

Reflections on Inclusive Language – BMC (09.27.17)

Whereas¹

- All people are created in the image of God
- God includes but is not limited to the language we use to describe God
- Our language for God and humans shapes how we experience and understand them
- Our ability to know and use language in our faith is ever-evolving
- BMC is a faith community that affirms each person as a unique and valued creation of God

Therefore, we offer these reflections to invite dialogue and intentionality regarding inclusive language in the life and faith of the BMC community:

Scope – These reflections may apply to church materials, including mission statements, policies, liturgy and worship materials, promotional items, and social media postings, and aims to help us think through what we say, sing, and write, and the impact these have on others.

Expansive Language about God – since God is so much more than words or images can do justice to, it makes sense to *add*, rather than substitute, imagery for God in speaking about or to God. We also acknowledge that people in the Church historically have referred to and addressed God almost exclusively as male, and with titles that assume a hierarchical relationship. But God’s self-revelation is so much more than these. Examples of the wide range of names or descriptors for God are those of a midwife, mother, mother bear, shepherd, woman, baker, eagle, hen, fire, wind, rock, water, light, bread, vine, word, wisdom, I Am, and potter.² And these are just a start.

Inclusive Language for People – This is rooted in challenging all our assumptions about who and what our language includes, and evolves with greater understanding of the human person in all their manifestations, including but not limited to such things as gender, race, class, age, physical abilities, nationality, theological beliefs, culture, lifestyle, and the other ways we describe and categorize humans.

Learning and Growing Together – We are inviting reflections on our use of language, not to call one another out, but to expand our community’s awareness of the way language is used, the assumptions that underlie our use of certain terms and expressions, and how our language impacts our being a welcoming congregation. Above all, we seek to speak to one another in love and truth out of our own experiences and for ourselves only.

Good Faith and the Benefit of the Doubt – As we reflect on language together, we will do so in good faith and give one another the benefit of the doubt, working from the assumption that no one in community *means* to do harm in using language that excludes, and all of us have room to grow.

1 The theological basis for this Policy was greatly informed by a teaching-learning document on Inclusive Language from the Worldwide Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches: <http://mccchurch.org/inclusive-language-guidelines/>

2 Scriptural references for these names can be found at <http://www.ucc.org/worship/inclusive-language/language-about-god.html>.