

Paper E3

Inclusive and Expansive Language

Equal Opportunities Committee



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Equal Opportunities Committee: Inclusive and Expansive Language

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Elizabeth Nash elizabethjnash@gmail.com
Action required	Discussion and reporting to Equal Opportunities Convener
Draft resolution(s)	None
Alternative options to consider, if any	None

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The aim is to consider language in worship, for both human beings and God and to reflect on a wider range of people excluded by our language.
Main points	<p>General Assembly 1984 agreed by a small majority to use gender inclusive language in our publications but not for the deity. Nothing significant has happened on this subject since.</p> <p>Some worship leaders use inclusive language for both people and God and some use exclusive language for both.</p> <p>The aim is to open up discussion on those who can be excluded by our language in worship and to look at ways in which we can move from inclusive to expansive language.</p> <p>Following this discussion the Equal Opportunities Committee will look at the way forward and find ways in which the whole of the United Reformed Church can be involved in the discussion and in using expansive language.</p>
Previous relevant documents	None recent
Consultation has taken place with...	Equal Opportunities Committee

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None at this point

Discussion on Inclusive Language and Expansive Language

God comes to us gender-neutral. It is we who impose gender upon “Him”.

Genesis 1.27, So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female God created them.

St Paul said, “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.”

Different societies and cultures have treated people differently depending on their gender, skin colour, disability, language, class, faith or caste.

If God loves us all can we not push out the boundaries and expand our language so that no-one is excluded?

General Assembly 1984 received a report from the Community of Women and Men, which contained the following paragraph:

As a Reformed Church, claiming to follow Scripture, the URC must be prepared

1. to face up to the generally ‘patriarchal’ tone of the Bible, and the difficult texts in the epistles which subordinate women to men;
2. to ask ourselves whether we are doing justice to the richness of the Biblical image of God which on the one hand includes both feminine and masculine characteristics and on the other hand transcends both;
3. to make clear through the language we use that the people of God comprises both men and women.

A resolution followed: “The Assembly asks Departments and Committees to take steps to ensure that all future publications use inclusive language.” On a point of order the Moderator ruled that ‘inclusive language’ excluded the deity. The vote required tellers and the resolution passed by 226 votes to 205 with 23 abstentions.

1. **Looking at the 3 points made by the Community of Women and Men, what has and has not changed in the almost 30 years since they were discussed by General Assembly?**

Michael Jagessar, as a teacher of worship and liturgy, has said, ‘what I have found very helpful is shifting the conversation from “inclusive language” to “expansive language” underscoring how words and symbols matter and the healing power of faith language.’

2. **What image does ‘expansive language’ give you?**
3. **In what ways have words and symbols influenced your faith?**

The 1984 resolution was about publications, what about our worship? We have worship leaders who use expansive language for both people and God, and worship leaders who still use man as a generic term for both women and men.

4. **What difference does it make to you if the language used for God in worship is the same as the language you use for yourself?**
5. **What are the consequences for men?**
6. **What difference does it make to you if the language used for God in worship is never the same as the language you use for yourself?**
7. **What are the consequences for women?**
8. **What is your experience of expansive language in worship?**
9. **What do you feel when exclusive language is used?**

What does inclusiveness mean for people with disabilities?

Professor John Hull, who is blind, has said that he found John 9.2,3 – Jesus healing a blind man very difficult. “Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born blind, this man or his parents? Jesus answered, neither..., he is blind so that God’s power might be seen at work in him.” John Hull asks, ‘is there a God who will receive me in my blindness? Where is the God who will take me just as I am?’

The Bible does not always treat people with disabilities equally.

10. **What should we do to enable people with disabilities to know that God takes them just as they are?**
11. **What does your local church do to ensure that everyone feels welcomed and included in worship?**
12. **What should the United Reformed Church do?**