

MCPC Policy Statement on Human Sexuality



Our Stand

In reflecting on the current questions about sexuality, the MCPC Session is committed to upholding and defending, whatever the cost, the historic Christian teachings below.

We worship a God who does not change. In Christ's name, we seek to welcome all who want to follow Him. Jesus teaches marriage is between one man and one woman for life. Jesus sets the standards for officers and leaders in the church. Our goal is to walk with people in the way of Christ.

We believe these teachings reflect the unchanging character of God. This booklet outlines what we mean by these affirmations and how we intend to continue to implement them.

Historical Background

Because of social trends in Canadian society, this has been a topic of conversation for many years in the PCC. For example, the GA issued a major statement in 1994 declaring homosexual practice was not a Christian option. The most recent round of conversation began in the months before the 2015 Presbyterian Church in Canada General Assembly, when a couple of presbyteries sent overtures asking for a change in the church's teaching about marriage and sexuality.

Our pastors talked with the pastors of other Chinese Presbyterian congregations about a response. Our Session adopted the following before that Assembly:

The Session of Markham Chinese Presbyterian Church declares its affirmation of Christ's teaching on the foundation of marriage as expressed in, for example, Matthew 19:

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?' So

they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” Matthew 19:4-6

The 2015 Assembly encouraged the church “to engage in a year of prayerful conversation and discernment and Bible study on the topics of human sexuality, sexual orientation and other related matters.” In response to that General Assembly, the Session’s additional conversation resulted in the longer statement that forms the core of this booklet. This statement was reported to the national Presbyterian Church, and became one of hundreds of other responses to the call for study and conversation.

As the conversation has continued in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, it has become clear there are deep divisions between those who embrace the historic church teaching and those who believe that teaching must change.

The Session believes the church should be united in its affirmation of Christ’s teaching, not continually divided by conflict about what the gospel means. And we don’t believe the cause of Christ is helped when congregations who profoundly disagree are locked in a long struggle over whose views will define the church. This kind of partnership burdens ministry.

So, we were one of more than a dozen Sessions and two Presbyteries who sent overtures to the 2017 General Assembly asking for a way for congregations who can not agree on core gospel teachings (like issues of marriage and sexuality) to be able to graciously separate and, as our overture put it, “to seek an alternate denominational affiliation which will more effectively enable their mission work.”

As Presbyterian Church policy currently stands, the only way a congregation can stop being part of the PCC is by dissolving. That means the congregation ceases to exist, and all its property (buildings, furnishings, bank accounts, etc.) devolves to the Presbyterian Church Board of Trustees. If a congregation wanted to continue ministry outside the Presbyterian Church structure, it would need to do so with newly-purchased buildings and other assets. This would represent a significant diversion of resources from ministry and outreach to property and administration.

Our overture asked that any process of finding new partnerships would “leave the larger part of congregational resources available to further the fulfillment of the great commission...” That is, not tied up in acquiring property and filing new incorporation and other documents.

The 2017 Assembly sent the church as a whole two documents describing the cases for and against changing what the church teaches about marriage and sexuality. All three ministries of MCPC studied these documents, and in a congregational meeting January 2018 strongly affirmed the church’s historic teaching.

Response from the Session of Markham Chinese Presbyterian Church

The 2015 General Assembly called the church to “engage in a year of prayerful conversation and discernment and Bible study on the topics of human sexuality, sexual orientation and other related matters” and invited sessions “to share the result of their conversation with both the Committee on Church Doctrine and Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries) prior to March 31, 2016.” In response to this, the Session of the Markham Chinese Presbyterian Church adopted the original version of the following. As 2019 begins, the Session has edited and added implementation points to that statement to produce the version that follows.

We worship a God who does not change

We take comfort in the promise “I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.”

Malachi 3:6 The scripture is clear we worship an unchanging God. “God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind.

Does he speak and then not act?

