

Guidelines for the Implementation of the Presbytery's
Policy on Inclusive Language

Use of Scripture

Scripture, in the original Hebrew and Greek, is more inclusive than most English translations. Through careful attention to the use of scripture in worship, God's word can come to us through the received tradition of the church, and yet can be set free from the limitations of a patriarchal culture in order to speak to us afresh. While the use of exclusive language may occasionally be warranted for reasons of historical accuracy or poetic integrity, we encourage and emphasize language which genuinely reflects the diversity of our spiritual community.

Language in Hymns

Hymns are communal statements of faith that reflect our understanding of God and humanity. Yet many of the hymns we use, written primarily in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, are no longer adequate to convey our expanding concepts of God and the people of God. We encourage all who choose hymns to select from the many hymns in our present hymnals that are gender inclusive. We also encourage the writing and use of new hymns that reflect the sensitivity of our times. Some well known hymns, beloved for both their melodies and words, will sometimes be sung with their present texts, and sometimes with alternative verses. New and altered hymn texts will be printed in the bulletin in full. The same standards of liturgical fitness and aesthetics will be applied to all hymns.

Language in Anthems

We recognize that there are considerations which may inhibit attempts to make anthems gender-inclusive, including copyright laws and a desire to respect the writer's voice. We will therefore regard anthems as historical works. We endorse the present practice of making minor revisions where practical. We encourage those who choose, review, and purchase new anthems to act consistently with our other guidelines on inclusivity.

Use of Liturgy

Throughout history, the order of worship and the selection of liturgical texts have been altered many times. Whenever such changes are contemplated, we recommend that greater inclusivity in the liturgy be an intended result. Some age-old elements of the liturgy, such as the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed, are regarded by many worshippers as particularly inviolable, and it is thus desirable to use them in the most familiar forms. We encourage the occasional use of alternative statement of faith, offertory responses, unison prayers, and litanies that acknowledge and affirm our diversity.

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Policy on Inclusive Language in the Worship Service

Because we are called to be one with God and each other, it is important that our services of worship clearly show that we are an inclusive community of faith. The words we use have a powerful impact on how we perceive God, the Christian community and our- selves. In order to affirm the full human dignity of all worshippers, the Presbytery of Geneva adopts these guidelines on the use of inclusive language. We recognize the creative tension that exists between a desire for greater justice and a fondness for familiar tradition, and we celebrate the fact that it is present in each of us, as well as in the Presbytery as a whole. This tension is our assurance that worship, the collective expression of our faith, will remain vital and impassioned.

Language about God

God is not fully comprehensible to us; we therefore use symbols and metaphors to describe God. No one metaphor can describe all that God is. Because both women and men are created in God's image, God encompasses both male and female, yet God is a spirit that far transcends male and female. Our goal as a church is to use language that will bring all people closer to God. Historically, male images of God have been predominant: father, king, bridegroom. Yet there are in the Bible and in our traditions a variety of female images of God: mother, midwife, homemaker, as well as other metaphors and symbols: wind, rock, lamb of God, mother eagle, mother hen, wisdom, grace, word, love. To bring men and women into closer harmony with God, we will continue to develop and use a variety of metaphors and symbols to describe God.

Language about People

The English language is particularly confusing in that one word "man" has been used to mean both "adult male" and "human being". In addition, the literature of the church has often relied on exclusively masculine terms as substitutes for their more generic counterparts: "forefathers" for "ancestors", "sons" for "children", "brotherhood" for "fellowship" or "community". No matter how intended, the use of these words has the effect of excluding women from our vision of the Christian heritage. While their use may occasionally be warranted for reasons of historical accuracy or poetic integrity, we encourage and emphasize language which genuinely reflects the diversity of our spiritual community, choosing fully inclusive words such as "humanity", "people", "family of God", "saints", "we", and so on.

As these guidelines are implemented with love and discretion, they will forward the peace and harmony of our Church.