

Policy

It is the policy of Takoma Park Presbyterian Church to use gender-inclusive language in worship services to the greatest extent possible consistent with faithfulness to our understanding of Scripture. This policy applies to Bible readings, prayers, confessions, sermons, and the music sung by the congregation and the choir.

Guidelines

The worship committee has adopted the following guidelines for implementing this policy. These guidelines are flexible, not rigid rules. Different approaches may be appropriate for different passages of Scripture, for sermons, for hymn-singing, for music sung by the choir, and for other elements of worship. Specific choices about what language to use are the responsibility of those planning worship services.

Language used in worship should reflect our understanding of the inclusive nature of God. "Our language about God should be as intentionally diverse and varied as is that of the Bible and our theological tradition." (A Report to the Church on Issues of Language and Gender, PCUSA, <http://www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/worship/language.htm>). We believe that both women and men are created in God's image (Genesis 1). God encompasses both what we consider to be the human male and female, and is not limited to one or the other. This imagery should be reflected in our worship services. God should not arbitrarily be assumed to be male when images of the Divine are being presented.

We encourage those planning worship to include a variety of images of God in the worship services, just as they are included in the Scriptures. This diversity is particularly important to help children develop a full understanding of God. Drawing on a variety of images for God found in the Bible – shepherd, mother hen, light, wind, flame – helps children visualize God and appreciate all aspects of God's nature.

At the same time, we want to be faithful to our understanding of Scripture, and not make textual changes that are arbitrary or awkward.

Examples

(1) Where God is referred to in the text as "He."

In most of these cases, it would be appropriate to consider substituting the word "God" for the English pronoun "He," especially where the pronoun "He" appears several times in the course of a single passage. Another acceptable approach would be to alternate "he" and "she". However, it is not necessary that this always be done. It is up to the Pastor and other worship planners to determine the appropriate approach for any given worship service. For example, in dealing with well-known texts such as familiar and beloved Psalms, it is not necessary to

make changes, especially if this would make the text sound awkward or diminish its poetic value.

(2) Words attributed to Jesus.

The words attributed to Jesus in the New Testament Scriptures are a special case and do not need to be changed. Jesus often used the terms "He" or "Father" to refer to God. Jesus was reported to have frequently used the word "abba" when referring to God, which in Aramaic was the intimate term for father. Jesus taught His disciples that God is more like a loving father than like a distant, arbitrary lawgiver and judge.

(3) Use of imagery and metaphors for God during worship.

We encourage worship planners to select a variety of images for God, the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual life, including some that are masculine, and some that are feminine. Describe spiritual values traditionally considered to be "feminine" as well as those considered "masculine." Cite female spiritual role models as well as male ones. Quote women as well as men. Use a variety of imagery and metaphors for God during worship, such as: mother hen; a blowing wind; a guiding light; a wise woman; a still, small voice.

Implementation

It is the responsibility of the Pastor to implement this guidance when planning the worship service, including in the selection of the texts to be read during worship. The Pastor may choose to make substitutions or not make substitutions as she/he deems appropriate. We encourage the Pastor to provide to the liturgist in advance the exact text that is going to be read during Worship, with an explanation of any gender-related language changes that are to be made.

This guidance should also be made available to the whole congregation and posted on the church's website.