Inclusive Language with Reference to the People of God

Avoid Words that Exclude	Choose Words that Include
brothers, brotherhood (in the faith)	brothers and sisters, friends, kindred, family of faith, neighbors, humankind
men, mankind	people, men and women, women and men, humanity, humankind
chairman	chair, chairperson, moderator, group leader, presiding official
fellowship	community, friendship, "koinonia"
forefathers	ancestors, forebears
kingdom	kindom, realm, reign
laymen	laity, member, congregant
clergyman	clergy, minister, teaching elder
birth defect, disabled, crippled, deformed, retarded	congenital disability, persons who are differently abled, physically challenged, mentally challenged
blind	visually impaired
stand as you are able	rise in body or spirit
minority	racial ethnic people, people of color
third world	developing countries
manmade	constructed, human-made, synthetic
workmen	workers
foreigner, alien	visitor from another country, immigrant
man and wife	husband and wife, woman and man
sons (of God)	daughters and sons, children of God, people of God

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 Images of God from our Theological Traditions

"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?"—*Anselm of Canterbury, Prayers and Meditations"*

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.

Order this brochure at **pcusa.org/store** or download at **pcusa.org/allwomen** ("Resources" tab)

Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries

Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC)

PDS 27-521-12-001

Well Chosen *Words!*
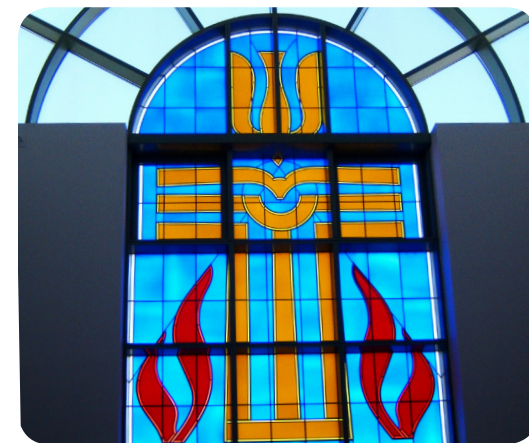
Inclusive
Language with Reference to the People of God

Expansive
Language with Reference to God

pcusa.org/women
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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission

Inclusive and Expansive Language

» Seeks to include others.

» Is sensitive to the plight of people who have been marginalized in history.

» Broadens our expressions of God.

"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 on Inclusive Language,* 197th General Assembly (1985), PCUSA, Advisory Council on Discipleship and Worship, Council on Theology and Culture).

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*).

Expansive Images of God in the Creeds

The Nicene Creed—God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God

The Apostles' Creed—Maker of heaven and earth

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 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. God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community

The Theological Declaration of Barmen—Jesus Christ—the One Word 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)

Expansive Images of God in Scripture

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 Translations of Scripture

» *The Inclusive Bible: First Egalitarian Version.* The Priests for Equality, Sheed and Ward, 2007.

» 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 New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (New York: Oxford), 1995.

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. See GA minutes of these assemblies for more information.

Available at pcusa.org/language-gender
» *A Report to the Church on Issues of Language and Gender*

Document Available from Presbyterian Distribution Services, (800) 524-2612
» *Definitions and Guidelines on Inclusive Language,* PDS 70-420-01-003