

An invitation to intentional use of language

We believe that words form us; that how we speak, hear, read, and write matters. We believe that the way we use language helps shape and reflect the way we and our children understand God, ourselves, and each other as dearly loved children of God and participants in the work of God. Being intentional about the words we use is one way of showing love to each other. So we invite each other to an ongoing awareness of and conversation on our use of language.

Of particular concern are the terms and images we use to refer to women and men, to girls and boys, and to God.

With respect to references to human beings, we believe that

- Women and men, girls and boys, are equally created good, in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), and that God's spirit is given equally to women and men (Acts 2:17-18) so that we all have the same status in God's family, living in unity (Galatians 3:28), and serving the common good (I Corinthians 12:7).¹
- The use of inclusive language, particularly language that challenges sexist stereotypes (e.g., of women as typically passive, emotional and helpless, and men as typically active, 'rational' and empowered) and language that underlines the spiritual significance and contribution of women and girls, is a goal in worship, conversation, study, and church life activities.

With respect to references to God, we believe that

- God is spirit (John 4:24) and that, although God's image is seen in both women and men (Genesis 1:27), these human categories, like all metaphors, fail to capture the fullness of God.
- There are a variety of ways we might refer to God that embrace this profound mystery. Among the options: using feminine pronouns and the Bible's feminine imagery for God alongside of the traditional masculine pronouns and imagery, or avoiding gendered references altogether.

Our goal, again, is to embrace all who worship and work with us with words that express the love of God. There is a range of choices for each of us in speaking that might serve this end—or that might thwart it. So we extend to each other the grace to make different choices at different times without fear of judgment or stifling self-consciousness. And we extend to each other the grace to continue to have

conversations about how we each might use language in ways that are both loving and truthful.

[1] See The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 6, “The Creation and Calling of Human Beings,” in particular Commentary #2.

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