God’s original design. What is “unnatural” goes against the creative intentions of God.</li> <li>• These categories are unchanging.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Paul’s context, what is “natural” is aligned with what is divine and true. Anything “unnatural” is aligned with idolatry, lies and uncontrolled lust. This is larger than sexual norms, yet includes them.</li> <li>• What is “natural” also includes social well-being and cultural norms. Something that is natural is “conventional.” Conventional includes sexual relationships, gender ideologies and how men and women conduct themselves in society, all of which are very different today than they were for Paul.<sup>39</sup></li> <li>• Progressives note that Paul does not always use the notion of what is “natural” to mean what is good. In other places (such as Ephesians 2), what comes naturally is a negative thing.<sup>40</sup> “Natural” is not a term that is synonymous with “the will of God.”</li> <li>• The categories of “natural” and “unnatural” are not fixed. Our understanding of how God’s will is shown to humanity within the natural order changes, grows and deepens over time.<sup>41</sup></li> </ul>

*chart continues on next page*

<sup>37</sup> The two main sources for these different readings are Stanley Grenz and James Brownson.

<sup>38</sup> It is difficult to know what language is best in this context. Susan Garrett’s work uses the terms “affirmers” (those who affirm same-sex unions) and “prohibitionists” (those who would prohibit same-sex unions). Others use “revisionists” versus “traditionalists.” All of these terms are somewhat problematic, and carry some negative connotations.

<sup>39</sup> Brownson, 234–237.

<sup>40</sup> Brownson, 227.

<sup>41</sup> Brownson, 247.

## Scripture Chart

Romans 1 chart continued

Key words or phrases	A Traditionalist Reading	A Progressive Reading
<b>inner disposition</b>	Paul does not have individuals in mind in this text. Therefore, his argument is not against people going against “their” natural sexual functioning, but rather against “the” natural sexual functioning. <sup>42</sup> His argument is wider in scope than a person’s natural tendencies. “Natural” and “unnatural” are not relative terms, but part of the created order.	By looking at various biblical usages of the word, “natural,” one can argue that “naturally” can refer to “one’s own individual nature.” Paul could be interpreted then to be arguing that one’s God-given identity includes what “comes naturally” to an individual. In our current context, we now understand that a person’s sexual orientation is something that “comes naturally” to them. While Paul might not have had this modern understanding of sexuality as an individual’s natural disposition, the concept of nature as inner disposition is present in Paul’s use of the word and concept and can be applied in a new way to a different understanding of sexuality than what was available to Paul himself.
<b>degrading</b>	The use of words and phrases such as degrading or dishonourable, “consumed with passion” and shameless emphasize the strength of Paul’s convictions on this subject.	The word “degrading” can also be translated as “dishonourable.” In this case, rationality (associated with male gender roles) is taken over by passions (associated with a less honourable disposition and with a female gender role). A male who behaves in a way that does not conform to the societal norms of his gender (rational, dominant, honourable and moderate) is behaving in a degrading way.
<b>consumed with passion</b>	Someone who is “consumed with passion” indicates a person whose sexual appetite is not satisfied with accepted male-female relationships. These individuals have an undisciplined sex drive and seek to satisfy their desires through sexual perversion (anything outside of “natural” male-female sexual relations).	Passion in the first century context, as opposed to the 21st century is more often negative than positive. It is something that stands in contrast to moderation and rationality. Uncontrolled passion is associated with excess, lust, lack of control and self-centredness. While we in the 21st century have a different usage and positive understanding of the word “passion,” Christian sexual ethics for both heterosexuals and homosexuals would guard against these same characteristics (excess, lust, lack of control and self-centredness).
<b>women</b>	The fact that women are included in this specific passage of scripture in the context of same-sex sexual activity puts lesbian sexual activity on par with gay sexual activity. While there is acknowledgment that Paul does not specifically define the term “natural intercourse,” it can be rightfully be assumed that this is a straight-forward reference to heterosexual activity. Therefore, “unnatural intercourse” in this context points to the opposite, which is same-sex sexual activity.	Understanding women’s role in sexual relationships in Paul’s cultural context is crucial to interpreting the text that says women exchanged “natural intercourse for unnatural.” Any engagement in sexual activity that was not procreative or in which the woman took a dominant role would be considered “unnatural” in Paul’s cultural context. While “unnatural” is a term that could be used in the ancient world for same-gender sexual activity, it also could refer to a much wider number of sexual behaviours. <sup>43</sup> In addition, many of the roles we consider appropriate for women in sexual relationships, as well as society in general (including education and leadership) would contradict what was deemed “natural” for women of the first century.

<sup>42</sup> Grenz, 49.

<sup>43</sup> Brownson, 225.

### 1. Tools for Biblical Reading and Interpretation

1. Name one idea in this section that you found helpful. Why? What did you find most challenging. Why?
2. What does the phrase “faithful interpretation of the Bible” mean for you?
3. Share an example of a time when you read a scripture passage that seemed to be speaking directly to you.
4. Share an example of a time when a Bible study or sermon helped you understand a passage of scripture in a new way. What helped you understand it differently?

