

## Inclusive Language Guidelines

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**In the Diocesan Bishop's Charge to Synod, in September, 1991, we were urged “in liturgy, scripture readings, and hymns to be sensitive to inclusivity. Simple, unobtrusive changes can create a climate of affirmation which, far from distorting, more faithfully express the heart of the Gospel.”**

To further the use of inclusive language in our liturgies, the College of Bishops offers the following guidelines to clergy and the people.

1. **The use of the New Revised Standard Version (1989) of the Bible at all diocesan and area liturgical gatherings, and we strongly recommend its use at parish liturgies.**
2. For parishes wishing to use an inclusive language lectionary, we urge that concurrence first be given by the parish Worship Committee, if there is one, and the Advisory Board. *Hearing the Word: An Inclusive Language Lectionary* published by St. Stephen and the Incarnation Church, Washington, D.C. (1986) is the version that we recommend for parishes where there has been agreement to proceed in this way.
3. If it is desired to alter the text of lectionary readings to make them inclusive, please refer to the guide, *Making Scripture Inclusive* by Sister Thelma Anne, S.S.J.D.
4. Further assistance in considering lectionary readings is available in an article by Dr. Ann Jervis, Assistant Professor of New Testament at Wycliffe College. The article, featured in the November 1990 issue of *Insight* is entitled, *The Translator's Dilemma*.

See also the article, *Inclusive Language and the Liturgy of the Anglican Church of Canada* by Bishop Victoria Matthews in the *Book of Alternative Services* Evaluation Commission's [Final Report](#) to General Synod 1995, available at the Anglican Book Centre.

The spirit of inclusivity in public worship is only one of the ways by which we can respond to the call for a spirit of greater inclusivity in the church. We encourage our parishes to take such appropriate steps as we propose by the above guidelines. The introduction of new forms and words should be done with careful preparation and sensitivity. Written resources for encouraging dialogue and reflection are available from the Diocesan Doctrine and Worship Committee and members of the Doctrine and Worship Committee are willing to help in the planning of workshops at parish, deanery, clericus, or area levels.



## Making Scripture Readings Inclusive

### A. PREFACE

The Diocese of Toronto is recommending the use of the New Revised Standard Version for the public reading of scripture. The NRSV is careful to make language referring to people inclusive. However, it is envisaged that other versions of the Bible will continue to be read publicly. The section, *References to People* is intended to offer help to people reading from such versions.

With references to God, apart from avowedly inclusive translations, the standard versions of the Bible in English afford no help. One is very much on one's own, and there is a need to be sensitive to good usage and to the integrity of the text.

The suggestions which follow are intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Readers are encouraged to experiment, and to adapt them freely rather than follow them rigidly.

### B. References to People

Non-inclusive references to people may be grouped into three main categories:

1. Male-specific words which purport to refer to the whole human race, e.g., 'man', 'mankind', 'all men', 'man's', 'he', 'him', 'his' in such expressions as, "He who would save his life shall lose it".

*For:* **man, men, mankind**

*Substitute:* person, people, humanity, human beings, mortals (useful when human beings are contrasted with God or with angels), everyone, all, all of us, we, others, etc., according to context.

*For:* **all men**

*Substitute:* all, all people, everyone.

*For:* **man's**

*Substitute:* our, your, people's, human (especially useful when contrasting human and divine actions and qualities).

*For:* **he, him, his (when referring to people in general)**

*Substitute:* we, us, our, they, them, their, that person, one, one's, someone (?).

*For:* **he who**

*Substitute:* the one who, those who, anyone who, whoever.



2. Male-specific words which refer to a particular group of people which actually includes women, e.g., ‘My brothers’, when a Christian congregation is being addressed, ‘Our fathers’, when both male and female ancestors are intended.

*For:* **fathers, forefathers**

*Substitute:* ancestors, forebears, fathers and mothers.

*For:* **sons of God**

*Substitute:* children of God, sons and daughters of God, people of God, God’s people.

*For:* **brothers (brethren), brotherhood, fellowship**

*Substitute:* brothers and sisters (or vice-versa), friends (as form of address or exhortation), kin (ship), kindred, family, neighbours, Christian community, disciples, believers (according to context).

3. Masculine pronouns used with antecedents which are not gender-specific (the so-called ‘sexist singular’), e.g. ‘person... his’, ‘everyone... his’, ‘whoever... him’.

*For:* **person/anyone, etc... his, him**

*The following adjustments are suggested:*

- i) Use the first person: we, our, ours.
- ii) Use the second person: you, your, yours.
- iii) Use the plural: one of the easiest, handiest methods.
- iv) Delete the pronoun.
- v) Use a new pronoun: this, that, these, those, some, etc.
- vi) Use an article or conjunction: a, an, the, but, and.
- vii) Use who with or without a noun: who, anyone, who, someone, who, some, everyone who, whoever, no one who, one who, any (noun), who, a (noun) who, the (noun) who - helps emphasize a single individual.

## **C. References to God**

In the Bible, male pronouns are used consistently with reference to God. Although we know that such language is metaphorical, the cumulative effect is an assumption of God’s maleness that is misleading in itself and is also experienced as diminishing by many women. Eliminating or reducing the use of male pronouns can help counteract this assumption.

Language about the Persons of the Trinity raises particular issues. In trinitarian theology, ‘God’ and ‘Father’ are not interchangeable; the Son and Spirit are also properly spoken of as God. Although the Second Person lived as a male human being, it is humanity, not the maleness that is crucial. It is therefore, appropriate, with regard to Christ, to reduce the number of male pronouns when they create an overwhelming impression of maleness. As there is no compelling theological reason why male gender should be assigned to the Holy Spirit, reduction or elimination of male pronouns seems particularly apt in this case. Indeed, one may speak of the Holy Spirit in feminine terms.



Some of the ways given under 3, above, with regard to ‘anyone. . .his’ are useful in dealing with ‘God. . .his’. Here are some further suggestions:

*For: He*

- Repeat ‘God’ (be aware that this can become repetitious).
- Restructure the sentence so as to eliminate the pronoun.
- Use the relative pronoun ‘who’, or ‘the One who’.
- Recast the sentence so as to address God (‘You...’).

*For: Him*

- Repeat God.
- Use ‘whom’, ‘the One who’.
- Restructure the sentence as necessary.
- Use the second person.

*For: His Spirit*

- Use ‘God’s Spirit’, ‘the Spirit’, ‘the Holy Spirit’.

