

April 15, 2021



*Enabling individuals and families to discover, grow in  
and share the love of God found in Jesus Christ.*

**Welcome to Parkwood's E-letter -- which is designed to keep you up to date with what we are doing and to communicate opportunities for fellowship, Bible study, and service in which you are welcome to participate.**

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### **Special congregational meeting**

By the authority of the session, a special congregational meeting of Parkwood Church is called **Saturday, May 1<sup>st</sup> at 7 p.m.**

All members and adherents are eligible to attend and are encouraged to do so. If you are planning to attend, please notify the church office **before noon on Thursday, April 29<sup>th</sup>** by e-mail to [office@parkwoodchurch.ca](mailto:office@parkwoodchurch.ca) or telephone. A link to join the meeting on Zoom via computer will be sent by e-mail on Saturday, May 1<sup>st</sup> ahead of the meeting.

The purposes of the meeting are: to provide an update on the status of the proposal in the Presbyterian Church of Canada to change the current definition of marriage; to provide an opportunity for the congregation to express support or otherwise for the session's expressed position in support of the current definition of marriage; to give opportunity for comments or reflections upon the session's proposal for restructuring; and to give opportunity for the congregation to reflect on the possible implications for future ministry and leadership in the event that the General Assembly adopts the proposed changes to the church's teaching on marriage.

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### **Virtual Fellowship Hour**

Every other Sunday after the Worship Service the Fellowship Team hosts a Virtual Fellowship Hour. Everyone is welcome and if interested in participating -- please contact Don Pestaluky (at [613-226-3089](tel:613-226-3089) or [donwp@live.ca](mailto:donwp@live.ca)) or any member of the Fellowship Team -- or the Church Office.

**The next Virtual Fellowship Hour is scheduled for Sunday, April 18<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 AM.**

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“I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.” (Isaiah 62: 6-7, NIV)

### **A letter to members and adherents of Parkwood Church, Ottawa from the session**

One of the responsibilities of elders is to keep watch for the health and welfare of the Christian community — for both the present and future well-being of the church. We seek the long-term flourishing of Christ's church as a witness to the neighbourhood, the city, the country, and indeed the world, proclaiming both in word and action God's love found in Jesus Christ.

As elders within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, we affirmed at our ordination and admission to office that The Presbyterian Church in Canada is bound only to Jesus Christ, the Church's King and Head, and that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as God's written word, testifying to Christ, the living Word, are the canon of all doctrine by which Christ rules our faith and life. Our subordinate standards are the Westminster Confession of Faith (adopted in 1875 and 1889), the Declaration of Faith concerning Church and Nation (1955), and Living Faith (1998).

Parkwood Church as a congregation is part of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and has been ever since it was recognized by the Presbytery of Ottawa in 1964.

Within the structure of The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC), any change in doctrine (church teaching) or polity (the principles and method of governance) requires three steps: approval by one General Assembly (a national gathering of representatives from all 45 presbyteries across Canada, usually held once a year), subsequent approval by a majority of the presbyteries, and then approval by another General Assembly. This process, known as the Barrier Act, has been settled practice in the Presbyterian church since shortly after the Reformation; the Barrier Act was first approved by the Church of Scotland in 1697, and is designed to avoid hasty or unsupported changes in the teaching or structure of the church.

In 1994 the General Assembly adopted a comprehensive statement on human sexuality which among other things affirmed that sexual relations are designed by God to be expressed within the bonds of a marriage between one man and one woman. This is the teaching clearly confessed in both the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) and Living Faith (1998).

Some within the PCC have been seeking to change this. In 2019, the General Assembly adopted two proposals: (a) to assert that the church holds two definitions of marriage, one being a covenant relationship between one man and one woman, and the other being a covenant relationship between two adult persons, and (b) to permit individuals in same-sex unions to be eligible to serve as pastors or ruling elders. The proposals included a statement intended to provide “liberty of conscience and action” to ministers and sessions on marriage and to ministers and ruling elders on participation in ordinations.

When these proposals were considered by the Presbytery of Ottawa at a special meeting in early 2020, the presbytery was significantly divided: the presbytery signified approval of the first proposal by a vote of 22-12; and disapproval of the second proposal by a vote of 17-16.

The session of Parkwood believes (a) that the current confessed definition of marriage as being the union of one man and one woman is based upon God's design as revealed in the Bible, and (b) that the standards of conduct expected for pastors and elders should remain unchanged.