### 2. The Specific Texts and What They Say: seven texts mention same-gender sexual activity

#### Old Testament

1. How do you understand the law (such as the Holiness Code in Leviticus 17–20) in connection with your own Christian faith?
2. After examining these Old Testament texts that speak to same-gender sexual activity, what is your dominant impression? What is clarifying? What is challenging? What is distressing?

#### New Testament (see chart on Romans 1, page 94)

1. After reading the summary of the traditionalist interpretation of Romans 1, what is clarifying? What is challenging?
2. After reading the summary of the progressive interpretation of Romans 1, what is clarifying? What is challenging?
3. What common ground, if any, do you see in these two perspectives?
4. How does having some background regarding the seven texts that reference same-gender sexual activity help your understanding of our church’s conversation about this matter?

### 3. The Bible, Sexual Norms and Family Structures

1. Understandings of family structures, including marriage and celibacy, have differed and shifted through time and between different cultures. What are some of our understandings of family structure today in Canada? What are some of the strengths and the challenges that come with different kinds of family structures in our society?
2. How can we as Presbyterians disagree about how we interpret the scriptures and still remain together as a unified church? What other subjects can you think of where we disagree on how to interpret scripture across our denomination?
3. What other biblical texts or stories, beyond those that specifically mention same-sex sexual activity, should we consider when discussing the issues of human sexuality, sexual orientation and sexual ethics (in relation to both marriage and ordination standards) that are before us as a church? (For example: Luke 15:11–32, 1 John 4:16–21, 1 Corinthians 5–7, Galatians 3. You might want to use these as a beginning and come up with your own as well.)

# Theology

## What is Theology?

- Theology is a kind of bridge from the scriptures and their ancient contexts to the church of the 21st century and our context. Theology allows us to read specific texts of the Bible as well as reading the Bible as a whole.

## Creation (Genesis 1–2)

- The creation texts found in Genesis 1–2 play a foundational role in understanding God’s relationship to human beings and how humans relate to each other. Included in these foundational texts are understandings of gender and sexuality.
- The creation stories are meant to teach us enduring truths about God and human beings, and about our relationships to each other and to the rest of the created world.
- See the Theology Chart on page 101 for traditional and progressive readings of the creation stories.

## Covenant

- Christians understand God as a God of covenant. A covenant can be understood as a promise within the context of a relationship. (See Genesis 17:7 and Exodus 6:7.)
- It is within an understanding of covenant that the law comes into being. The covenant governs the intentions and actions of those who are part of it. The covenant can be broken or confirmed.
- Covenants can be renewed and re-imagined. (See Jeremiah 31:33 and Luke 22:20.)
- The early church understands itself as descendants of the covenant that God first established with Abraham, transformed and renewed through the life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- While human beings break covenant (with God and each other) regularly, this stands in stark contrast to the character and actions of God. As people of faith, we seek to model our relationships on the relationship that God has established with us.

## Sin and Grace

- Sin might best be described as that condition which separates or alienates us from each other and from God.
- Sin is broken covenant with God and with other human beings. Sin might be described as a lack of harmony between human beings, between humans and God, between human beings and the creation itself, or even the conflict that often goes on within our own hearts. (See Genesis 3.)
- Sin is everywhere – all human structures, institutions and relationships. Personal sin – what individuals do or do not do – is part of sin, but one part of the larger understanding of sin. Sin is a condition. It encompasses all of us, it has consequences for all of us, and we can see its effects in our lives. We are complicit in this web of sin. Every day we both participate in it and perpetuate it by what we do or don't do. Sin is about the state in which we live, until God's grace burns through it.
- Grace, simply put, is the unmerited favour, goodwill, benevolence and approval of God.
- We cannot earn the favour of God through good works or any other means. We do not woo God into being kind to us or judging us with mercy. Grace is God's initiative.
- Review the flow chart on human sexuality, sexual orientation and sin.

## Baptism

- Baptism is one of two sacraments in the Presbyterian Church. A sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace. A sacrament is an action initiated by Jesus Christ as a reminder and a sign of the covenantal relationship between God and human beings.
- Having been marked by God, as God's own beloved child, we become part of the family of faith and the household of God.
- Baptism reminds us that God claimed and chose us first.
- In the church, we understand baptism as the beginning of a new life in Christ, wherein we can become fully the person that God created us to be. Baptism is the beginning of a journey toward wholeness, as we discover our true identity in Christ. This is an individual journey, but we journey together, as members of God's own family.

