

Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality

A New Statement of The United Church of Canada by the 32nd General Council

Council Re-affirmed...

quoting from the statement of the 30th General Council "Gift, Dilemma, & Promise", 1984:

- a. We affirm that marriage is a gift of God through which Christians make a covenant with one another and with God.
- b. We affirm that in Christian marriage a man and woman give themselves to each other in the full intention of a life-long commitment.
- c. We affirm that this unity is a creation of God and is greater than the two individuals.
- d. We affirm that sexual intercourse in marriage is intended to be:
 - a profound expression of the whole person;
 - a yearning for total union with the other;
 - a creative and holy expression of fulfillment in the other person.
- e. We affirm that marriage from a Christian perspective is based on faithfulness.
- f. We recognize the commitment that is present in many relationships other than Christian marriage; and that the church is called to minister to people in these relationships, as in others.
- g. We affirm that the church is called to emphasize and work for the essential values in marriage and family that contribute to the wholeness of persons and to challenge those forms and attitudes that limit and degrade personal worth, even when the culture supports them.

Council Confessed...

Of Faith

1. We confess that God is the Creator of the earth and all that is, including humanity in all its diversity.
2. We confess that God speaks authoritatively through the Old and New Testaments.
3. We confess that God's Spirit offers us comfort, healing, and support, and challenges us in ways we may experience as difficult and disturbing.
4. We confess our creation in the image of God and that as Christians we are called into covenant community as sisters and brothers in Christ.

Of Sin

5. We confess that we are a broken and hurting community. In our search for God's intention, at times we have become fractious and judgemental and have both caused and experienced hurt, misunderstanding, and estrangement.
6. We confess before God that as a Christian community, we have participated in a history of injustice and persecution against gay and lesbian persons in violation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Of Infirmary

7. We confess our continued confusion and struggle to understand homosexuality, even as we confess our history of sinfulness.
8. We confess our inability at this time, given our diversity in our understanding of the authority and interpretation of Scripture, to find consensus regarding a Christian understanding of human sexuality, including homosexuality.

Of Fact

9. We confess that we have not all responded to the acclamation of appreciation of the effective participation of our Christian gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in all aspects of our church's life, including the Order of Ministry, as declared at the 30th General Council.
10. We confess that only recently has The United Church of Canada become aware of and involved in the dialogue leading toward a Christian understanding of human sexuality.

In light of the foregoing confessional statement, the 32nd General Council challenges the United Church of Canada to continue to be a covenant community, wherein:

- we recognize that all have sinned and fallen short of God's intention for us;
- we agree that God's intention for all human relationships is that they be faithful, responsible, just, loving, health-giving, healing and sustaining of community and self;

- we acknowledge that we are unclear at the present time, as to what God's complete intention is in relation to human sexuality, even as we affirm our support and appreciation for the gifts of Christian marriage, the charism of celibacy, and the way of chaste singleness.

On the strength of our on-going covenant relationship as The United Church of Canada, we are called to examine two theologically-based but culturally-conditioned views, namely:

- an undue emphasis on sexual morality which has, from time to time, caused the Christian church to lose perspective on the whole variety of human sinfulness; and,
- an undue elevation of the sexual aspect of our being, in our times, making this an idol which we worship.

Neither view is fully consistent with God's intention for us, nor has either view liberated us to faithful love in Christ.

Council Declared...

1. That all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation, who profess faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to Him, are welcome to be or become full members of The United Church of Canada.
- 2a. All members of The United Church of Canada are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry.
- b. All Christian people are called to a lifestyle patterned on obedience to Jesus Christ.
- c. That all congregations, presbyteries, and conferences covenant to work out the implications of sexual orientation and lifestyles in light of the Holy Scriptures, according to their responsibilities as stated in the Manual.
3. That the 32nd General Council affirm the present ordination/commissioning procedures as outlined in the Manual, and those actions taken at the 30th General Council, which state, it is inappropriate to ask about the sexual orientation of those in the candidacy process, or those in the call/appointment/settlement process.
4. That the report "Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientations, Lifestyles, and Ministry" does not reflect the present position of The United Church of Canada; therefore this report ought to be considered an historic document and the decisions of the 32nd General Council be circulated for study and reflection in our struggle to find God's direction for our church.

Council Issued a Call...

To the Church:

5. That there be further church-wide study of the authority and the interpretation of Scripture and the theological and cultural premises that inform our understanding.

6. That the 32nd General Council ask congregations, presbyteries, conferences and the appropriate Divisions to respond to the call for further study and dialogue, related to the broad spectrum of sexual responsibility and continue to make available existing educational resources, including those of the ecumenical community.
7. That the 32nd General Council urge the appropriate Divisions and Courts of the church to take action to address the Church's participation in oppression of people on the basis of sexual orientation.
8. That the 32nd General Council through the appropriate Divisions and Courts of the Church address the issue of our concern for pastoral care of individuals and groups in our United Church of Canada community, who feel unheard, manipulated, or estranged.

To Society:

That, since within Canada, only Quebec, Manitoba, Ontario, and the Yukon Territory have human rights legislation that provides equal protection under the law from discrimination against gay and lesbian persons, but the human rights codes of the Government of Canada, the remaining provinces, and the North-west Territories do not include such legislation, the 32nd General Council:

- urge all levels of government in Canada to guarantee and ensure that the human rights of their gay and lesbian inhabitants are fully protected by law;
- urge all courts, congregations and appropriate divisions of The United Church of Canada to become active in support of human rights for lesbian and gay people;
- request the Division of Mission in Canada to make information, educational resources and study guides available to support Pastoral Charges, Presbyteries, and Conferences in these endeavours.

Having studied the petitions sent to it, the 32nd General Council also received the report, "Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientations, Lifestyles, and Ministry", along with the Dissenting Statements (Parts 2 and 3 only), as fulfilling the mandate given by the 30th General Council, 1984.

Footnote:

For purposes of readability, the numbering system used during debate on the issue during General Council has been simplified. The action of the General Council on the original report has been moved to the end for purposes of clarity. The text of the Council's action remains the same.

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