

# Inclusive Language Policy

## Policy statement on the Use of Inclusive Language

### **The basic assumptions of our statement are:**

1. Language shapes and informs our impressions of reality. It is basic to learning.
2. Language informs our attitudinal stereotypes and subtly influences people into roles, positions, status, and other forms of fragmentation. It is a key to human relationships.
3. Language can be a creative, liberating force or a captive, oppressing force. It is an expression of shared assumptions and a major factor in all liberation struggles.
4. Both women and men suffer from the use of a male-oriented language which forces personalities into culturally approved roles, limiting free decisions.
5. Our use of male-dominated language images and forms deny the feminine\masculine duality in each of us.

### **There are some basic theological assumptions which need affirmation in light of the above assumptions:**

1. God is not a male person (SUPER-Superman). Terminology about God, particularly in worship, which uses exclusively masculine words (e.g., He, Him, His, Father, Lord) distorts our concepts of a deity in whose image both females and males are created.
2. All persons share equally in God's plan for humanity.
3. Jesus recognized women as valuable persons, even to the point of violating the social mores of his time (e.g., by conversing with women in public).
4. The Church, as the Body of Christ, is a liberating and creative force enabling persons to transcend the boundaries of language and society in being faithful to the Word (Gospel) of Love.
5. The historical periods described in the Bible as well as the times in which the Scriptures were written, compiled and translated were all in patriarchal social settings. Thus, images of male-female roles described are colored by the cultural

understandings of those times and need not be literally interpreted for our changed cultural situation. The truths of the faith are denied by sex role stereotypes. They can be conveyed more clearly without the male-dominant, female-submissive images of a given historical period.

**The following suggestions are given as guidelines for use in printed materials, classroom environment, academic work, and worship. The guidelines are based on the above assumptions and theological affirmations.**

1. Much of the language which appears in printed materials reflects a masculine bias. Therefore, the following list of words is given as alternatives to the exclusively masculine phraseology:

a. for **mankind**: Humankind, humanity, people, persons, creatures, citizens, community, ourselves, yourselves, folk, mortals, beings, etc.

b. for **brotherhood**: sisters and brothers, society, public, unity, community, amity, kinship, corporateness, etc.

c. for **masculine pronouns**: he/she, we, our, their, one, the person, individual, someone, member, etc.

2. Attempts need to be made to refer to God in other than exclusive masculine words in order to balance our images of the deity. Some options include: Creator, Redeemer, Holy Spirit, Sustainer, Mother and Father God, One, Life Giver or Giver of Life, etc. (See nonsexist liturgies in the book Women and Worship by Sharon and Thomas Emswiler, Harper & Row, 1974).

3. Occupational and status terms often suggest role and position stereotypes which need to be avoided. This is true for both women and men. The following titles should be avoided:

a. policeman, fireman, serviceman, statesman, watchman, salesman, etc.

b. authoress, aviatrix, heiress, sculptress, songstress, poetess, etc.

Such terms not only give young people false impressions about their vocational prospects, they also tend to perpetuate discriminatory practices that exist. Occupational and status terms can be avoided by the use of diction, by changing the sentence construction, or by altering the terminology.

4. It is often demeaning to women to be identified entirely by their relationship to men. One form of this discrimination is the use of the terms Mrs. and Miss, which

identify women according to marital status. It is preferable to use the general title Ms. to identify a woman, as Mr. is used to identify a man.

5. In referring to couples, whether married or partnered, use such identifying phrases as “Mary and John Jones” rather than “Mr. and Mrs. John Jones” or “John Jones and his wife Mary” or “the John Joneses.” There is more dignity in using a woman’s full name. Editors should also be aware of couples using hyphenated last names (e.g., “Marcia and John Clark-Johnson,” “Doug and José Tompkins-Garcia”), which include the each person’s last name—and also the number of couples using different last names (neither person changes their last name). If it is important to identify them as a married or partnered couple, it can be done as “Mi-Ok Kim and Young Park, wife and husband (or partners),” or “Dionne Coleman and her wife (or partner), Sophia Evans.” (Which partner’s name comes first, is optional, but should not be consistently one way or the other, implying a more important status to the first.)

6. The common ways in which identification of persons is written suggests a predominant male orientation. Identifications and family relations often reflect fixed roles, stereotyped duties, or child affinity and possession. For example, “housewife,” “the little woman,” etc. suggest attitudes which imply that only women are in the home and doing domestic chores. This is demeaning to both men and women.

7. Application forms for educational institutions (e.g., seminaries), or membership in organizations (e.g., craft unions), or employment in jobs traditionally held by men (e.g., welding), should not discriminate against women applicants by such means as asking for the “wife’s name.” If such information is necessary, the word is “spouse.”

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