## The Church (Ecclesiology)

- The Greek word *ecclesia*, that we translate as “church,” assumes a diversity of people, and indeed the early church included people from all different socio-economic levels of society, men and women, Gentile and Jew, slaves and free, people of high status and outcasts.
- The other earliest descriptor of the Christian church, found in the book of Acts, is *hodos*, which is translated “the Way.”
- Certainly this understanding of the church is a people who are on a journey and who are travelling together.
- If you put these two earliest descriptions of the church side by side, you can get a sense of the intended nature of God’s church. It is about people, not buildings. It is dynamic, not static.
- Calvin teaches that there is the visible church that we see with our eyes and also the invisible church that God alone knows.
- God desires unity, not uniformity. From the first accounts of the creation of the world, we can see that God values a rich assortment of different kinds of creatures, vegetation and people whom God claims in covenantal bonds. Through the interactions of Jesus, we can see that Jesus values people of both genders, of different races and of different experiences. From the story of the birth of the church at Pentecost, we can see the Holy Spirit’s drive toward reaching out to different languages, cultures and peoples.
- Being with like-minded people in an atmosphere where people generally have similar opinions, particularly on matters of deep emotion or high controversy, is much more comfortable for everyone.
- It is undeniable that God continually calls for unity in the church. But unity cannot be understood as a church where disagreement is absent.
- On the issues of human sexuality and sexual orientation, there is no question that diverse and even conflicting perspectives are present in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The real question that remains is whether we can maintain unity in the midst of our diversity or not.

## Genesis 1 and 2

The chart that follows is a synopsis of how people with different understandings of human sexuality and sexual orientation tend to think about the theology of creation. While certainly these categories are oversimplified, they seek to fairly represent a continuum of perspectives while highlighting the differences of interpretation. In an effort to name the two groups, those who are in favour of full inclusion of LGBTQ persons and expanding the definition of marriage to include same-sex union are called “progressives” and those who think that same-gender relationships and sexual activity are prohibited by the Bible are called “traditionalists.”<sup>1</sup> Within these two poles is a range of perspectives, which will be nuanced differently by different readers.

Users can read this chart in several ways. It might be helpful to think of it as an eye chart at the optometrist’s office. You can cover the right side of the chart and read down the rows. In doing so, you can see how a person who advocates for the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons understands the creation story. Then you can cover the left side of the chart and see how a person who reads the text in a traditional way understands the creation story. In addition, you can use the subject headings on the far left side to help you understand how the different understandings compare on particular sections of Genesis 1 and 2.

Key words or phrases	A Progressive Reading	A Traditionalist Reading
<p><b>The creation of human beings</b>  <b>Genesis 1:27</b>  <b>Genesis 2:7, 22</b></p>	<p>Progressives tend to read the creation stories with an understanding that God created male and female simultaneously in the first account of creation (as in Genesis 1:27). In the second account of creation (Genesis 2:7), God created the first human being out of the earth, not as a person specifically of the male gender, but as a creature of the earth. The Hebrew word translated “man” in Genesis 1 is “<i>adam</i>” and the Hebrew word for earth or dust is “<i>adama</i>.”<sup>2</sup> So “<i>adam</i>” is literally an earthling, not a particular gender.<sup>3</sup></p>	<p>Traditionalists understand that in chapter 1 God created both male and female in God’s image. Chapter 2 expands that story with the understanding that man was formed first and then humanity was completed with the forming of woman.</p>
<p><b>“It is not good that the man should be alone.”</b>  <b>Genesis 2:18</b></p>	<p>God realized that it was not good for the creature of the earth, made in God’s image, to be alone. None of the animals that God had made were sufficient to be a companion for the human being. So God created another human being from the first, for companionship, as a life mate, who shares the same flesh and bone. The terms “man” (<i>ish</i>) and “woman” (<i>isha</i>) are then introduced into the text. The two human beings do not complete one another, in the sense that the male needs the female to be whole, or vice versa. They are equally made in the image of God independently of one another.</p>	<p>In the chapter 2 expansion, the good of 1:27 is tempered by the “not good for the man to be alone.” Nothing yet created was sufficient to satisfy this aloneness. So, from the man, God created woman to be the man’s helper or partner in a way that no other creature could. The female as “helper” or partner is a divine gift. Male and female, while understood by many traditionalists as equal, are often regarded as different reflections of the divine image.</p>

*chart continues on next page*

1 It is difficult to know what language is best in this context. Susan Garrett’s work uses the terms “affirmers” (those who affirm same-sex unions) and “prohibitionists” (those who would prohibit same-sex unions). Others use “revisionists” versus “traditionalists.” All of these terms are somewhat problematic, carrying negative connotations for some over others.

2 Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:7, 20.

3 Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 149–152. Taylor interprets the Hebrew text here and refers to “*adam*” as an earthling, a mud-baby, a dirt-person, a dust-creature, whom God breathed into and it became a living being. God created earth and earthlings to tend the earth. In examining the spiritual practice of physical labour that brings human beings back into relationship with the stuff of earth, Taylor invokes this imagery saying, “Welcome home, you beloved dirt-person of God.”

