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MODERATOR OF THE 2017 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Rev. Peter Bush

February 12, 2018

To The Presbyterian Church in Canada and all those harmed by homophobia and hypocrisy by and within the church:

The 2017 General Assembly asked the moderator to write a letter of repentance to the LGBTQI community. Although, in 1994, the General Assembly received The Human Sexuality Report that called on The Presbyterian Church in Canada to repent of its homophobia and hypocrisy, the church to this point has not acted on that call and publicly repented. However, the 2017 General Assembly established a listening committee, the Rainbow Communion, to create a safe space for LGBTQI persons and others to tell of their experiences in the church, and to report back to Assembly no later than 2020. This letter of repentance is an interim response between the call of the 1994 document and the work of the Rainbow Communion.

God calls the church to be a welcoming community where we welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us. In our hypocrisy the church offers welcome to heterosexual people but often shuns people who do not identify as heterosexual. In this homophobic environment, the church is often an unsafe place for people to name their sexual identity and orientation. For the church and our congregations failing to be safe and welcoming places, we are sorry, and we repent.

In this homophobic environment we are all harmed. Families have felt and still feel the church's expectations to condemn and reject children, siblings and parents who do not look, act or speak in ways congruent with the restrictive gender definitions of the church and society. Friends feel pressure to break off connections. For the ways our congregations judge and exclude others based on restrictive gender definitions, we are sorry, and we repent.

No one should ever be harmed for naming their sexual identity. We live in a culture and a world where LGBTQI persons are bullied, brutalized and sometimes killed. Moreover, bullying and violence occurs in congregations or in the community with the support of church members. Presbyteries and sessions fail to hold church members and church leaders accountable for their hateful acts. For our failure to protect those attacked and brutalized, we are sorry, and we repent. For our ongoing failure to hold people accountable for abuse and hatred, we are sorry, and we repent.

Even when congregations and church members do not participate in emotional and physical bullying, the church's silence condones such action when it fails to speak against the violence. By not speaking clearly and in a public way, the church is "part of the evil of the world, of its violence, neglect, and injustice."<sup>1</sup> Moreover church members wanting to speak fear that if they speak they will be ridiculed and bullied themselves. For our silence and silencing others, we are sorry, and we repent.

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<sup>1</sup> *Living Faith* 2.5.6

The church by its actions and inaction, speaking and silence, creates hurt, fear and distrust among LGBTQI persons who are part of the church. Deaf to the cries of hurt, fear, and distrust, the church dismisses the pain experienced by LGBTQI persons. For our unwillingness to recognize the hurt and fear our actions and attitudes have caused, we are sorry, and we repent.

Bullying, hatred and silence, have led to emotional and physical pain and personal struggle, which sometimes have led people to attempt or commit suicide. The church has not offered and continues to fail to offer care to those who face this struggle and pain. For our failure to offer tender care to the hurting, we are sorry, and we repent.

Irrational fear in the church has created a climate where there is often more interest in condemning what is considered sin than in listening to the struggles and stories of human beings. The church is often quick to speak and slow to listen. Further, the church is quick to name and condemn certain sexual practices, while at times being slow to name and confront sexual abuse and marital unfaithfulness. For our hypocrisy, we are sorry, and we repent. For offering judgment and condemnation rather than gospel hope, we are sorry, and we repent.

The church too often puts more emphasis on a person's sexual identity than on their identity in Christ. When the church ignores the gifts present within the body of Christ, it fails to appreciate all that God has for the church and fails to see God's glory revealed in all people. For our unwillingness to affirm the spiritual gifts present in all the people of the church, we are sorry, and we repent.

By God's grace, led by the Holy Spirit, and seeking to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ we repent and desire to go in a new way and to be a welcoming church centered in the Triune God of grace who draws us into community. As such a community, we will seek, as individuals and congregations, to welcome all, as Jesus Christ has welcomed us. We will reach out, rejoice together in fellowship, and seek holiness as we worship, pray, sing, eat and listen together for God's Word speaking to the whole church. We commit ourselves to pray with one another, weep with one another, and rejoice with one another.

This letter of repentance is neither the beginning nor the end; it is but a part of a longer conversation. This conversation is being taken up in part by the Rainbow Communion, a committee with the important mandate of creating a safe space where experiences of LGBTQI people will be told and heard.

Those who wish to respond to this Letter of Repentance can do so by sending their e-mail response to [repentance@presbyterian.ca](mailto:repentance@presbyterian.ca).

In Christ,



The Rev. Peter Bush  
Moderator of the 2017 (143rd) General Assembly  
The Presbyterian Church in Canada