In early 2020, in view of the division in the local presbytery, aware that other presbyteries are also divided and that some presbyteries are strongly in favour of the proposed changes and others strongly against them, the session undertook to propose a plan to restructure the national PCC. The plan, known informally as the two-synod approach, proposes that ministers and congregations upholding the current definition of marriage be able to affiliate and work together within presbyteries and cohere together within a national synod, while ministers and congregations seeking to embrace a different definition of marriage

and revised standards for ordination be able to connect in a second set of presbyteries also within a national synod, with the two synods co-operating together in matters of common interest and concern. Part of the motivation for such a restructuring is to ensure that the so-called “liberty of conscience and action” provisions do in fact ensure long-term freedom and enable presbyterial oversight of ministers and congregations to continue with integrity and mutual accountability, without pressure to embrace and conform to what is a very different understanding of scripture and scriptural authority.

The General Assembly was to have met in June, 2020 to receive responses from the various presbyteries on the proposed changes to the definition of marriage and to eligibility for ordination, and we anticipated that the proposal from the session of Parkwood Church would have been received and considered. In addition, the Assembly, which was cancelled on account of the current pandemic, expected to receive a report which would address one of the concerns around the definition of liberty of conscience and action.

Legally, property of local congregations is held by trustees of the congregation in trust for the congregation. Under the provisions of the Trustee Board Act of 1939, should a congregation within The Presbyterian Church in Canada be dissolved, the property then vests in the Trustee Board of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. This has been understood to mean that congregations are not free to “leave” The Presbyterian Church in Canada and at the same time retain their property and financial assets. Since 2015, there have been several requests from congregations for a change to this protocol; the requests have generally been known as a “provision for gracious dismissal”, through which certain other Presbyterian bodies (in the USA, for example) allow congregations under certain circumstances to withdraw from one Presbyterian denomination and affiliate with another, while retaining their property. At the General Assembly in 2018, a report from the clerks of Assembly essentially proposing that such requests be denied was not accepted by the Assembly, but referred to the Assembly Council to study and report; at the General Assembly in 2019 permission was given to the Assembly Council to report on the matter to the General Assembly in 2020. Recent developments indicate that the Assembly Council has resolved not to receive and consider the report it commissioned from its own sub-committee until after the next General Assembly deals with the proposed changes to the definition of marriage and the standards for ordination.

In January, 2021, the session of another congregation within the Presbytery of Ottawa presented a proposal to the presbytery calling for the General Assembly not to make any changes in doctrine or polity while meeting online, but to wait for an in-person meeting at which full discussion and debate could take place on these matters face-to-face. The presbytery endorsed this proposal, and we are prayerful that the General Assembly will heed this advice.

The session wishes to inform the congregation of these matters and provide an opportunity for discussion, and is therefore calling a special congregational meeting, to be held on Saturday, May 1, 2020 at 7 p.m. via Zoom conference, to give the congregation an opportunity to express support or otherwise for the session’s expressed position in support of the current definition of marriage; to give opportunity for comments or reflections upon the session’s proposal for restructuring; to give opportunity for the congregation to reflect on the implications for future ministry and leadership in the event that the General Assembly adopts proposed changes to the church’s teaching on marriage; and, vitally, to pray for wisdom for the forthcoming General Assembly.

Our minister has been appointed as one of the delegates (commissioners) from the Presbytery of Ottawa to General Assembly which is scheduled to meet online from June 5-9. Once it is known what actions if any the Assembly takes, the session will undertake to further inform the congregation.

Watching and praying,

The session of Parkwood Church.

Dennis Featherstone, Clerk.  
James T. Hurd, Moderator.

## Questions and Answers

In the overall process to decide on the acceptance of the proposed revised definition of marriage, are we now at the third and final step where approval is being sought from the General Assembly?

Yes.

The letter provides information on the voting results by the Presbytery of Ottawa. What information is available for the Presbyteries across the country?

There are 45 Presbyteries across Canada. The reported vote is that approximately 73 percent of Presbyteries are in favour of changing the definition of marriage and about 66 per cent of Presbyteries are in favour of allowing a change in eligibility for ordination. The 45 Presbyteries are comprised of a total of approximately 1300 ministers and representative elders. The actual number of ministers and elders in favour or opposed is not known.

What if the church doctrine on marriage is changed?

“Liberty of conscience and action” was introduced early on at part of the discussion and voting process to allow pastors, elders and members to continue to embrace and conform to a very different understanding of scripture and scriptural authority on marriage. If both proposals (also called Remit B and Remit C) are approved, then there is a question of how pastors, elders and members respond to the change. There would appear to be three options: accept and affirm the new teaching; compromise by agreeing that the church’s teaching has changed but accept “liberty of conscience and action” and carry on the work; or some may find it necessary to resign or withdraw membership.

Would Parkwood’s property be taken away if the congregation does not accept and affirm a new doctrine?