Genesis 1 and 2 chart continued

Key words or phrases	A Progressive Reading	A Traditionalist Reading
<p><b>“cling to each other and become one flesh”</b> <b>Genesis 2:24</b></p>	<p>Human beings have an intense need to be in meaningful relationship with one another. This quest is in response to a feeling of loneliness. While this idea of becoming “one flesh” has been used to express the commitment of a marriage between one man and one woman, this language primarily refers to a new primary kinship bond.<sup>4</sup> This kind of lifelong kinship bond could extend to other relationships beyond one man and one woman in marriage and still remain faithful to the intentions of God’s creation and human beings’ need for one another in intimate and kindred relationships.</p>	<p>For Traditionalists, this language speaks specifically to a sexual union between a man and a woman. It is applied primarily to the covenant of marriage of a man and a woman. The quest of the man for a woman, and vice versa, is understood by some traditionalists as the quest for completeness. It is often also expanded to speak of the bonding of two persons in “heart and soul” so that each not only becomes more whole or complete in relationship with the other, but by mutual self-giving they become one.</p>
<p><b>Gender Complementarity</b> <b>Genesis 1:27</b> <b>Genesis 2:23</b></p>	<p>Progressives believe that the idea of gender complementarity is not inherent in the creation stories, but is a later idea added into the text.<sup>5</sup> The bonding of the male and female is a covenantal, unitive kinship, linking two families and creating a new family. In addition, the Genesis accounts do not emphasize the <i>difference</i> between the man and woman so much as the <i>similarity</i> between them.<sup>6</sup> The male finds in the woman someone similar to himself (unlike anything else in creation), which enables an intimate relationship that involves sexual union. This is not to say that male and female do <i>not</i> complement each other. However, it also does not rule out the possibility that two different people of the same sex have complementary aspects.</p>	<p>Traditionalists understand the accounts of creation in chapters 1 and 2 to present a divine design of gender complementarity. This view emphasizes that there are inherent and intended differences in man and woman, though both reflect the divine image. Genesis teaches that the similarity of the human being with God is only found in the association of the man and the woman and not in each one taken separately. As such, they are able to complete one another (fit together to form one flesh) in ways no other creature can. This can be understood in anatomical or biological terms as well as in social and spiritual terms. For many traditionalists, this concept of gender complementarity involves the roles that men and women play in society, the church and particularly in family structures. Furthermore, some of these traditionalists assert that these gender roles, while both valuable, ought to remain distinct from one another.</p>
<p><b>Procreation</b> <b>Genesis 1:28</b></p>	<p>God gives the blessings of procreation, “Be fruitful and multiply,” not only to the human beings of creation, but to all the creatures of creation. Procreation is one of many purposes for human marriage and the mandate for a lifelong kinship bond. However, procreation is neither the sole purpose nor an essential component of marriage. The primary reason for marriage is faithful love and care for two partners in unitive, intimate relationship to one another and for the greater good of society.</p>	<p>Procreation and the responsibility to nurture children is understood as one of the primary reasons for marriage. Marriage, as an exclusive bond between a man and a woman, is often celebrated by sexual intercourse that leaves open the possibility for new life. This creation mandate is often developed with other parts of scripture with regard to sexual intercourse within marriage and family life in general.</p>
<p><b>Genesis in relation to the rest of the canon of scripture</b></p>	<p>Progressives understand the creation stories as setting the stage for the relationship between God and humanity and between human beings. All of the relationships cited in these stories grow, change and deepen in a variety of ways throughout the canon of scripture, as God interacts with the covenant community of Israel, individuals and the church.</p>	<p>Traditionalists see Genesis 1 and 2 as God’s design of a “sexual-ethical paradigm” for all times and places. As such, it is a divine pattern that is enduring for humanity. This design understands sexuality as “consistently gendered, complementarian, procreative and marital.”</p>

4 Brownson, 86. For example, Ruth clings to Naomi, her mother-in-law, thus forming a new primary kinship bond (Ruth 1:14).

5 Garrett.

6 Brownson, 30.

## Tracing Different Pathways

Throughout our history, there have been many debates in the church about whether sexuality and sexual activity itself is sinful or not and in what contexts sexuality ought to be expressed. One focus of this particular conversation is whether homosexuality and homosexual activity is necessarily sinful or is not, when practiced within mutual and committed relationships. There are different theological perspectives on this topic with the PCC. And the PCC has made certain statements over the last 20 years that have been approved by the General Assembly.

The flow chart on the following page is designed to help people do a few things:

1. See the current position of the PCC regarding sin and homosexuality.
2. Help participants examine their own theological understandings and positions by answering questions and following them to potential conclusions.
3. Show that there are various understandings of sin and homosexuality AND that those diverse understandings include the possibility of reaching a similar conclusion.



### Story: Life and Faith Get Complicated

1. How do you respond to the story of Katherine and Tim?
2. Why do questions about our sexual identity sometimes feel different or more difficult than other aspects of our identity?
3. How do you think this story ends? What are some possible faithful responses and outcomes of this story for the daughter? For Katherine and Tim? For the other siblings in the story?

### Creation

1. After reading the summary of the traditionalist interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2, what is clarifying? What is challenging?
2. After reading the summary of the progressive interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2, what is clarifying? What is challenging?
3. What are some key ideas that are important to you in your understanding of creation in relationship to human sexuality?

