

The Eleventh General Synod instructed that a *Book of Worship* be developed and characterized by language that is truly inclusive with respect to God and to people. Although the generic use of masculine terms has been accepted practice, it is exclusive and viewed as offensive by many. Further, the use of only masculine nouns and pronouns for God and of masculine generic terms for humankind has hidden the rich feminine imagery for God and God's people in scripture. Scripture contains many gender neutral metaphors for God such as shepherd, rock, or Holy One. The rediscovery of the complementary female and male metaphors in the Bible and the literature of the early church encourages Christians not to settle for literary poverty in the midst of literary riches.

Inclusive language is far more than an aesthetic matter of male and female imagery; it is a fundamental issue of social justice. Language that is truly inclusive affirms sexuality, racial and ethnic background, stages of maturity, and degrees of limiting conditions. It shows respect for all people. Scripture proclaims the world is created, redeemed, and sustained by the Word of God, and the church attests to the power of language and words, recognizing that words have the power to exploit and exclude as well as affirm and liberate.



© 2007  
Local Church Ministries  
700 Prospect Ave  
Cleveland, OH 44115  
WE101

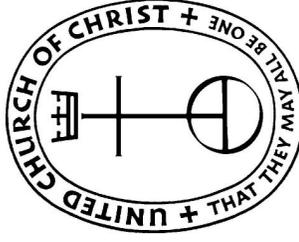
Jesus didn't turn people away . . . neither should we.

# Expansive

Language with  
Reference  
to God

# Inclusive

Language with  
Reference to the  
People of God



**UNITED CHURCH**  
OF CHRIST

Worship and Education Ministry  
Local Church Ministries  
(a Covenanted Ministry of the  
United Church of Christ)

## Inclusive Language with Reference to the People 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 NRSV*

"We believe that the imagery conveyed by language and language itself is important and that they articulate and influence our understandings of what is revealed to us about the nature and activity of God and the dignity of all God's people as created in the image of God."  
*UCC Inclusive Language Covenant*

### Words That Exclude:

brothers, brotherhood (in the faith)

man, men, mankind

sons (of God)

chairman

workmen

forefathers

disabled person

clergyman

layman

fellowship

man-made

stand as able

minority people

foreigner, alien

man and wife

kingdom

third world

washed white, white lies

blacklisted

darkness of evil

### Words That Include:

brothers and sisters, friends, kindred, family of faith, neighbors, humankind

people, all people, men and women or women and men, humanity, persons, everyone, all of us, we, one

daughters and sons, children of God, people of God, God's people, heirs

chairperson, chair, moderator, group leader, presiding officer

workers

ancestors, forebears, forebearers

person with a disability, differently abled

clergy, minister

laity, layperson, member of the congregation, congregant

community, communion, friendship, "koinonia"

constructed, not natural, human-made, synthetic

if you are able to do so comfortably, please stand

racial ethnic people, people of color

visitor from another country, immigrant

husband and wife, woman and man, spouses, partners

realm, reign of God

developing nations, two-thirds world

washed clean, lies

discriminated against, excluded

presence of evil

### Inclusive Translations of Scripture

- *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995
- *Inclusive Language Lectionary, Years A (1983), B (1984), C (1985)*. New York: National Council of Churches
- *Inclusive Language Psalms*, Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1987
- *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*, Priests for Equality, 2007

## Expansive Language with Reference to God

Beyond the words we use or speak, this concern [expansive language] recognizes the power of language to shape, if not create, reality and to structure relationships, whether in the church or in the world. Exclusive language limits our perceptions of reality and thereby distorts. Thus, inclusive language has implications for the way we perceive God, things, and concepts, as well as persons.

