

Inclusive Language with Reference to the People of God

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28 NRSV).

“In recent years, the Presbyterian Church has become aware that the diversity of culture, gender, class, and race, which is present in the church and in the world, often is not reflected in the language of the church” (“Definitions and Guidelines on Inclusive Language”^{*}).

Avoid Words That Exclude

Choose Words That Include

brothers, brotherhood (in the faith)	brothers and sisters, friends, kindred, family of faith, neighbors, humankind
man, men, mankind	people, all people, men and women or women and men, humanity, persons, everyone, all of us, we, one
sons (of God)	daughters and sons, children of God, people of God, God’s people, heirs
chairman	chairperson, chair, moderator, group leader, department head, presiding officer
workmen	workers
forefathers	ancestors, forebears, forebearers
disabled person	person with a disability, differently abled
clergyman	clergy, minister
layman	laity, layperson, member of the congregation, congregant
fellowship	community, communion, friendship, “koinonia”
man-made	constructed, not natural, human-made, synthetic
stand as able	stand at your discretion
minority people	racial ethnic people, people of color
foreigner, alien	visitor from another country, immigrant
man and wife	husband and wife or woman and man
kingdom	kindom, realm
third world	developing nations

Inclusive Translations of Scripture

- New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). New York: National Council of Churches, 1989.
- *Inclusive Language Lectionary*, Years A (1983), B (1984), C (1985). New York: National Council of Churches. *Inclusive Language Psalms*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1987.
- The Psalms, *Book of Common Worship*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, pp. 611–783, 1993. *Daily Prayers* edition of *Book of Common Worship*, pp. 181–390.
- *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (New York: Oxford), 1995.

A concern for **inclusive language** bespeaks the church’s emerging conviction both that the diversity of the people of God is to be acknowledged and embraced in such a way that all may feel included, as well as the realization that every reference to God is limited in its capacity to express the reality and mystery of the One who has so variously encountered us” (“Definitions and Guidelines”^{*}).

General Assembly Actions

The General Assembly (GA) took action in 1971, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1998 and 2000 encouraging the use of inclusive language in worship, education, publications, and theological and biblical reflection.

1979 GA 191 received the paper “The Power of Language Among the People of God and the Language about God” and commended its use to the Church as a resource document.

1985 GA 197 adopted “Definitions and Guidelines on Inclusive Language.”

1998 GA 210 asked moderators of governing bodies to renew their commitment to “Definitions and Guidelines” and the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns requested that the Office of Theology and Worship assess the current status of the church on inclusive language policy.

2000 GA 212 reaffirmed “Definitions and Guidelines on Inclusive Language” and requested the Office of Theology and Worship make it available churchwide.

Documents Available from Presbyterian Distribution Services, 800/524-2612

- **“Definitions and Guidelines on Inclusive Language,”* PDS 70-420-01-003
- A Report to the Church on Issues of Language and Gender, PDS 70-42-00-007
- Power and Language, *Church and Society*, Nov/Dec 1998, PDS 72-630-98-606

Well Chosen Words!

Inclusive
Language with
Reference to the
People of God

Expansive
Language with
Reference
to God

Women’s Ministries
National Ministries Division

Advocacy Committee for
Women’s Concerns (ACWC)

(A Ministry of the General Assembly Council)



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Expansive Language
with Reference to God

“Our language about God should be as intentionally diverse and varied as is that of the Bible and our theological tradition. This diversity should be reflected in the language and life of the church. Rather than using only a very small number of terms referring to God (e.g., “Father,” “Creator,” “Lord,” “Almighty”), we should seek to employ the rich reservoir of imagery to be found in the New and Old Testaments” (“Definitions and Guidelines on Inclusive Language”*)).

Why Put God
in a Box?

Father
Creator
Lord
Almighty

Speaking about God

“What is the right way to speak about God? This is a question of unsurpassed importance, for speech to and about the mystery that surrounds human lives and the universe itself is a key activity of a community of faith. In that speech the symbol of God functions as the primary symbol of the whole religious system, the ultimate point of reference for understanding experience, life, and the world. Hence the way in which a faith community shapes language about God implicitly represents what it takes to be the highest good, the profoundest truth, the most appealing beauty. Such speaking, in turn, powerfully molds the corporate identity of the community and directs its praxis” (Johnson, Elizabeth A. *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad), 1992, pp. 3–4).

Expansive Images of God
in Scripture

Midwife	Gen 1:27, Ps 22:9–10
Mother	Num 11:12–13, Deut 32:18, Job 38:28–29, Ps 131:2, Isa 42:14, Isa 46:3–4, Isa 49:15, Isa 66:9, Hos 9:14, Hos 11:3–4, Jn 16:21, Acts 17:28, Rom 8:22, 1 Pet 2:2–3
Mother bear	Hos 13:8
Shepherd	Jn 10:11, 14; Ps 23
Woman	Lk 15:8–10, Ps 123:2
Baker	Mt 13:33, Lk 13:20–21
Eagle	Deut 32:11–12, Ex 19:4
Hen	Mt 23:37; Ruth 2:12, Ps 57:1, Ps 61:4, Lk 13:34, Ps 17:8
Fire	Deut 4:24
Wind	Acts 2:2, Jn 3:8
Rock	Is 17:10
Water	Jer 17:13
Light	Jn 8:12, Isa 60:2–3
Bread	Jn 6:33–35
Vine	Jn 15:1
Word	Jn 1:1
Wisdom	Lk 11:49, 1 Cor 1:24
I Am	Ex 3:14
Potter	Jer 18:1–11, Job 10:8–9

Check the Web site for more informaton
www.pcusa.org/women/resources

Expansive Images of God
in the Creeds

The Nicene Creed

God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God; Lord and Giver of Life

The Apostles Creed

Maker of heaven and earth

The Scots Confession

Eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible; Messiah

The Heidelberg Catechism

Faithful Savior; merciful, gracious, righteous; Mediator, Advocate, Judge

The Second Helvetic Confession

God is One, God is Three; just Judge and Avenger, Only Savior, True Awaited Messiah, Living God, Author of the sacraments

The Westminster Confession

Infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute . . . most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering; Christ the Mediator

The Larger Catechism

God is a Spirit, in and of himself* infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. (*historic language)

The Theological Declaration of Barmen

Jesus Christ—the One Word of God

The Confession of 1967

Reconciling the world, Redeemer, Creator

A Brief Statement of Faith

Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child; giver and renewer of life.

Expansive Images of God
from our Theological Traditions

“He who has promised us heavenly food has nourished us on milk, having recourse to a mother’s tenderness. For just as a mother, suckling her infant, transfers from her flesh the very same food which otherwise would be unsuited to a babe (the little one actually receives that he would have received at table but the food conveyed through the flesh is adapted to the child), so our Lord, in order to convert His wisdom into milk for our benefit, came to us clothed in flesh.”

—St. Augustine

“But you too, good Jesus, are you not also a mother? Are you not a mother who like a hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings? And you, my soul dead in yourself, run under the wings of Jesus your mother and lament your griefs under his feathers. Ask that your wounds may be healed and that, comforted, you may live again. Christ, my mother, you gather your chickens under your wings; this dead chicken of yours puts himself under those wings . . . Warm your chicken, give life to your dead one, justify your sinner.

—Anselm of Canterbury, *Prayers and Meditations*

“To those infants who seek the Word, the Father’s loving breasts supply milk.”

—Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*

Other Expansive Images
from Theologians

"God his father and the Holy Spirit his Mother."

—Aphrahat, *The Orthodox Way*

In *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian of Norwich spoke of Jesus as the mother who gives us birth in the agonies of the cross and who nurses us at the breast in Holy Communion.