

## Inclusive Language Policy

We believe that words and images should be welcoming and affirming of all people, and that verbal, visual, and musical expressions that cause pain, even if that pain is unintentional or not understood, should be avoided. This single statement guides us in our worship, our work, and our communications.

### **Gender-specific language for God:**

God is neither male nor female, so we avoid using gender-dominated language for God, and use more expansive language. This includes in scripture readings and historic confessions of our faith where we will replace gendered pronouns for God, with “God” or another name that is appropriate to the reading.

We do use gendered language for God in the following circumstances:

- a. The Lord’s Prayer. This prayer connects us with believers in all times and places, so we keep this name for God in this prayer to honor that connection.
- b. Baptism formula: Many churches won’t recognize baptism without the traditional words “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” We often add “our creator, redeemer, and sustainer” or other words to recognize that the traditional words do not fully encompass the Triune God.
- c. Music: We try to choose music that doesn’t use gendered language for God. Legally, we cannot change the words of a hymn that someone else has written, so where we do use a hymn that has gendered language for God, we try to balance that with other music that uses more expansive language.

### **Gender-specific language for humanity:**

Language changes over time, and we recognize that in the past “man,” “mankind,” and even “brothers” on occasion, and other such male language, was often used to encompass everyone present, men and women. Today those words are understood to be more exclusive. We also recognize that not all people identify as male or female. We do not wish our language to be exclusive, but rather inclusive, and honoring of all people, not dismissive or making people invisible. Therefore, we use non-gendered words such as “siblings,” and “humankind.” For pronouns, unless talking about a person of a specific gender, we use they/them/theirs, or if the individual chooses to use other pronouns, we will use the pronouns of their choice. This includes scripture in readings where gendered pronouns or language will be replaced with more inclusive language **where it is clear that was what was intended.**

Music: Most of the hymns in our hymnal were written before people were sensitive to the expansive ways people identify in terms of gender and sexuality. Some hymns speak only of male and female. Over the course of a worship service, we may use some of those hymns, and seek to balance them with hymns that avoid gendered language for human beings. We also continue to look beyond our hymnal for other options that are more inclusive of the ways people identify in terms of gender and sexuality.

**Language that speaks of different abilities:**

Rather than speak of “disabilities,” we speak of “different abilities” or those who are “differently abled.” There is a tendency in our history to look at those who are differently abled and feel sorry for them, or to see them as “less.” In some very fundamentalist traditions, they might even be seen as “sinners.” We believe everyone is created and loved by God, and that our different abilities and limitations are not reflective of God’s judgement, nor do they define what the fullness of life looks like for each person. Each person, regardless of their abilities or limitations (and we all have them), is a full person, capable of living a full and blessed life. Therefore we will to the best of our ability avoid stories and music that picture those who are differently abled as needing to be “fixed.” We do recognize that healing is a primary way Jesus shares the Good News of God’s love, so we will be sensitive to how we use those stories.

**Racism:**

We may not always be aware of how some words cause pain for others. One example is the word “darkness” which is so meaningful in the Christian tradition. Yet darkness has also been used to denigrate those of African heritage. We will not always be aware of what words have been used to cause harm or to “lessen” another, however when we become aware, we will be sensitive to how we use those words so as not to cause more pain, especially when those words are meaningful in their own right in our Christian tradition.

**These are just examples of the way we aim to be inclusive and sensitive in our use of language. Language is fluid, so our understanding of what is affirming and what is devaluing will change over time. We will always go back to our initial statement as our guide.**