At this point in time, this is an extreme question. Given the large number of denominational uncertainties, the question of if, when, and how the Presbytery would take action to change the current status of a congregation not accepting and affirming a new doctrine on marriage is premature.

With a change in doctrine, what are the likely consequences for Parkwood to remain in the PCC?

The consequences would mainly depend on whether the minister and congregation would be able to continue with “liberty of conscience and action” without pressure to embrace and conform to a very different understanding of scripture and scriptural authority.

It is possible that some members and adherents will consider not attending a Presbyterian church because of the change in the definition of marriage, although with “liberty of conscience and action” this might minimize any such loss.

Down the road for Parkwood, the next time it embarks on a search for a Minister, the congregation will need to address the possibility of applications from an ordained minister married to a person of the same sex.

What are the barriers to leaving the PCC?

The primary barrier at this time is the loss of our property. This might change if a form of gracious dismissal were put in place. Another barrier would be what the congregation might do as an alternative. Would it be viable as an independent congregation? Would it be able to find another organization where it would agree with the doctrines and polity of the alternative organization? (It should be remembered that a church has many more points of doctrine than the definition of marriage.)

What would be the major implications of leaving the PCC for the man or woman in the pews?

There would be a sense of a loss of membership in the PCC which for some has very important theological and family attachment values. There would be no access to the resources of the PCC. The Parkwood congregation might become smaller, depending on what course of action individuals in the congregation decide to take.

On the other hand, a new degree of freedom for the congregation might offer new opportunities for our approach to Christian witness in the community.

Should Session set out a plan for the congregation based on the worst-case scenario?

In general, planning for an uncertain future does not automatically focus on the worst-case scenario. Planning is usually based on the most likely outcome, taking into account the possibilities of both better and worse outcomes.

At this time, we are just a few months away from when General Assembly is expected to meet virtually. As we know, there are many uncertainties before and which might come

before the GA. The clarification of even one or two of these uncertainties would help congregations develop a better view on some of the other uncertainties and hence to develop a view on the overall most likely outcome.

Has Session considered the options for leaving the PCC?

The session is concerned about the possible change in doctrine and its effect on the PCC. It would prefer to remain within the PCC and to this end prepared an overture to consider the two-synod approach. Session continues to watch and pray about the ongoing process. When more clarity arises from the current uncertainty, options and possible courses of action will be reviewed further.

What is the worst case scenario for Parkwood?

The worst case would appear to be pressure for the Minister and congregation to embrace and conform to the different definition of marriage with no availability of options such as two-synod or gracious dismissal. The former option has appeal (indeed it originated with Parkwood) but the details have not been worked out. The latter option would include paying whatever is the financial penalty to withdraw, recognizing the loss in our historical relationship with the PCC and dealing with the challenge to operate as an independent congregation or finding another organization with an acceptable doctrine and polity.

What is the likelihood of General Assembly approving the two-synod option?

At this time, it is unclear whether the submission for the two-synod system option will be received and brought before the General Assembly. If it is not brought before General Assembly, then clearly the two-synod option would not be approved by this General Assembly in June.

If the proposed change in the definition of marriage passes at this General Assembly, then there might be an initiative to try to get the two-synod and/or the gracious dismissal option onto the agenda for the General Assembly in 2022.

Is there a sense of the degree of support for the two-synod proposal among sessions and Presbyteries not in favour of the proposed revision to the definition of marriage?

At this time it is difficult to assess the total support for the idea. But it is encouraging that there are several overtures similar to the Parkwood proposal for two synods.

### What is Gracious Dismissal?

Gracious Dismissal would be a way for a congregation to leave the PCC and retain their property and financial assets. Currently this is not the case. If a congregation were to request to leave the PCC or to be dissolved, then the ownership of the property would automatically switch to the Trustee Board of the PCC. There have been several requests from congregations to change this protocol. Basically, the proposed changes would allow congregations under certain circumstances to withdraw from the PCC while retaining their property.

### What “costs” would be included with gracious dismissal?

If/when a process for gracious dismissal is set up, it would then be possible to evaluate the conditions to apply for and the costs to receive gracious dismissal.

At a minimum, there would likely be legal and other costs (or penalties) related to the actual severance from the PCC. As well there would be future financial and organizational costs related to being separate. The financial costs would include higher costs due to changes in church group insurance and the various benefits for pastors. Organizational costs might include those to establish a “head office” for a group of congregations which obtained gracious dismissal and wish to join such an organization. If Parkwood were to join an existing organization, then the financial and other costs might be less than going the independent route.

There would also be the opportunity cost with the time spent on the details of the change rather than on the basic purposes of a church and congregation.