Does he promise and not fulfill?” **Numbers 23:19**

And we know “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” **Hebrews 13:8**

Because God never changes, God’s truth never changes.

“The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever.”

Isaiah 40:8

We find the word of our God written in the Bible. By inspiring the prophets and apostles who wrote the books of the Old and New Testaments, God has given for all time an infallible record of his truth. Of this written word, Jesus said, “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” **Matthew 5:18**

Our confession *Living Faith* summarizes what this means in section 5.1: “The Bible has been given to us by the inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life. It is the standard of all doctrine by which we must test any word that comes to us from church, world, or inner experience. We subject to its judgement all we believe and do. Through the Scriptures the church is bound only to Jesus Christ its King and Head. He is the living Word of God to whom the written word bears witness.”

While the culture around us changes, God’s truth remains the same. This is why the Bible tells us “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” **Romans 12:2**

This statement focuses on God’s truth about questions of marriage and sexual ethics. It has this focus mostly because that is the area where the culture around us poses particular questions to the church. Those questions deserve an answer.

Because of this, we commit ourselves to:

1. Ensure our teaching ministry within MCPC affirms and strengthens people’s understanding of these truths.
2. Bear witness to these truths whenever we have an opportunity

In Christ’s name, we seek to welcome all who want to follow Him

Jesus assures us “All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” **John**

6:37 Because the church is Christ's presence in the world today, Jesus calls us to extend this invitation in his name. We seek to do this in a spirit of confident humility, remembering the Apostle Paul's experience of grace is also our own: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." **1 Timothy 1:15** As our confession *Living Faith* puts it: "...in the spirit of humility, as beggars telling others where food is to be found, we point to life in Christ." (§ 9.2.1)
From the beginning,

 "...God created mankind in his own image,
 in the image of God he created them;
 male and female he created them." **Genesis 1:27**

Since all people are created in the image of God, they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." **1 John 4:12**

With the Apostle Paul, while we recognize the depth of our own sin, we celebrate the power of Christ's grace to make us new people, able to live renewed lives. After listing some kinds of "wrongdoers" common in their culture, Paul went on to remind the Corinthians, "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." **1 Corinthians 6:11** Jesus calls us to share that message of new life. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." **Matthew 28:19-20**

Because of this, we commit ourselves to:

1. Help our members learn how to welcome visitors
2. Encourage people to bring their questions to the community, confident the truth of the gospel has a good answer

Jesus teaches marriage is between one man and one woman for life

Questioned about marriage, Jesus replied by looking back to God's original design in creation.

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” **Matthew 19:4-6**

This echoes something Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount:

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” **Matthew 5:31-32**

Jesus commanded his church to teach everything he commanded. We believe one of the ways the church faithfully witnesses to the grace of Jesus Christ is by encouraging people to live according to this creative design. The creator’s design for marriage shows how men and women, different yet complementary, can find unity. In the union of a man and a woman, this unity opens the possibility of new life.

Jesus taught marriages exist by the providence of God when he described husband and wife as people “God has joined together.” He taught the permanence of marriage when he said no one should separate them. God is very concerned to preserve the honour and purity of marriage. “Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

Hebrews 13:4

Just like those first disciples, people today can find Christ’s teaching about the permanence of marriage to be a challenge to follow. While it often seems gracious to relax this standard, we believe we are most faithful to Christ’s call to teach his word of grace when we teach people to live by this design. When we neglect or diminish adherence to this standard, we obscure the grace of Jesus Christ.

We acknowledge the general warning “wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God[.] Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards

nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”
1 Corinthians 6:9-10 None of these sins makes a person “more guilty” before God than any other.

But the issues around marriage and sexuality are particularly important for Christians.

