
GUIDE FOR USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Originally developed for use in the Christian Peacemaker Congress 1993-1994

As an organization which believes in the transforming power of nonviolence, we are committed to respecting all persons and recognize that language presents an important way to model mutuality between men and women. We are committed to equal affirmation of women and men within worship services, workshops, training sessions and other gatherings and encourage all participants to use inclusive language where possible in speaking, reading, writing, teaching, and leading music.

As a worshipping community, our longing is for an inclusive community where God is recognized and revealed in many traditions and tongues, identities and images, colors and cultures. We wish our worship and communication to be as varied and as rich as God's world. We are challenged to be sensitive and creative. We are challenged to proclaim God who is greater than our words allow us to understand.

Participants are encouraged to:

- utilize a wide variety of images for God as you speak. There is no need to neuter God by eliminating pronouns altogether. Rather find other words that reflect an image of God.
- use examples and stories whose characters are women, men, children, older people, rich and poor, Canadians, Americans, Mennonites, Brethren, Quakers, Catholics and Protestants, etc.
- be creative when using materials which do not adapt well to inclusive language. It is helpful to intersperse these materials with ones which are more contemporary and inclusive of all.
- either refrain from using or explain acronyms and words which are understood by people within Mennonite, Brethren and Quaker traditions.

In referring to humans: While such terms as "man" and "mankind" were once understood generically as well as with reference to human males, this is increasingly not the case. The avoidance of exclusive language when referring to people in general is not difficult and can be done without awkwardness.

- For: Man/Men/Mankind – Use: people, all people, men and women, humanity, all, person, everyone, we
- For: Brotherhood – Use: community, companionship, unity, family, friendship, kinship
- For: Male pronouns – Use: he or she, they, you
- For: Sons of God – Use: people of God, God's people, children of God

In referring to God: Christians should carefully choose words to describe God. The predominant use of masculine terms to refer to God is traditional but limits our understanding of God. Images like "Father" and "Mother" may be appropriate for expressing a personal relationship with God. Other images may be found to express an activity of God, for example: Creator, Sustainer, Maker, Defender and Nurturer. Other appropriate titles are Spirit, Source of Life, Rock, etc.

In Scripture: It is understandable that in a patriarchal society language for God would have been primarily masculine. Frequently we neglect some Biblical imagery for God that is feminine, for example: Deuteronomy 32:18 – "the God who gave you birth;" Isaiah 66:13 – "as a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you;" Matthew 23:37 – "O Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered your children like a hen gathers her brood under her wings;" Luke 15:8-10 – God as the woman in the parable of the lost coin.

In referring to Jesus: The historical fact that Jesus was incarnate as a male is significant as an affirmation that Jesus was truly human as well as divine. We also recognize that Jesus incorporated the humanity of all men and women.

In referring to the Trinity: It is appropriate to refer to the Trinity in personal terms. Traditionally these terms have been masculine. It is possible to use terms that are more inclusive, for example Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit.

In selecting hymns: Many traditional hymns use language and imagery that is out of date but dear to the hearts of many. It is often possible to substitute more inclusive words or phrases. It is also helpful to mix these hymns with songs that are more contemporary and inclusive of all.