### Covenant

1. In contemporary Canada, how does the understanding and practice of marriage:
  - a. reflect the covenantal promise and relationship with God outlined above?
  - b. differ from the concepts of covenant outlined above?
2. How, if at all, would an affirmation of same-sex marriage affect your understanding of marriage as a covenant?
3. Covenant life in the church and legal life in society are not always identical. As a result, how, if at all, should the understanding and practice of marriage in the PCC be different from that of society in general?

## Sin and Grace (see Flow Chart: Tracing Different Pathways on page 103)

1. Where do you find yourself on this flow chart? Try to trace a path different from your own. Try to see the issues of sexual orientation and ordination from that other perspective. What makes you feel uncomfortable and why?
2. Notice that the chart allows people who believe that homosexual activity *is* a sin and people who believe that homosexual activity *is not* a sin to reach the same conclusions. How can Christians have different opinions about whether specific behaviours are sinful and still be unified?
3. Theologian David Gushee talks about the need for sinful human sexuality (both heterosexual and homosexual orientations) to come under the “discipline of covenant.” What does that mean?

## Baptism

1. In this section, baptism is defined as “the beginning of a journey toward wholeness, as we discover our true identity in Christ.” How is our understanding of sexual orientation a part of the journey toward wholeness for ourselves both as individuals and collectively as a gathered, worshipping people of God?
2. Given the vows we take as a congregation at a person’s baptism, what is the church’s role when a baptized person comes out as an LGBTQ person? How could a congregation help foster dialogue to promote mutual listening, respect and understanding?

## The Church

1. Share an example from your own experience of how members of a congregation are able to disagree and yet continue to work together in the church.
2. Reflect on an experience of division, such as when someone or some group has left the congregation. Might there have been a way to maintain unity in the midst of disagreement?
3. It is highly unlikely that all members of the PCC will reach a common understanding on the matters before us of human sexuality and sexual orientation. Try to imagine some creative ways that we can maintain our unity and disagree on these matters.

# Tradition

## A coffee shop conversation:

Our church is talking about homosexuality again.

Again?

Yup.

Seems like everyone is talking about it. All. The. Time.

It's important to talk about it. Look at what is happening all around us. The church is out of sync with society.

I think we've said enough. The church has made a statement.

Um...er...  
I'm not exactly sure.

I'm not sure either.  
Gotta run.

## A person overhearing the conversation:

I wonder what church they go to? My denomination is talking about that too.

Wouldn't it be good if we could all talk to each other about our faith and human sexuality?

Excuse me, what does your church say about homosexuality and the church?

Hmmm...  
I wonder what my denomination says...

## PRAYERS FROM THE 141<sup>ST</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Dear God, we, your people, want to abide in you and want your words to abide in us, so that you can bring healing to our church family.

Dear God, we lay our concerns and anxieties about our future as a Presbyterian Church before you for your guidance and direction for us.

Compassionate God, we face our future seeking your wisdom and grace to quiet the fears of the unknown. Give us courage and strength for the journey ahead of us all.

### A Chicken and Egg Game

Before the Protestant Reformation, people of faith looked to the tradition of the church for the most authoritative statement on any particular issue or practice. The church was the institution gifted with the ability to read the Bible and offer interpretation. The church leaders were often the most educated people in the community – often among the few who could actually read the Bible (especially since it was only available in Latin!). If you wanted to know what the Bible said about something or what it meant, you looked to what the church and the tradition said, and did that. The church interpreted the scripture.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers asserted that this was all wrong. The scripture, they said, shapes and forms the church. The church was answerable to the scripture and not the other way around. If you want to know what the Bible says about something or what it means, you read the Bible. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with the community of faith, you interpret it together. The scripture has authority over the church, and not the other way around.

### The Power and Wisdom of Tradition

The power of the tradition – the practices, interpretations and beliefs – handed down to us by those who have gone before us in faith is strong. This is true in positive ways that help us maintain continuity throughout the generations of faithful Christians. Tradition keeps us grounded and rooted in ways that serve us well. Tradition can remind us of who we are and where we come from. Tradition can also have the power to keep us from change. How many churches hold certain events, follow certain practices and use certain decorations for the holidays because “we have always done it this way” or because someone’s great grandfather or mother started it? Tradition can be emotional and influential.

The wisdom of the tradition – the careful and faithful discernment of our church mothers and fathers – is important. If we cannot trust their judgment and build on

what they believed, the church could not exist. God often uses tradition to teach and guide us, especially in uncertain times. In addition, tradition is, as the writers of the 1994 Church Doctrine Report on Human Sexuality noted, “a living, dynamic thing and not simply the dead hand of the past” (A&P 1994, 251–274).

## Building on the Work of Others

On the issue of human sexuality and sexual orientation, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has done a lot of good, faithful, prayerful and often painstaking work. Each committee and statement has built upon the others. Many General Assemblies have prayed, deliberated and voted on matters of human sexual ethics and sexual orientation. It is important to honour that work, as well as build on it.

