

WATCH YOUR *language*

An introduction to inclusive language



Language is important

Language shapes and defines the relationships we have with each other and with God. We use language to express feelings, convey information and inspire action. The meaning of words is constantly changing as are the ways in which they are used. Sometimes new words or expressions are necessary.

Language is powerful

- Language transmits emotions and values as well as facts and ideas.
- What we say and write can affect people's attributes, influence their actions and shape their views of other people.
- Language may be a vehicle for the expression of prejudice or discrimination. It can cloud issues and misinform.
- Language is never neutral.

Careful Language

What is careful language?

Choosing your words in a way that considers the audience and communicates in a way which doesn't alienate part of the community. Careful language is precise. It treats people fairly and with respect, recognising their diversity, dignity and status. It enables us in faith communities to imagine an image of God in a variety of ways.

Why is careful language important?

- It does not cause intentional exclusion.
- It values and includes people regardless of their gender identity.
- It does not assign roles or characteristics which limit them.
- It helps to broaden our understanding of God.

We share a common humanity

- Cultural and racial differences can be affirmed.
- Slurs and stereotypes can be avoided.
- Careless language regarding sex/gender is a form of discrimination.
- Limiting images of God limits our understanding.

Using careful language

Gender Pronouns

We use pronouns to refer to a person without using their name. Addressing people by their chosen pronouns is an important way of showing respect, and creating an inclusive space - for example if someone identifies as non-binary they may have 'they/them' pronouns. Common pronouns are she/her, they/them & he/him, however there are other variations. Being aware of people's pronouns and using them correctly helps people feel valued and included just as they are, and leads by example to others in your congregation and community.

Groups of people

In order to be inclusive when addressing groups of people avoid using the masculine pronoun as a default, or using binary terms in generic sentences. It's more inclusive to consider using a neutral singular pronoun such as 'they':

Instead of – 'an elder must satisfy the congregation that *he* has gifts'

Consider – 'an elder must satisfy the congregation that *they* have gifts'

Or re-word the sentence:

Instead of - 'A Christian puts his trust in the Lord.'

Consider – 'A Christian trusts the Lord', or even 'A Christian trusts God'.

More information on pronouns can be found at -
<https://www.pridetraining.org.au/pages/pronoun-page>

"Our vision:

We live together in a society where all are equal and free to exercise our rights equally, regardless of faith, cultural background, race, ability, age, sexual orientation and gender identity. We defend those rights for all."

Avoid the 'generic man'

A few centuries ago, 'man' came to carry the dual meaning of 'human' and 'adult male'. Its meaning has now become so closely identified with male, that the general use of 'man' is no longer accurate.

It is far clearer and less ambiguous to use terms which are not gender specific, eg:

Man-made – synthetic, hand-crafted, artificial

Mankind – humankind, humanity, human race

Manpower – labour, staff

Manhood – adulthood, identity

Spokesman – advocate, representative

Make titles and roles inclusive

Avoid using gendered terms in occupation titles. You could use the 'person' alternative:

Chairman – chairperson

Layman – layperson

Or consider using a gender neutral word:

Groundsman – gardener

Cleaning lady – cleaner

Workman – worker

Policeman – Police Officer

Common Phrases

Find gender neutral alternatives for commonly used phrases which previously included only man.

'the man on the land' – the farmer, the rural community.

'no man should' – no one should, nobody should.

'the man in the street' – the average person, the ordinary person.

'man and wife' – husband and wife, partners.

Derivative terms

Derivative terms for women are usually not necessary:

Actress – actor

Manageress – manager

Girls and boys | men and women

These words should be used in a parallel manner. Referring to adult women as girls is inappropriate and demeaning. It could imply that women are not considered fully grown up. Even better, find gender neutral terms such as 'young people' or 'everyone'.

Stereotyping

Careful language avoids adjectives focusing on individual characteristics:

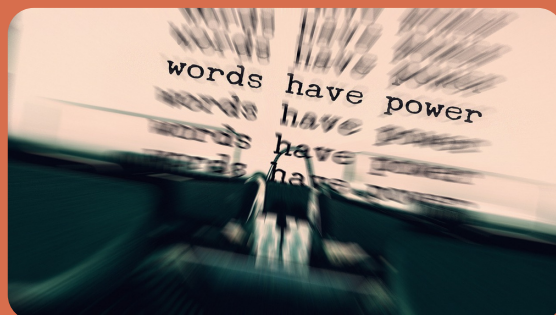
Male nurse, lady preacher, woman doctor. These adjectives could suggest the person is unusual or even unsuitable for the group.

Careful language does not describe people in stereotypical terms. Eg. *Feminine/fragile, masculine/tough*

Careful language avoids sexist assumptions. Eg 'Members of the congregation and their wives.'

Instead it could be 'members of the congregation and their spouses/partners.'

Who is the best man for the job? Could be who is best for the job?





Language about God

Finding words to express the revelation of God in history which also speaks in our contemporary life is a continuing task. We, like the bible, use both masculine and feminine images to name and describe God.

A variety of speaking patterns is helpful and appropriate in order to express what we confess and experience through the mercy of God. Words can never fully comprehend or adequately express the wonder and mystery of the living God. God, mother and father of us all.

YHWH I am who I am

As most Christians don't read ancient languages, careful translation of the Scripture is a continuing task. New scholarly editions of the bible aim at inclusiveness ... after generations of English which was more sexist than the original text!

The Inclusive Bible "is a re-imagining of the scriptures and our relationship to them...Seeking to be faithful to the original languages, they have sought new and non-sexist ways to express the same ancient truths." (from the Publishers)

The New Revised Standard Version, although not fully inclusive, is another good option. Another alternative is the New Inclusive New Testament and Psalms.

Worship

There are plenty of resources available, or you can create your own. There are many inclusive hymns in *Together in Song* and *Alleluia Aotearoa*.

Inclusive language includes all people.

This can be a sensitive area, but many of the suggestions in this pamphlet can be helpful in public reading, in prayers, hymns and in our personal faith journey.

Change takes time and desire

It is a matter of breaking old habits and adjusting to a new vocabulary.

Making deliberate changes in the way we use language is not always easy. It can seem awkward and inconvenient. This awkwardness reminds us, and others, of the importance of the issue. Careful language can enhance the community of God's people.