

## Canadian Ministries Inclusive Language Guidelines

### Acknowledging

- the gospel summons of the new commandment (John 13:30) that we are to love one another as Christ has loved us
- the baptismal proclamation (Galatians 3:26-29) that all are one in Christ
- that “Justice opposes prejudice in every form. It rejects discrimination on such grounds as race, sex, age, status, or handicap...[and]...stands with our neighbours in their struggle for dignity and respect...” (*Living Faith* 8.4.6)

great care should be taken to avoid language that is demeaning or that stereotypes others on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, income, geography, mental and physical characteristics, and age. The language we use not only reflects our thinking but also shapes it.

It is the practice of Canadian Ministries that inclusive language is to be used in reports, presentations, worship resources, and official communications.

The application of this practice is brought about through the following:

1. Any language that demeans or stereotypes others on any basis (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, mental and physical characteristics, age, etc.) is unacceptable.
2. Gender-exclusive words and pronouns are to be avoided when referring to human beings broadly as a group.
3. The use of masculine pronouns when referring to God should be avoided where possible so that an image of God that is exclusively male is not cultivated.

### Exclusive language:

In his Holy Word, God says that he has redeemed us and called us by name.

### Inclusive language:

In scripture, God says, “I have redeemed you; I have called you by name.”  
Isaiah records that God redeems us and calls us by name.

4. Metaphors used in reference to God should reflect the variety of language found in the scriptures.

(While the term “Father” is the most employed metaphor and title for God in worship, it is not the most frequently used in the Bible. Among the more frequently used images for God in the Bible are Creator, Light, Strength, Power, Healing One, Tower of Strength, Mighty One, Shepherd, Deliverer, Loving Kindness, Potter, Dwelling Place, Redeemer, Radiant, God of Peace, Living God, Lawgiver, Consuming Fire, Almighty.)

5. The Presbyterian Church in Canada acknowledges that, in continuity with the scriptural warrant (Matthew 28:19), the ancient liturgical formula, and ecumenical partnership with the wider church, in the baptismal liturgy we baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

6. Quotes from scripture should be taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) or another translation known to support inclusive language.

7. Great care will be taken to maintain clarity of expression and grammatical integrity while carefully employing inclusive language.

The Inclusive Language guidelines are based on statements accepted by the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

The 1988 General Assembly adopted recommendations from the Committee on Church Doctrine encouraging the following approach:

1. The use of a wider spectrum of images, both personal and non-personal in prayer, consistent with biblical usage. E.g., God could be addressed as “O God, who gave birth to your people Israel,” or “O God, who cares for us as a comforting mother cares for her children,” or “O God, steadfast as a rock.”
2. An increased use of non-gender-specific biblical images in the language of worship. E.g., referring to God as Guide, Judge, Healer, Advocate, Friend, Saviour, as well as Father, King, Lord.
3. A diminished use of masculine pronouns with reference to God, where grammatically feasible, in order to refrain from encouraging a false male image of God.

Second, the General Assembly passed a vision statement for The Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1989 that includes the paragraph cited below.

The Vision Statement of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, adopted in 1989, affirms: “We will be a loving, inclusive community—truly God’s family. We will not simply be a club for ‘nice’ people. The use of the word inclusive opens up the Church to take seriously the presence and needs of people of all ages, and of many different cultural backgrounds other than the Scots-Irish out of which this Church sprang in past centuries. We will take seriously the special needs of disadvantaged people, and we will be intentional about seeing that those needs are met. We will use inclusive language as we learn to be inclusive. Our congregations will be a family for those who have no other family and an extended family for those who do. We will be a people who practice love, as we have met and experienced it in Jesus Christ.”