What follows is a summary of The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s current position on sexual orientation, ministry and ordination, same-sex marriage and other related matters, highlighting main points and transitions based on approved reports to GA from 1969 to 2005. (See Appendix B on page 74.)

**Q: Is same-sex attraction, or orientation, a sin according to the PCC?**

**A:** No.

**Q: Is one’s sexual orientation a lifestyle choice?**

**A:** No. Scientific evidence has shown that one’s sexual orientation is innate, established early in life, rather than a lifestyle choice.

**Q: Is homosexual practice a sin according to the PCC?**

**A:** Yes. Scripture treats same-sex activity as a departure from God’s created order.

**Q: What does the PCC say about homophobia?**

**A:** In 1985, the PCC stated that homophobia is a form of hatred and the church stands in opposition to it. In 1994, the PCC called the whole church to repent of its homophobia and hypocrisy. Anger, hatred and acts of denigration toward gay and lesbian people should not be tolerated within a congregation or the greater community.

**Q: Are gay and lesbian people welcome to join the PCC?**

**A:** Yes, the PCC affirms that the church is called to be a place where all are welcomed, nurtured, loved and supported. There is no barrier to membership for persons from the LGBTQ community.

**Q: What leadership roles can a LGBTQ person have in the PCC?**

**A:** The church does not limit the roles of its members on the basis of their sexual orientation. These roles include church school teachers, musicians, youth leaders, ruling elders, teaching elders and members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries.

- Q: Can a homosexual person be ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments or designated to the Order of Diaconal Ministry in the PCC?**  
**A:** Yes, if that person is celibate and non-practicing. Neither scripture nor church prohibits ordination based on same-sex attraction or orientation.
- Q: Can a *practicing* homosexual person or an LGBTQ person in a same-sex relationship be ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments or designated to the Order of Diaconal Ministry in the PCC?**  
**A:** No.
- Q: Does the PCC believe that a person's sexual orientation can be changed?**  
**A:** No.
- Q: Does the PCC endorse programs that claim to change or "heal" a person's same-sex attraction?**  
**A:** No. The PCC cannot see any scriptural, scientific or pastoral basis for such programs.
- Q: What kind of pastoral care should sessions offer to those dealing with sexual issues?**  
**A:** Sessions should provide support groups as requested and provide help for individuals and/or their family members who are facing sexual discrimination, support for parents whose children are gay or lesbian, and care for all those who have been victims of sexual abuse.
- Q: What is the definition of marriage in the PCC?**  
**A:** The PCC states that a marriage is the union of a man and a woman.
- Q: Does the PCC allow public worship services blessing same-sex relationships or same-sex marriages?**  
**A:** No.
- Q: Can a minister of the PCC officiate at same-sex marriages?**  
**A:** No.

### Discussion Questions

1. In this chapter, some information regarding the PCC's present teaching about human sexuality and sexual orientation is provided. Given the passage of time since the last report on human sexuality and sexual orientation was adopted by our denomination, what other questions might you like to see added to this list?
2. Have you ever had a discussion about same-sex marriage and/or sexual orientation with others from different church backgrounds than your own? Recall how this discussion unfolded. What did you learn from this discussion?

# Biological and Psychological Studies

“I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139:14)

## Church and Culture

- A common worry across the church on matters of sexual orientation and same-sex marriage is: Is the church just doing what culture is doing? Shouldn't the church lead the culture on moral issues, rather than the other way around?
- Studies of church and culture have shown that the relationship between church and culture is complex and doesn't always work in one direction.

## Science and Faith

- The 1994 Report on Human Sexuality says that “*science can provide valuable information and concepts which must be taken into account in articulating a theology of sexuality...*” but “*they cannot in themselves determine in any final way the criteria on which our ethical decisions should be based.*”
- Science has a role in informing decisions of Christian ethics. It has influence on how we read the scriptures, our theology and how we understand the world in which we live.
- From the perspective of the Reformed tradition: critical thinking and faith ought never to be in contradiction with one another.
- The 2003 Report of the Special Committee re Sexual Orientation says, “*For Christians the Bible is the ultimate authority in matters of faith, but not the ultimate authority in matters of science. However we need not see science and the Bible as being at odds with one another, but view the relationship as a friendly one.*”

## A Note about Sexuality and Identity

- Throughout this study guide, there has been an emphasis on sexual orientation versus sexual activity. The difference between these two categories is an important part of the debate about how the church might proceed in terms of full inclusion or the continuation of the current church position.
- It has been argued that a person's sexuality, while being only one part of a person's identity, affects how we experience the world generally in emotional, cognitive, spiritual and relational ways.

## Biological Studies

### Biology and Theology

- Biological studies have helped Christians understand and worship God better. God's creation of such intricate, delicate and strong bodies and brains is mind-boggling.
- Sometimes biological studies clarify and allow us to interpret the Bible more faithfully. For example, in both the Old and New Testaments, a woman's inability to conceive was understood as the fault of the woman and was considered a curse or a punishment. Scientific understanding of human reproduction as well as male and female contributions to conception has led Christians to a different theological understanding of childlessness.

