

Inclusive and Expansive Language Statement and Guidelines

[For bulletin use, only the first paragraph needs to be included.]

Trinity Lutheran Seminary is committed to the use of inclusive language for humans and inclusive and expansive language for God. Not all of the hymns, liturgies, and other worship resources we use reflect this commitment fully, often because of copyright restrictions. When the written language interferes with your ability to worship, we encourage you to say or sing other appropriate words.

The use of inclusive language for humans is not limited to matters of gender. Inclusive language also attends to matters of ability, age, family status, and the racial implications of metaphors of darkness and light. As the word “inclusive” suggests, no one should feel excluded by the language used in worship, the classroom, or seminary life.

The use of inclusive and expansive language for God does not mean that one may never use gendered language. The goal of expansive language is not to censor but to broaden our use of language in order more faithfully to reflect the fullness of God’s self-revelation in the Scriptures and in human experience. Particularly in worship, expansive language is achieved not by making all references to God generic but by using a variety of diverse images and words for God.

Because of its creedal and ecumenical significance, the Trinitarian language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not to be edited.

Alternate God language should not be substituted for the Trinitarian language used in the baptismal formula and in the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds.

Some guidelines for implementation:

Because language evolves, examples and guidelines provided here may change.

Because the seminary is a learning community, all the members of the seminary community are encouraged to grow in their understanding and use of inclusive and expansive language.

Use “humans” or “humanity” rather than “man” or “mankind” to refer to people.

There is now increasing sensitivity to avoiding gender binary language such as “men and women,” or “brothers and sisters.” Consider using phrases such as “siblings in Christ,” “children of God,” “people of God,” or “friends in Christ.”

Although the word “we” is not gendered, be sensitive to how the first person plural can exclude others when it implies a normative experience for all humans, often shaped by the experience of the speaker or writer.

Male pronouns used for God can often be replaced with “God” or “God’s.” When the language of the text can be understood as a prayer or speech directed to God, it is appropriate to replace male pronouns with “you,” “your,” or “yours.”

Male pronouns are appropriately used to refer to Jesus.

Beware of doing a mental “Find and replace” on male pronouns. In the hymn “A Mighty Fortress,” for example, the majority of the male pronouns refer to “the evil foe.” Be sure you know what a pronoun refers to before replacing it with “God.”

Pronouns do not always need to be replaced with pronouns. For example, in “This is the Feast,” the line “For the lamb who was slain has begun his reign” can easily be sung “For the lamb who was slain has begun to reign.” In addition to eliminating the male pronoun, this change has the advantage of changing “reign” from a noun to an active verb, which is quite appropriate theologically.

Think beyond obvious substitutions. The word “Father” in a hymn or prayer can be replaced by words such as “Savior” or “Healer” as well as “Parent.”

While the Trinitarian formula itself is not to be edited, in many places one can use other language instead, for example, “In the name of the Triune God who creates, redeems, and sustains us” or “In the name of the God who was and who is and who is to come.” (To use “Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer” as a substitute for “Father, Son, Spirit” is problematic because it implies a correlation between each of the three roles and one of the persons of the Trinity. The scriptural witness to God’s activity is more complex. For example, the Scriptures affirm the work of the Spirit and of the Logos in creation. It is the Triune God who creates, not just the first person of the Trinity.)