

*Overture \_\_ From Heartland Presbytery: On Celebrating the Gifts of People of Diverse Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities in the Life of the Church*

**Recommendation:**

**That the 223rd General Assembly adopt the following resolution:**

- 1. Celebrating the expansive embrace of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the breadth of our mission to serve a world in need, the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly affirms the gifts of LGBTQ+ people for ministry and celebrates their service in the church and in the world.**
- 2. The Assembly celebrates that over the years, LGBTQ+ people have faithfully, lovingly, and courageously served in every kind of service to which Christian disciples are called – notwithstanding the church’s efforts to exclude them from particular types of service.**
- 3. The Assembly laments the ways that the policies and actions of the PC(USA) have caused gifted, faithful LGBTQ+ Christians to leave the Presbyterian church so that they could find a more welcoming place to serve, as they have been gifted and called by the Spirit.**
- 4. At the same time, the Assembly gives thanks for the LGBTQ+ pioneers of the faith who have persisted in relationship with the Presbyterian church, at great personal cost and sacrifice, together with the whole of the LGBTQ+ community, moving the church toward a more generous, loving, and just understanding of God’s grace.**
- 5. The Assembly also gives thanks for those who continue to seek deeper understanding, and more authentic welcome, even amid discomfort or uncertainty about how best to show hospitality, in the spirit of continuing Reformation.**
- 6. Today, openly LGBTQ+ people are leading churches, preaching the gospel, serving those in need and otherwise using their gifts for ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).**
- 7. With an eye toward the future, the Assembly affirms God’s presence and call in the lives of all God’s people and commits to seeking justice, equality and inclusion for all in church and society.**
- 8. The Assembly calls on the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, the Office of Public Witness and all who represent the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to actively work for the protection of human and civil rights, both in the United States and around the world, especially the rights of marginalized and oppressed groups, including people facing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.**

9. **The Assembly calls upon mission co-workers and ecumenical representatives to advocate for justice and equality for all God's people in ways appropriate to their cultural and ecclesiastical context.**
  
10. **The Assembly encourages all congregations and councils of the PCUSA continually to seek to expand their welcome so that all might know the Good News of Jesus Christ and encourages all other communions to do the same.**

**Rationale:**

The Assembly celebrates that over the years, LGBTQ+ people have faithfully, lovingly, and courageously served in every kind of service to which Christian disciples are called – notwithstanding the church's efforts to exclude them from particular types of service.

They have served as ministers of word and sacrament, proclaiming the inclusive good news of God's love for all people in Jesus Christ, embodying Christ's expansive welcome at the table, and reminding the church again and again what it means to live with integrity into our baptismal identity as beloved children of God.

They have served as ruling elders, leading congregations with wisdom; they have served as deacons, loving and caring for the church and its people. And, beyond ordination to particular service, they have served the church in worship, ministry, and mission, with countless acts of tender mercy.

Since 2011, councils have been permitted under the constitution to ordain people without regard to sexual orientation or any other matter not related to their calling, gifts, preparation or suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. Today, openly LGBTQ+ people are leading churches, preaching the gospel, serving those in need and otherwise using their gifts for ministry.

Still, the General Assembly has never explicitly affirmed the gifts and lives of LGBTQ+ people, some councils have elected not to ordain some LGBTQ+ candidates; and some inquirers, candidates and already ordained deacons, elders and ministers do not feel free to serve openly. Many churches with whom we are in ecumenical relationship still do not ordain LGBTQ+ people. This overture, therefore, will serve an important purpose expressing the Assembly's affirmation.

In Heartland Presbytery, we have been particularly blessed by the gifts of LGBTQ people as deacons, ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. In our presbytery, ministers serve in roles including congregational pastor, presbytery staff, and validated ministry. Ruling Elders have been giving leadership on their sessions and in various ministries at the congregational and presbytery level for years. We wish for all presbyteries and congregations to know this blessing, and we call on the General Assembly to adopt this overture.