### Biology and Gender

- Sometimes biological studies can add more questions about how we interpret the Bible for sexual ethics. For example, we tend to think of biological sex as binary – a person is either male or female. It has become clear that there are biological variations on sex, most notably androgynous persons. This kind of biological variance can raise theological questions about gender, birth and creation.

### Biology and Choice

- While the science is complex and not everything is fully understood, science concludes that there is biological basis for sexual orientation, while leaving room for environmental and social factors.
- After reviewing biological studies, and recognizing that there is not complete clarity from scientific studies, the 2003 Report of the Special Committee re Sexual Orientation that was adopted by General Assembly affirmed that sexual orientation is “innate, established early in life, and not a matter of choice.”

## Psychological Studies

### Psychological Studies and Sexual Orientation

- The decriminalization of homosexual acts (1969) and the removal of homosexuality and transgender from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (1974) have influenced theological thinking and understanding. The 2003 Special Report on Sexual Orientation, which was approved by the General Assembly, concluded that homosexual orientation is not a sin.

### Psychological Studies and LGBTQ Youth at Risk

- Organizations such as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) have recognized in recent years that LGBTQ youth, in particular, are at higher risks for bullying, depression, anxiety and suicide than their straight peers. In addition, LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the homeless youth population.
- Some studies have shown that LGBTQ youth from homes with strong moral codes and expectations, which are most often religious households, are somewhat more likely to face rejection or ostracism from their parents.
- However, it is also true that families who embrace Christian faith and teach it to their children often have a great gift for love and resilience that allows for acceptance and support in as great or greater measure than other families.
- These kinds of studies cause us to pause and consider how our faith affects the way we relate and respond to each other when our moral convictions clash with the experiences of those whom we love.
- These issues speak to the church's role and responsibility in caring for people and their families who face LGBTQ issues of sexuality and identity.
- How we respond to teenagers in our churches who identify as LGBTQ is related to our baptismal vows. If teenagers cannot find their place in our communities of faith, in ways that not only tolerate but also value who they understand themselves to be, the rejection that they experience from their own family or their family of faith can easily be construed *by them* as rejection by God.
- Faith must meet these young people where they are and actively engage with the real experiences they are facing. What the church says and understands about these experiences is important and deserves careful and thoughtful communication as young people make decisions about their own sense of belonging and commitment to a congregation and a denomination.

# Biological and Psychological Studies

## Discussion Questions

### Church and Culture, Science and Faith, Sexuality and Identity

1. After reading the discussion about church and culture, what do you find clarifying? What do you find challenging?
2. VanderWal-Gritter says that sexuality shapes or impacts how we experience the world through things like music, art, friendship and family relationships. Reflect on how that has been part of your life experience.
3. How does your own experience of sexuality and gender influence how you identify yourself? Imagine having a different sexual orientation than your own or being a different gender. What features of your identity change when you imagine yourself differently?

### Biological Studies

1. The diversity of genders is well documented in biological studies. This diversity is not mentioned at all in biblical accounts of the creation in Genesis. How do we account for such diversity as we look through the lens of faith? What other scientific things are not specifically mentioned in the Bible, but are understood by contemporary Christians as part of God's creation?
2. In your own theological thinking, what difference, if any, does it make that biological studies have indicated that sexual orientation is not a choice?

### Psychological Studies

1. How does statistical information like this affect the way we address the concerns of LGBTQ teens and their families within the church?
2. What are some ways the church might respond in light of such concerns?
3. Ask a young person in your family or congregation what he or she sees, hears, or experiences in their school community in regards to students who identify as LGBTQ. How does our faith affect how we respond to what we see, hear and experience in such situations?

# Glossary of Terms

This glossary is intended to provide concise explanations of some of the terms used in this study guide and is not intended to be comprehensive either in its choice of terms or in its definitions.

**abstinence** – the habit or practice of refraining from sexual activity.

**affirming** – (of a church or other faith community) fully accepting of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity; making no distinction among people based on sex, gender, orientation or sexual practice. [see *welcoming*]

**androgynous** – (of a person) **a.** having some or all of the physical or social characteristics of men and women. People with both male and female sex organs were formerly called hermaphrodites. **b.** neither male nor female.

**bisexual** – (used to describe a person) sexually attracted to both women and men; neither heterosexual nor homosexual.

**celibacy** – the practice of committed abstinence from marriage and from sexual activity as a religious discipline.

**eunuch** – (historically) a man who had been castrated, usually early in life, so that his hormonal development was altered and he did not develop masculine traits.

**full inclusion** – the fact or condition of being fully accepting of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, or of making no distinction among people based on sex, gender, orientation or sexual practice. Within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, this is generally understood to mean allowing both same-sex marriage and the ordination of practicing LGBTQ persons to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments.

