



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC30 Gift, Dilemma and Promise

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Sexuality and Selfhood

Acknowledgements and Affirmations

- a. WE AFFIRM that our sexuality is a gift of God. In its life-enhancing, non-exploitive forms it is a primary way of relating to ourselves and to one another, and is the way God has chosen to continue the human race.

We acknowledge that human sexuality, like all other aspects of human nature is affected and distorted by human sinfulness. We recognize the ambiguity of human nature and therefore of human sexuality. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

- b. WE AFFIRM that God works in Christ through the Spirit to redeem human nature and, with it, human sexuality. (Romans 8:21)
- c. WE AFFIRM that the giving and receiving of affection, whether physical or emotional or both, is a basic need. The forms which this may take are many and varied. Because the hunger for intimacy is ultimately a hunger for God, this is a profoundly spiritual experience. It may lead to a more profound humanness or to manipulation, distortion, and control.

We acknowledge that the roles and expectations that accompany gender are largely cultural in origin and arbitrary in nature.

- d. WE AFFIRM that even in the midst of ambiguity we are called upon to make responsible decisions with regard to the expression of our sexuality and to cope with the consequences.

We need to, “hear the pluralism and diversity of moral decision-making within the church as a possible way in which God is engaging us,” says one of the responses to the Human Sexuality Study.

- e. WE AFFIRM the church’s call to proclaim the worth of human sexuality and to speak out concerning the abuses of human sexuality in individual lives, in the community and in the structures of society. In this respect, we understand that our responsibility is more to challenge and support than to condemn, more prophetic and pastoral than imperial.

We acknowledge that the way we experience and express our sexuality is shaped largely by the ways in which we are socialized, by our unique journeys through the stages of human development, and by our personal journey of faith.

- f. WE AFFIRM the role of the church as a community of faith, offering support, challenge and guidance in sexual decision-making.
- g. WE AFFIRM that the church is called to a ministry of prophetic witness in the face of evil, pastoral care in the face of pain and confusion, education in the face of conflicting values and ignorance. This includes the ethical dimensions of: birth control and family planning; family life education; marriage preparation and enrichment; counselling in situations of marriage breakdown; separation and divorce; unfulfilling relationships; sexual exploitation in the family; sexism (personal and social discrimination against others on the basis of gender); concerns of singles; of unmarried couples; homosexual persons and single-parent families.
- h. WE AFFIRM that the church is called to initiate and support research and educational programs to increase our understanding of the causes of exploitive sexual behaviour and other destructive expressions; to reduce the incidence of such destructive expressions, and to improve our ministry to all who are harmed by such behaviour.

Marriage

Acknowledgements and Affirmations

- a. WE AFFIRM that marriage is a gift of God through which Christians make a covenant with one another and with God

In marriage we offer one another the promise of lifelong companionship, rich expression of human affections and sexuality, and nurture for the children. Marriage as an institution can undergird each relationship and provide stability for society.

We affirm the value of marriage and that the church must work both to redeem and care for the institution and to support those entering into a covenant relationship with each other.

We acknowledge that marriage can also be destructive. Marriage as an institution is shaped by cultural attitudes that are patriarchal and oppressive.

As an institution at the present time it more readily supports male supremacy than human equality, reflecting current values in society. It can degenerate into exploitation, abuse and violence, including rape.

Marriage is an instrument which shares in human sin and which may be redeemed by grace to become the vehicle God intended. It is not to be idealized or idolized as an end in itself.

- b. WE AFFIRM that in Christian marriage a man and woman give themselves to each other in the full intention of a lifelong commitment.

Nothing less can measure its totality, even though they may fail in their best intentions and efforts.

In self-giving they become one, a new unity. Yet they do not own each other, as no human being may so possess another. They own the gifts of love and commitment and grace that each other has freely offered.

This self-giving love over the years may lead into the most mature and complete joy in each other.

- c. WE AFFIRM that this unity is a creation of God and is greater than the two individuals.

It creates holy ground on which the two, and all others, must walk carefully and gently, yet forthrightly and with courage. It has boundaries, between them, and with others, that may not be trespassed. It takes precedence over other relationships. It calls for that caring which heals hurt and tends growth.

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 fulfilment in the other person.

