

Human Sexuality and the 145th General Assembly of the PCC

What Happened

Tuesday at General Assembly began with worship, followed by the report from the Special Committee of Former Moderators that was appointed by the previous General Assembly to propose a pathway forward for the church with regard to human sexuality, in particular the marriage of homosexuals and the ordination of elders/ministers from the LGBTQI community.

The report was presented and four different pathways were proposed for the church to consider as ways to move forward:

1. Current Practice
2. Inclusion
3. One Denomination: Three streams
4. Pastoral Accommodation

The commissioners asked questions to clarify the details of the pathways and then shared the pathways they felt most positive about. The assembly was led in a time of prayer and then commissioners voted through a secret ballot. The results supported Pathway B (Inclusion).

After discussion and debate, the General Assembly voted again that Pathway B (inclusion) be approved (approximately 60% majority). A committee was struck to work on implications and present recommendations to be sent down to the Presbyteries through the Barrier Act. The committee's report was received on Wednesday evening, with debate being deferred until the following morning.

On Thursday morning after significant discussion, a motion was passed to send down to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act that the Presbyterian Church in Canada hold two parallel definitions of marriage, one which understands marriage as a covenant relationship between a man and a woman and one which understands marriage as a covenant relationship between two adult persons; and that congregations, sessions, ruling and teaching elders be granted liberty of conscience and action on marriage.

It was also passed to send down under the Barrier Act that congregations and presbyteries can call LGBTQI people (married or single) as a minister and elect as ruling elders, and there is freedom of conscience on this.

What Remains to be Done

The Clerks of Assembly will work on guidelines and the LMA will create a process for those affected by this decision to express their concerns, views and pain in a safe environment, and that it will be reported back to next year's general assembly before further votes are taken.

At this point in order for any changes in church law to move forward, a majority of the Presbyteries of the church must express their approval. If they do, the upcoming General Assembly may make these changes into a standing law of the church. If a majority of the Presbyteries express disapproval, that General Assembly must reject these changes, or submit them to the Presbyteries again.

What Needs to be Said

It was clear on Tuesday that a majority of commissioners favored an inclusive option, which as it was stated would grant freedom of conscience and action to present elders and ministers, but not to future elders and ministers.

Because many found the process rushed and felt they had no time to express their concerns the Moderator scheduled an additional session on Wednesday night. At this meeting commissioners were given time to speak. Many voices declared that a choice for inclusion was excluding the traditional view.

When the committee struck to work out implications reported the following morning, much of their recommendations were significantly amended to allow greater freedom for a traditional view to be retained by the church.

All to say at the beginning of the assembly the traditional view was ditched for a more inclusive view but the pendulum swung back to include both views as legitimate and faithful.

Please note that this is NOT the current law of the church. The recommendations from General Assembly will now be reported to our Presbyteries for their consideration. Presbytery decisions will be reported to the next General Assembly and that assembly will decide what to do with those results.

This was an incredibly difficult assembly for many commissioners.

Following the service on June 23 there will be a time after the service to express your feelings, your questions, and your comments.