

## **St. Andrew's Kingston – General Assembly Update – Sunday June 13, 2019**

- commissioners from across Canada gathered the first week of June for the 145<sup>th</sup> annual General Assembly: reports on ministries in inner cities, native communities, university chaplaincies, partnerships with churches in Africa and Asia, reports on everything from international affairs to church doctrine and ecumenical relations
- one of the reports was from a special committee of former moderators that last year's General Assembly had established to help the church find a way forward in dealing with issues of human sexuality
- their report was received, presenting four distinct options for the denomination to consider, from the present policy of marriage and ordination being available to celibate or married heterosexual Christians, to full inclusion in marriage and ordination of all members of the church celibate or married
- after much debate on the floor of Assembly over several days (which can be seen and heard online) and in table groups, the General Assembly agreed to recommend
  - a) that the PCC acknowledge that we hold two parallel definitions of Christian marriage, with some members holding it is between a woman and a man, and others holding it is between two individuals in covenanted commitment
  - b) that the PCC accept the ordination of all gifted members of the church to positions of leadership, both elder and minister
- one important clarification: while the recommendation would extend possibility within the denomination, liberty of conscience is assured, so members are permitted to retain their personal perspective about marriage and ordination, and every congregation is permitted to proceed as they determine best
- this is a very significant recommendation, after over 25 years of study, prayer and debate, but at this point, it is only a recommendation
- over the next year, each presbytery (regional grouping) of the denomination will meet to study, pray and debate the recommendation of last year's GA
- if a majority of presbyteries vote in approval, then the recommendation returns to next year's General Assembly the first week of June 2020
- the 2020 General Assembly will be made up of an entirely different group of 300 commissioners from across Canada (as ministers and presbytery elders attend only in rotation, about once in five years), and they will dedicate further study, prayer and conversation to this matter
- this is a matter that evokes a great deal of emotion and debate, as it touches on the foundational issue of how each of us hears the Spirit speak to us through the Bible and the Church
- over the year ahead, as we wait for presbyteries and GA to vote, the elders of St. Andrew's will be considering how best we might care for each other, and study the materials and report back to General Assembly, and please don't hesitate to pass on your suggestions for our congregation to your elders or minister

- in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century during the terrible 30 year's war between nations of Europe, often over religious issues, there lived an otherwise undistinguished German Lutheran theologian, Rupertus Meldenius, who in 1627 wrote, **'In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity'**

- proceeding with charity:

if we discuss this with others let us remember that this is not an issue, but people, people as passionate and fragile as we are, with families and loved ones

- respecting liberty:

let us remember that we belong to a tradition in which each individual member has the right and responsibility to discern through scripture and prayer their understanding of God's will, and yet also remain committed to honouring the decisions of the whole

- seeking unity: we are not called all to be the same, but we are called to journey together, to be one in Christ

**'In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity'**