### What is the likelihood of gracious dismissal becoming an option?

At this time of great uncertainty, it would be unwise to try to attach a probability to this option. As the letter indicates, such a policy is feasible but the Assembly Council does not want it to be considered, at least at this time. In general, the main unknown for requesting congregations would be the circumstances attached to approving a request to withdraw from the PCC.

Some have observed that the financial costs to the PCC might be significant if a relatively large number of congregations sought and obtained gracious dismissal. Others have commented that the threat of a loss of property without gracious dismissal would minimize the number of congregations in the PCC seeking to leave the PCC.

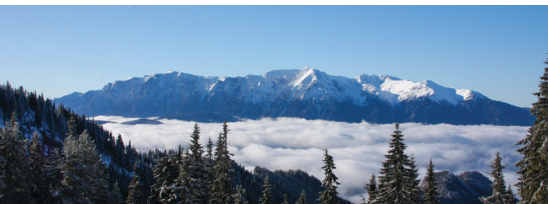


## significant news for christians

Some news that's encouraging—some disturbing—read with discernment. Watch and pray.

# THE Church Around the WORLD

April 2021



## Country in Focus: Romania <sup>(1)</sup>

Romania is a Balkan state on the lower Danube River. A mix of mountains, hills, and plains, it is a land rich in agriculture, minerals, and oil. Under one of the Communist bloc's most oppressive and cruel regimes, the country became more industrialized while suffering a great deal. That government was overthrown in 1989–90 and a parliamentary government was installed.

The Romanian diaspora in Europe is regarded as both a crisis and an opportunity—between 10 and 20 percent of Romanians have left the country since 1990.

Today, Romania is officially a secular state, though it is still dominated by the Orthodox Church. A legacy of brokenness endures from the days of Ceausescu's regime, a moral vacuum being filled with every kind of social evil. A 2006 law made it much more difficult to register denominations or charities and has been used to limit proselytism. Since the fall of communism, there has been a lack of unity among denominations and within congregations. The country has a large and growing evangelical population and is considered one of the more spiritually receptive European nations. There are more than 6,000 evangelical churches in the country.

Prayer concerns:

- Pray for leadership development in the churches.
- Pray for unity among Christian denominations.
- Pray for the Romani (Gypsy) community. (They are hard to accurately count: there are between 500,000 and 2.5 million.) They remain a needy people and suffer greatly from discrimination and isolation.

## Thousands of Nigerian Christians Martyred <sup>(2)</sup>

According to a new report by Nigeria's International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law, thousands of Christians

are being martyred for their faith, while the country's government is stating other reasons for their deaths. The report found that 2,000 Nigerian Christians were hacked to death throughout 2020, with an estimated 34,400 killed since 2009. An

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## This month you can . . . **Bless Others—Even during a Pandemic**

In the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, most people's attention was focused on adjusting to what many called a "new normal." Hardly anyone has managed to escape the day-to-day strain on their mental and emotional well-being. But what might it look like for us to share the love of Jesus and bless our neighbors like Jesus did, even during a pandemic? Here are five ways in the form of an acrostic that spells the word "BLESS":

- B Begin with prayer.** If you haven't begun already, this is a great time to start praying for your neighbors. If you need some help, go to [BlessEveryHome.com](http://BlessEveryHome.com). It lists your neighbors' names and addresses with helpful ideas for how you can pray for them. You could go on a prayer walk through your neighborhood, as long as you wear a mask and maintain social-distancing guidelines.
- L Listen.** We know one of the greatest gifts we can give to anyone is a listening ear. As long as you keep your distance, you can still talk to people when you are out and about. You might even try an actual phone call—remember those? Ask them, "How are you really doing?" and then give them the space to actually tell you. More than ever in this season of isolation, people are longing for connection—someone who will listen to them.
- E Eat.** Even in a global pandemic, most of us still eat at least three meals a day—and if you're like me, many snacks in between. Offer to provide a meal to someone via a food delivery

app. Or better yet, don't ask first. Surprise someone. Buy a delicious treat at the grocery store and drop it off for someone. Just this week some friends of mine delivered freshly baked scones to their neighbors. My wife, Lisa, and I were on the receiving end of a blessing when someone left a loaf of fresh bread on our front porch.

