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An Open Letter to Members of the LGBTQ Community:

I am writing today as the spiritual leader of Canada's largest Protestant denomination, The United Church of Canada. I am also writing as an openly gay man, married to another United Church minister. This introduction may come as a surprise, seeing that so often it is religious leaders who condemn homosexuality, quoting scripture to justify their prejudice.

And so, as we approach this year's International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, I want to deliver a different sort of message from a religious leader to all members of the LGBTQ community, whether they are people of faith or not.

It is a message that states unequivocally that not all Christians think the same way; that the hatred, condemnation, and judgment inflicted upon LGBTQ people by some within the Christian church is wrong and does not reflect the sum total of all Christian understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation.

For too long LGBTQ persons have been ostracized because of who they are, and the cost has been tremendous suffering, oppression, and diminishment of their humanity. For this I grieve.

I believe that we are all made in the image of God, wholly good and wholly loved by the Creator. This is why I feel such sadness when I see religious leaders and organizations failing to recognize that reality in every member of the LGBTQ community.

I also feel sadness for those who have lost their lives due to homophobia and transphobia, and for the pain it has caused those still with us. We all deserve to live without fear, nurtured by communities that support our healing and empowerment. This is why I also feel a deep sense of appreciation for and am inspired by all the countless LGBTQ individuals who give so much of themselves to their communities, family, and friends to make the world a safer place.

For in the end I believe God says to each of us, "You are my beloved child!" We need to live that blessing with each other and that will not happen if we judge others as if we were higher than God. We are called to live together with respect for each other's differences and in ways that reflect God's intention for us all, and for creation as a whole.

And while I recognize that the journey to full inclusion is not over—even within the United Church—I want you to know there is hope; that the Spirit continues to challenge us to learn and to grow as a community of faith and to bear witness to the oppression suffered by the LGBTQ community.

As we mark this International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, I pray that you will hear this message of acceptance and affirmation, and know that there are many within the Christian church committed to working with you to end hatred, discrimination, and judgment of all human beings regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

In solidarity,

The Right Reverend Gary Paterson
Moderator, The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada