

Gender-fluid | According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “a person who does not identify with a single fixed gender; of or relating to a person having or expressing a fluid or unfixed gender identity.”

Gender identity | One’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. A person’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender-nonconforming | A broad term referring to people who do not conform to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

Genderqueer | People who typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as “genderqueer” may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

Gender transition | The process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with their outward appearance. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns and/or be socially recognized as another gender. Others undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions.

Homophobia | The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex in any expressed form.

Intersex | An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. In some cases, these traits are visible at birth, and in others, they are not apparent until puberty. Some chromosomal variations of this type may not be physically apparent at all.

Lesbian | Someone who identifies as a woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women.

LGBTQIA+ | An acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual.” The plus sign refers to the expansive nature of the term to continually include all identities.

Living openly | A state in which LGBTQIA+ people are comfortably out about their sexual orientation or gender identity – where and when it feels appropriate to them.

Nonbinary | An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Nonbinary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all nonbinary people do.

Outing | Exposing someone’s identity to others without their permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety, mental and emotional health, and religious or family situations.

Pansexual | Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Queer | A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations. Often used interchangeably with LGBTQIA+.

Questioning | A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Same-gender-loving | A term some prefer to use instead of lesbian, gay or bisexual to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender. This term has its roots in the Black community and is generally used specifically by Black people.

Saposexual | An orientation referring to people who are physically, emotionally, or mentally attracted based on expressions of intelligence

Sexual orientation | An inherent or immutable, enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.

Transgender | An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc. The term also does not refer to nor imply any specific surgical procedures.

Transphobia | The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, transgender people in any expressed form.

Office of Gender & Racial Justice
Compassion Peace, & Justice Ministries
Presbyterian Mission Agency PC(USA)

WELL- CHOSEN WORDS!

Third Edition

Inclusive

Language with Reference to the People of God

Expansive

Language with Reference to God

*a guide on respectful language that
builds the beloved community.*

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Inclusive and Expansive Language

Using inclusive and expansive language is one way to acknowledge and celebrate all people and bring recognition and a sense of belonging to people who have been historically marginalized in society and even in the church. This resource seeks to broaden our expressions of God and the many human reflections of our Creator as we live into beloved community.

General Assembly Actions: The General Assembly (GA) took action in 1971, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2010 encouraging the use of inclusive language in worship, education, publications, and theological and biblical reflection. In 2018 the GA approved overtures celebrating the gifts of people of all gender identities and sexual orientations in the life of the church and affirming and celebrating the full dignity and humanity of people of all gender identities. See GA minutes of these assemblies for more information.

Words Have Value

Language is not value neutral. All words have value and meaning. The words we choose to use communicate our personal thoughts, beliefs and feelings. Our language is a carrier of culture and mirrors culture. It can create systems of insiders and outsiders. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to a new way of life and a new way of speech. Accordingly, we are called to consciousness that “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21). Each time we speak, we have the opportunity to give life by choosing to use language that empowers, that is sensitive to the plight of oppressed people, that honors all human beings as God’s good Creation, and that has evolved through time and history. Well-chosen words have the ability to build up, instead of tear down. Our use of inclusive and expansive language speaks to our ability to be reformed in our thinking about God and the people of God.

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 found in the New and Old Testaments” (Definitions and Guidelines on Inclusive Language).

Mother	Numbers 11:12–13, Deuteronomy 32:18, Isaiah 42:14, Isaiah 46:3–4, Isaiah 49:15
I Am	Exodus 3:14
Hen	Matthew 13:33, Psalm 57:1, Psalm 61:4
Rock	Isaiah 17:10
Water	Jeremiah 17:13
Eagle	Deuteronomy 32:11–12, Exodus 19:4
Woman	Luke 15:8–10, Psalm 123:2

Inclusive Language for the People of God

Avoid Words That Exclude	Choose Words That Include
brothers and sisters, sisterhood, brotherhood	siblings, people of God, kindred, humankind
Mother and father	parent
niece and nephew	nibling
kingdom	kin-dom, realm, reign
men, mankind, men and women, ladies and gentlemen	humanity, humankind, friends, folx, people
chairman	chair, chairperson, moderator, group leader
fellowship	community, friendship, “koinonia”
laymen	laity, member, congregant
clergyman	clergy, minister, teaching elder
forefathers	ancestors, forebears
stand as you are able	rise in body or spirit
minority	people of color, marginalized populations
third world	developing countries
manmade	constructed, human-made, synthetic
foreigner, illegal alien	immigrant, undocumented person
husband and wife	spouses, partners
sons of God, sons and daughters of God	children of God, people of God
Sissy, tranny, bulldagger, dyke, “funny,” homo	LGBTQIA+, queer or however someone tells you they prefer to be referenced

Gender, Identity and Sexuality Terms

Ally -One who | A+shows support for LGBTQIA+ people and promotes equality in a variety of ways.

Androgynous | Identifying and/or presenting as neither distinguishably masculine, feminine nor any particular gender presentation.

Asexual | Someone who possesses low or no sexual attraction or desire for other people.

Bisexual | A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Cisgender | A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Closeted | Describes an LGBTQIA+ person who has not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming out | The process in which a person acknowledges, accepts and/or appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Demisexual | A term used for one who only has sexual attraction to someone they have an established emotional connection with.

Gay | A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

Gender dysphoria | Clinically significant distress caused when a person’s assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. --“”

Gender-expansive | Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.

Gender expression | External appearance of one’s gender identity which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.