Reuben A. Sheares, II  
UCC Office for Church Life  
and Leadership

## Speaking about God

“What is the right way to speak about God? This is a question of unsurpassed importance, for speech to and about the mystery that surrounds human lives and the universe itself is a key activity of a community of faith. In that speech the symbol of God functions as the primary symbol of the whole religious system, the ultimate point of reference for understanding experience, life, and the world. Hence the way in which a faith community shapes language about God implicitly represents what it takes to be the highest good, the profoundest truth, the most appealing beauty. Such speaking, in turn, powerfully molds the corporate identity of the community and directs its praxis.”

Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is*  
(New York: Crossroad), 1992, pp. 3–4

## Expansive Images of God in Scripture

<b>Midwife</b>	Ps 22:9-10
<b>Mother</b>	Num 11:12-13, Deut 32:18, Job 38:28-29, Ps 131:2, Isa 42:14, Isa 46:3-4, Isa 49:15, Isa 66:9, Hos 11:3-4, Jn 16:21, Rom 8:22, 1 Pet 2:2-3
<b>Mother bear</b>	Hos 13:8
<b>Shepherd</b>	Jn 10:11, 14; Ps 23
<b>Woman</b>	Lk 15:8–10, Ps 123:2
<b>Baker</b>	Mt 13:33, Lk 13:20-21
<b>Eagle</b>	Deut 32:11-12, Ex 19:4
<b>Hen</b>	Mt 23:37, Ruth 2:12, Ps 57:1, Ps 61:4, Lk 13:34, Ps 17:8
<b>Fire</b>	Deut 4:24, Acts 2:3
<b>Wind</b>	Acts 2:2, Jn 3:8
<b>Rock</b>	Is 17:10, Deut. 32:18
<b>Water</b>	Jer 17:13
<b>Light</b>	Jn 8:12, Isa 60:2-3
<b>Bread</b>	Jn 6:33-35
<b>Vine</b>	Jn 15:1
<b>Word</b>	Jn 1:1
<b>Wisdom</b>	Lk 11:49, 1 Cor 1:24
<b>I Am</b>	Ex 3:14
<b>Potter</b>	Jer 18: 1-11, Job 10:8-9

## Expansive Images of God in the Creeds

**The Nicene Creed**  
God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God; Lord and Giver of Life

**The Apostles Creed**  
Maker of heaven and earth

**The Scots Confession**  
Eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible; Messiah

**The Heidelberg Catechism**  
Faithful Savior; merciful, gracious, righteous; Mediator, Advocate, Judge

**The Second Helvetic Confession**  
God is One, God is Three; Just Judge and Avenger, Only Savior, True Awaited Messiah, Living God, Author of the Sacraments

**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 Evangelical Catechism**  
One God is Spirit, Life, Light, and Love

**The Theological Declaration of Barmen**  
Jesus Christ—the One Word of God

**The UCC Statement of Faith**  
God calls the worlds into being, creates humankind in the divine image, and sets before us the ways of life and death.

## Expansive Images of God from our Theological Traditions

“He who has promised us heavenly food has nourished us on milk, having recourse to a mother’s tenderness. For just as a mother, suckling her infant, transfers from her flesh the very same food which otherwise would be unsuited to a babe (the little one actually receives what he would have received at table but the food conveyed through the flesh is adapted to the child), so our Lord, in order to convert His wisdom into milk for our benefit, came to us clothed in flesh.”—*St. Augustine*

“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? And you, my soul dead in yourself, run under the wings of Jesus your mother and lament your griefs under his feathers. Ask that your wounds may be healed and that, comforted, you may live again. Christ, my mother, you gather your chickens under your wings; this dead chicken of yours puts himself under those wings . . . Warm your chicken, give life to your dead one, justify your sinner.”  
—*Anselm of Canterbury, Prayers and Meditations*

“To those infants who seek the Word, the Father’s loving breasts supply milk.”

—*Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor*

**Other Expansive Images from Theologians**  
“God his father and the Holy Spirit his Mother.”—*Aphrahat, The Orthodox Way*

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.

Check the Web site for more information  
[www.ucc.org/worship/inclusive\\_language](http://www.ucc.org/worship/inclusive_language)