- S Serve.** Social distancing means we must get creative in how we serve others. Write a thank-you note to your local grocer or first responders. Buy extra supplies to share with your neighbors. Rake your neighbor's leaves or shovel the snow off their sidewalks. Call someone who may be lonely, or buy groceries for someone who can't leave their home. If you're praying for your neighbors and listening to what they are saying, chances are you will discover meaningful ways you could serve them.
- S Story.** In this crisis you may have more opportunities than ever to tell how you found your way to God and the difference your hope in Jesus makes, especially during these difficult times. Look for opportunities to share your story. And keep it simple. It's as easy as one, two, three: (1) Talk about your life before you met Jesus, (2) share how you met Jesus, and (3) explain how your life is different since you met Jesus.

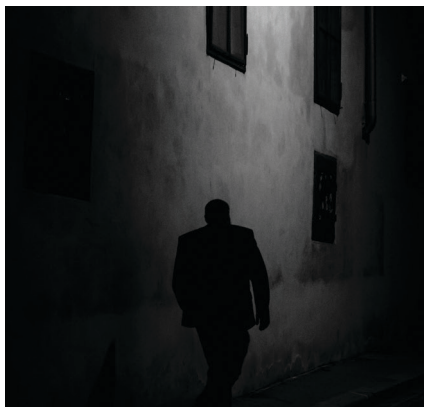
*This article is adapted from a piece by Jon Ferguson, the network pastor and cofounder of Community Christian Church, just outside of Chicago. He is also the co-author of B.L.E.S.S.: 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World. Learn more at [Bless-Book.org](http://Bless-Book.org).*



*Thousands of Nigerian Christians Martyred, continued from page 1*

estimated 20,000 moderate Muslims have also been murdered by radical Muslims.

The Nigerian government covers up the anti-Christian killings by reporting the incidents as random banditry or intertribal violence—but the attacks on Christians appear to be part of a plan to conquer Nigeria for Islam.



## Christian Pastors in Hiding in China <sup>(3)</sup>

Droves of pastors across China have disconnected from their computers and phones; destroyed their ID cards, which contain microchip trackers and are needed to do virtually anything in China; and have gone into hiding. The situation for believers in China has been extremely difficult, as Xi Jinping and the Communist Party gradually

prepare for what seems like a final assault to try to rid the country of Christianity once and for all. To that end, the government has openly announced plans to reinterpret the Bible and other religious texts, so they will have socialist characteristics. The Chinese Communist Party has been creating an altered version of the Bible that seeks to inject Communist messages into the Holy Scriptures.

The State Department and other governing bodies have condemned the persecution of Christians in China, and the House introduced a resolution to condemn Chinese persecution of Christians.

## China Imprisons Christians for Publishing Church Books <sup>(4)</sup>

A Chinese man was recently sentenced to more than three years in prison for publishing Christian books, in an alarming criminal case that involved more than two dozen people.

Xian Renguo, the director of the secretarial department of the South Korean Good News Mission in China, received a sentence of three years and ten months in prison and was fined about \$3,000 (USD) for his role in “illegal business operations”—that is, publishing Christian books. Two other Good News Mission members were

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given sentences of three years and six months, while several printing house managers were sentenced to three years. All total, the crackdown on the Good News Mission involved arrests and/or fines of 26 people in 13 provinces.

## Indian Pastor Killed after Baptizing New Believers <sup>(5)</sup>

Three unidentified men recently shot and killed a pastor in the east Indian state of Jharkhand. Pastor Salim Stephen Surin, a part-time evangelist in Rania village of Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district, was returning home with his wife after baptizing new believers.

"They killed my husband in front of my own eyes," said Tarsis, the wife of the slain pastor. "I was terrified seeing my husband collapse having been shot. I loudly cried out to God to save me and take care of my two children."

Radical Hindu groups have been demanding that the government ban those who convert to Christianity from receiving education and employment opportunities provided for the indigenous people.

India is ranked number 10 on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. Open Doors notes that converts to Christianity from a Hindu background are "especially vulnerable to persecution" and are constantly under pressure to return to Hinduism.



## Israeli Archaeologists Unearth Ancient Oil Lamps <sup>(6)</sup>

Archaeologists studying the Beit Shemesh area of Israel recently uncovered 1,700 lamps, some of which carry Jewish symbols, as well as fish motifs, one of the symbols of Christianity. Before this find, there was scant archaeological evidence of Christians in the area. The figurines and the motifs on the lamps tell the story of the Judean Hills in the period following the Bar Kokhba Revolt, a time in which Christianity also began to emerge. The sheer variety of lamps and figurines proves that the local population featured a mix of Jews, Christians, and pagans.

The lamps support Josephus's writings about Christians flourishing in the region alongside Jews during the second century AD. Agnostic and atheistic academics dispute Josephus's reliability because he wrote about Jesus's death and the miracles he performed. However, most biblical scholars and researchers regard Josephus as one of the most accurate historians of the period.

**Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.**

COLOSSIANS 4:2