Erroneous teaching and practice here leads to erroneous understandings of the relationship between Jesus and his church, which the scriptures call the Bride of Christ, and to erroneous understandings about the nature of our creation in the image of God as male and female. As Paul goes on to warn the Corinthians,

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies. **1 Corinthians 6:18-20**

Because of this, we commit ourselves to:

1. Ensure our marriage preparation conversations clearly explain this one man-one woman commitment.
2. Support our members as they face challenges to this from contemporary society.
3. Ensure couples seeking remarriage after divorce appreciate the forgiveness of Christ, and the importance of this lifetime commitment.

Jesus sets the standards for officers and leaders in the church

Jesus came to open the way for people to find an abundant, eternal life. He came to teach people how to live in God’s blessing. He taught not only by words and stories, but also by the example of his life. “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” **John 13:15** His example is the pattern for church leaders. We agree with the standard in the *Book of Forms*, section 106: “the qualifications for the office are those laid down in ‘the express Word of God, and namely the canons written by the Apostle Paul.’...” This section specifically quotes qualifications from Paul’s advice to Timothy, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are

young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” **1 Timothy 4:12**

Other passages on qualifications mention leaders should be “above reproach,” “blameless,” and “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught.” (**1 Timothy 3:1-10, Titus 1:6-9, 3:1-10**) Being an example was a commitment he had in his own ministry: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” **1 Corinthians 11:1** Peter echoes this teaching in his call for elders to be “eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” **1 Peter 5:3**

Unlike Jesus, we cannot model perfection, but we can model growth in righteousness and faithfulness. We can model humble acceptance of Christ’s forgiving and renewing power. “But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.” **1 Timothy 1:16**

Because of this, we commit ourselves to:

1. Admit only those who have demonstrated their faithfulness by walking in the example of Christ and upholding the teaching of the scriptures as leaders in the church.
2. Continue to lift up the calling of leaders to be examples to the congregation.
3. Be leaders who exercise mutual discipline and correction to hold each other accountable to this standard.

Our goal is to walk with people in the way of Christ

New life in Jesus Christ is an ambitious call. As the Apostle John put it, “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If ... we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” **1 John 1:5-7**

We often find ourselves echoing the experience of Paul who knew how far short he fell from the purity of the call of Christ.

“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” **Philippians 3:13-14**

As we press on to the goal of Christ’s upward call, we are eager to walk with others who are willing to turn from their old ways and to grow in Jesus Christ.

Because of this, we commit ourselves to:

1. Eagerly walk with others who seek to grow in Jesus Christ
2. Invite dialogue and encourage questions as we seek together to experience the renewing power of Christ’s Holy Spirit.

And in the future...

We hope to remain as we are, a congregation within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. This is the denominational context within which the Downtown Chinese Presbyterian Church first planted this congregation in Scarborough, and in which we grew to become the Markham Chinese Presbyterian Church. We continue to value the partnership in mission we have with other Presbyterian congregations.

But we also know a denomination divided by fundamental disagreement about the nature of our creation in the image of God, the extent of Christ’s redeeming work, and the power of the Spirit’s sanctifying ministry can not long survive. Controversies over those important questions will distract congregations from the mission that gives us life. Members of those congregations will live in confusion over what the church stands for and what Christ’s call means today.

Presently, the Presbyterian Church in Canada’s confessions declare the church’s affirmation that

Christian marriage is a union in Christ
whereby a man and a woman become one in the sight of
God.

It is the commitment of two people
to love and to support one another faithfully for life.
God’s law forbids adultery.

Should this affirmation change, our relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Canada will have to change. We can not say for sure what that change will look like. We can say for sure the MCPC Session is committed to upholding and defending, whatever the cost, the historic Christian teachings we have confessed.

And we are committed to maintain our mission and teaching ministry as much as possible through this time. We may have to maintain that mission in a different location, or we may have to make sacrifices to purchase the building we currently use. Only God knows the end from the beginning...

The members of the MCPC Session take seriously the promise we made “to follow no divisive course but to seek the peace and unity of Christ among [our] people.” We will work to keep MCPC together as a worshipping and serving community in the place where Christ leads us.