We acknowledge that:

- sexual intercourse may be exploitive, using the other for one's gratification;
- it is possible to be genitally exclusive while not being genuinely faithful.
Faithfulness cannot be contained in or reduced to sexual exclusivity, any more than covenant can be contained in or reduced to law.

e. WE AFFIRM that marriage from a Christian perspective is based on faithfulness expressed through:

- choosing each other above all others; This choosing has its greatest meaning when it is given and maintained gladly rather than as a grudging legalism
- risking and being vulnerable in the relationship; The alternative is, in the long run, to retreat into alienation or two solitudes;
- willingness to put into the relationship the patience, understanding and the work required to help it grow;
- accepting and nurturing the other for his or her unique gifts; putting each other before one's own interests in a lifelong commitment which is spiritual, emotional and physical;
- and that these intentions are most fully achieved and symbolized when sexual intercourse in marriage is exclusive. Faithfulness of this kind is a spiritual gift to be received in the grace of God. It recognizes that when we fail, God is faithful still, and we may discover forgiveness and renewal.

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. These include the unjust social structures of patriarchy and sexism, as well as distorted attitudes such as rigid role-stereotyping.

Intimacy

Acknowledgements and Affirmations

- a. WE AFFIRM that God has made us with a longing to belong, to reach out to one another, to touch each other's lives as members of one another. Through we think and act as if we were individuals, in fact we are social beings, needing on another.
- b. WE AFFIRM that all people experience a hunger for intimacy that is a profoundly spiritual matter, a hunger for God. It is in our experience of the intimate God that we find the grace and possibility of intimacy with one another. God leads us:
- to treat the other as a person of equal value to oneself;
 - to respect the other's relationships with other people;
 - to be vulnerable to the changes, even the hurt, that may come from openness to another;
 - to commitment and patience as the relationship grows;
 - to take the discovery of self more fully through experiencing the other;
 - to take seriously the dangers in intimacy and be careful to limit or prevent them;
 - to recognize our failures of intimacy and be willing to accept forgiveness.

God is a God of loving kindness, patience, forgiveness. In risking intimacy we may glimpse God's grace. In being forgiven, we learn to forgive.

We acknowledge that there are many forms of intimacy; some are enriching; others are exploitive. The Bible offers many models to help us understand and express these.

Ultimately, God is the most intimate and yet transcendent companion in life's journey of intimacy, and so the source and energy of all our seeking for each other.

- c. WE AFFIRM the importance in intimate relationships of respecting the integrity of others, of setting limits on our actions. The Bible expresses this both in terms of responsible love and of guidelines or rules for behaviour.

- d. WE AFFIRM singleness as a state in which people may find intimacy and fulfilment. We acknowledge that the church has too readily accept marriage as the norm for society and so has not valued single persons for themselves or given them the place that is rightfully theirs, nor allowed them the opportunity of sexual fulfilment. Each person needs to struggle faithfully with these decisions.
- e. WE AFFIRM that celibacy, freely chosen, can be an expression of God's will and can include emotional intimacy. We acknowledge that the church has not taken celibacy as a vocation with sufficient seriousness, and so has neither benefited fully from its riches nor provided the support it requires. Its value as a temporary or as a lifelong commitment needs further study.
- f. WE AFFIRM that learning to express our longing for intimacy both lovingly and responsibly is a lifelong task as God calls us into full humanity.

Sexism, Society, Self

Acknowledgements and Affirmations

- a. WE AFFIRM that the intention of God for all persons is full equality in both our personal and social lives, including acceptance of our sexual differences and similarities.
- b. WE AFFIRM that the essence of equality is the acceptance and appreciation of the gifts of all persons female and male. We acknowledge that all sexism in language, in social and economic structures, in the conventions of our society and in the attitudes of individuals is destructive to human dignity and opposed to the will of God.
- c. WE AFFIRM that God calls us as a church to eliminate all forms of sexism (personal and social discrimination against others on the basis of gender) in the life and worship of the congregations, presbyteries, conferences and national structures of The United Church of Canada, in keeping with guidelines established by the General Council of The United Church of Canada.
- d. WE AFFIRM the need for ongoing research and action in relation to those aspects of life in which sexism (personal and social discrimination against others on the basis of gender) is commonly found.
- e. WE AFFIRM that the traditional patriarchal structuring of society can be redeemed and eventually transformed through the grace of God and the struggles of those willing to face the contradictions of sexism. We affirm that Christians are called to work towards an inclusive society.

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