

GUIDELINES FOR GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AT ASIA PACIFIC NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

(An adaptation of “Handbook for Gender Inclusive Language” produced by Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City)

The Church of the Nazarene has always understood that God calls and equips women as well as men for all forms of Christian ministry, including parish ministry. The use of gender and race inclusive language is one way of demonstrating this conviction. The goal is to speak in a manner that demonstrates fidelity to the NT assertion that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Gal. 3:28).

[Some Asian languages do not have as many problems as English, which distinguishes between men and women in pronouns and other references. If “siya,” the Tagalog word for either he or she, were adopted into the English language there would be fewer gender-biased problems like the ones discussed in this paper. Similarly, “kapatid” does not specify brother or sister; “pamangkin” does not specify nephew or niece; “asawa” does not designate wife or husband. This shows that Tagalog is less gender-specific than English and would be a good model for developing a truly gender inclusive language.]

In addition to having a clear theological and historical warrant, use of gender inclusive language is also a matter of accurate communication.

Language both reflects and shapes society. It shapes persons’ self-understanding. Language can negatively define a person. It can be used to marginalize their role in society. Language that depreciates women, excludes them, and freezes them in roles that deny to them recognition of their full dignity as persons damages society as a whole. Demeaning and oppressive symbols and values often become so much a part of language that they function without people being aware of them, until those who are their targets point them out.

An “inclusive” community demonstrates commitment to this value by its language use. It affirms the call to Christian ministry and leadership that God has given to women as well as men.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

A. SEXIST/NONSEXIST. The *Nonsexist Word Finder* (p. 165) defines sexist language as “language that promotes and maintains attitudes that stereotype people according to gender. It assumes that the male is the norm, the significant gender. Nonsexist language treats all people equally

and either does not refer to a person’s sex at all when it is irrelevant, or refers to men and women in symmetrical ways when gender is relevant.” Sexist writing is characterized by 1) stereotyping an entire sex by what may be appropriate for only some of its members; 2) by assuming male superiority; and 3) by using non-parallel terms, e.g., *man and wife* instead of *husband and wife* or *man and woman*.

B. INCLUSIVE/EXCLUSIVE. Gender inclusive language includes everyone; exclusive language excludes some people simply because of their gender. Here is a good illustration of inclusive language: “The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspect of their lives” (William James).

C. GENDER-FREE/GENDER-FAIR/GENDER-SPECIFIC. Gender-free terms do not indicate sex and can be used for either women or men, boys or girls. Examples: teacher, bureaucrat, employee, student. Gender-fair language promotes fairness to both sexes. Gender-specific words such as businesswoman or altar girl are neither good nor bad in themselves. However, when used they should appear in a manner that is gender-fair. When terms for women appear, they should be used in an approximately equal number of times and only in contexts that do not discriminate against either women or men.

GENERAL RULES

A. GENDER-FREE LANGUAGE. The goal of inclusive language is to speak of people as persons without mention of their gender. A person’s race, sex, age or creed should not be mentioned unless there is a good reason for doing so. Avoid using “lady,” “women” or “female” before a job title. Using such terms simply calls attention to the gender rather than to the role.

B. PARALLEL TREATMENT. When sex-specific words must be used, attempt to maintain gender symmetry. When writing, ask: “Would I write the same thing in the same way about a person of the opposite sex?” Then, “Would I mind if this were said of me?”

C. HIDDEN BIAS. Avoid biased contexts that carry a sexist message.

D. HOW TO HANDLE SEXIST QUOTATIONS. Sometimes a writer needs to use a quotation that is sexist. There are a number of ways to handle this: 1) omit the quotation marks and paraphrase the statement; 2) place bracket marks around the sexist terms; 3) use the marker “[sic]” to show that the sexist words come from the original quotation; 4) quote only part of the statement.

E. USING LANGUAGE THAT IDENTIFIES WOMEN AS INDIVIDUALS. Identify women by their own names, and not by their connection to husband, son, or father. Instead of writing, “Lorita, his wife of 17 years,” write, “Lorita and Juan, married for 17 years.”

F. EXAMPLES OF GENDER-FREE WORDS:

Anyone	Executive	Laborer	Person	Someone
Assistant	Expert	Maker	Planner	Specialist
Associate	Facilitator	Member	Practitioner	Student
Attendant	Folks	Messenger	Producer	Tutor
Citizen	Guide	Nobody	Professional	Worker
Colleague	Hand	No one	Reporter	Writer
Companion	Individual	Officer	Representative	
Counselor	Inhabitant	One	Scientist	
Everybody	Intermediary	Owner	Servant	

THE GENERIC HE, MAN AND MANKIND

Use of the third person singular pronoun *he* and the terms *man* and *mankind* as generic terms when *he and she* is intended, are to be strictly avoided. *He* and *mankind* are ambiguous terms and are not now perceived to include both women and men. Use of these exclusive terms too often appears in written work and public addresses. Admittedly, use of *he* and *mankind* instead of *he and she* and *humankind* springs from deeply entrenched cultural habits. Donald G. McKay points out that each person hears the generic “he” over a million times in a lifetime and that the consequences of this kind of repetition are “beyond the ken of present-day psychology (in *The Nonsexist Word Finder*, p. 173).

When the pronoun *he* is used to refer to a specific male person then obviously its use is correct. But when the pronoun is not used in this way its use can be avoided, replaced or defused in a number of ways, such as:

- ✓ Replace *he* with the word *everyone*;
- ✓ Replace *no man* with *no one* or *no person*;

- ✓ Omit the pronoun *he* entirely: instead of, “what a person thinks of after he has left for vacation,” say, “what a person remembers after leaving for vacation”;
- ✓ Replace the masculine pronoun with an article: e.g., replace “cannot a critic give his opinion” with “cannot a critic give an opinion”;
- ✓ Replace the pronoun *he* or *mankind* with such words as someone, anyone, one, the one, no one, all of them;
- ✓ Use *he and she* or *his and her* when both genders are intended (since *s/he* is not recommended except for memos, notes, or casual communications);
- ✓ It is permissible to use masculine and feminine pronouns in alternating sentences, paragraphs, examples or chapters.

People can develop the habit of using language that includes both male and female. If inclusive terms are readily available, then why not appropriate them in the interest of inclusiveness and affirmation? Is not the insistence of using exclusive terms such as *man* and *mankind* instead of inclusive terms such as *humankind*, *humanity*, *persons*, and *people* an attempt to protect the prejudice of male superiority?

POINTERS

- ✓ Replace masculine pronouns with one or one’s, he or she, her’s or his.
- ✓ Recast the pronoun *man* into the plural: *persons*.
- ✓ Change “the average minister reads his Bible daily,” to “the average minister reads the Bible daily.”
- ✓ Instead of “layman” or “laymen” use *laity*, *layperson*, *laypeople*.
- ✓ Instead of “brothers in Christ,” *brothers and sisters*, *Christians*, *friends*.
- ✓ Avoid using “woman” as an adjective before a title, as in “woman preacher,” unless there is specific intention to point to sex rather than to role.
- ✓ In using humor, it is important not to demean women.
- ✓ Alternate stories about men with stories about women.
- ✓ Do not always portray men as powerful and successful or women as always dependent and supportive.
- ✓ Men should not always be the wage earners, scientists or ministers, and women should not always be secretaries, mothers, nurses or “good Samaritans.”