**gay** – **a.** (used to describe a person) sexually attracted to people of the same sex; (used to describe sexual activity) occurring between people of the same sex; homosexual. **b.** (used to describe a man) sexually attracted to other men; (used to describe sexual activity) occurring between men.

**gender** – the traits or characteristics that are determined culturally or socially because of a person's sex; a person's masculinity or femininity. [see *sex*]

**gender complementarity** – the belief that men and women are essentially different from one another, both anatomically and socially, and that each gender complements or makes up for deficiencies in the other.

**heteronormativity** – the belief that people can be divided into two complementary genders, male and female, with each gender having its own natural roles, and that the only normal sexual orientation is heterosexual.

**heterosexual** – (used to describe a person) sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex; (used to describe sexual activity) occurring between people of different sexes.

**homosexual** – (used to describe a person) sexually attracted to people of the same sex; (used to describe sexual activity) occurring between people of the same sex.

**intersex** – (of a person) **a.** having some or all of the physical or social characteristics of men and women. People with both male and female sex organs were formerly called hermaphrodites. **b.** neither male nor female.

**lesbian** – (used to describe a woman) sexually attracted to other women; (used to describe sexual activity) occurring between women.

**LGBTQ** – an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. The LGBTQ community, broadly speaking, can be said to include anyone who is not heterosexual.

**practicing** – (used to describe a person, especially one who is not heterosexual) sexually active; not celibate.

**progressive** – (used to describe a reading or an interpretation) relying on new or different cultural, linguistic or literary evidence, different from the previously common interpretation; (used to describe a person) favouring readings or interpretations that are different from those previously or commonly held.

**queer** – (used to describe a person) **a.** homosexual. **b.** not heterosexual; gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender; encompassing all sexual orientations that are not heterosexual. **c.** not identifying as having a specific or easily-categorized sexual orientation.

**sex** – either of the main groups (female or male) into which people are placed on the basis of biological differences, including their internal and external sexual organs, chromosomes, etc. [see *gender*]

**sexual orientation** – a person's sexual identity, as characterized by the gender(s) to which they are attracted.

**socially constructed** – (of human characteristics, such as gender roles) created by or influenced by culture or society, rather than by genetic factors.

**spectrum of sexuality** – the belief that human sexual orientation exists as a range or continuum, rather than simply as binary opposites such as heterosexuality and homosexuality.

**traditionalist** – (used to describe a reading or an interpretation) commonly held or accepted, and viewed as authoritative; (used to describe a person) favouring readings or interpretations that have been commonly held or accepted.

**transgender** – (used to describe a person) identifying with or expressing a gender identity that is not the one that corresponds to one's sex at birth.

**two-spirited** – (used to describe a First Nations or Aboriginal person) possessing both a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit; homosexual or transgender.

**welcoming** – (of a church or other faith community) accepting of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, but with the understanding that the only acceptable form of sexual activity is heterosexual. [see *affirming*]

# Body, Mind and Soul: Study Guide Survey

If you are a group leader for this study guide, please take a few moments when you have completed using the study guide for some feedback from the group. Individuals are welcome to send in their comments.

There are three methods for completing the survey. Choose one of the following:

1. Complete and submit the survey online at [presbyterian.ca/sexuality](http://presbyterian.ca/sexuality).  
(Click here to go to online survey.)
2. Download the fillable PDF survey from [presbyterian.ca/sexuality](http://presbyterian.ca/sexuality) and type your responses in the fields provided. Then save the PDF and email it as an attachment to [survey@presbyterian.ca](mailto:survey@presbyterian.ca).  
(Click here to go to the PDF survey.)
3. Print the survey on following page and write your responses in the spaces provided. Then mail the completed survey to

Human Sexuality Study Guide  
c/o The Presbyterian Church in Canada  
50 Wynford Drive  
Toronto, ON M3C 1J7

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

# Body, Mind and Soul – Study Guide Survey

(October 27, 2015)

1. Who used the study guide? (study group in the congregation, the session, committee of presbytery, etc.)

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2. Was the study guide used over several evenings, a day long or a weekend retreat?

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3. What parts of the guide were:

a) Easy to use?

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b) Difficult to use?

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4. What were some benefits you experienced from the use of this study guide?

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5. In what ways was the study guide unhelpful or of little benefit?

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6. You have been invited by the General Assembly to give feedback to Justice Ministries (Life and Mission Agency) and the Committee on Church Doctrine as they consider various overtures related to matters raised in the study guide. Please forward up to the three of the most valuable experiences or learnings that have come to light as you pondered the issues addressed in the study guide.

6.1 \_\_\_\_\_

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6.2 \_\_\_\_\_

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6.3 \_\_\_\_\_

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**Optional:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

Presbytery: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please send your responses to: Human Sexuality Study Guide, c/o The Presbyterian Church in Canada  
50 Wynford Drive, Toronto, ON M3C 1J7*

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.*



## ***Body, Mind and Soul***

*Thinking together about human sexuality and sexual orientation  
in The Presbyterian Church in Canada*

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