

# ROCKVILLE UNITED CHURCH POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

## WORSHIP AND MUSIC COMMITTEE

### Policy and Covenant on Expansive and Inclusive Language

#### We Believe and Covenant

We believe that language and the imagery it conveys are important. They articulate and influence our understanding of what is revealed to us about God and the dignity of all God's people. We believe that members of each generation of the church are called upon to witness to the substance of their faith and faithfulness. These are revealed in scripture, the teaching traditions of the church, personal religious experience, and our daily lives. Concerns related to expansive and inclusive language provide both challenges and opportunities to renew our faith and our witness through what we say, sing, read, and write. In addressing these issues, we aim to transform lives, build coalitions among communities, and work for social justice.

We know some have experienced the use of language as a barrier to knowing they are created in God's image. Also, some have experienced language to be a form of violence on the part of the wider church. We believe that faithful and inviting language can heal these harms and prevent new ones. Such language also helps us to share power, to interrupt the effects of unearned privilege, and to repair the spiritual harm done to those who have excessive and unexamined privilege. In these ways more expansive, inclusive language benefits everyone. We also know that each of us fits into many of different categories, giving us multidimensional and complex lives. Where categories intersect, people can experience interlocking systems of privilege, oppression, or both -- even at the same time.

We covenant to use language that is expansive in communicating the nature and activity of God. We will use language in such a way that age, creed, educational attainment, ethnicity, financial status, gender identity and expression, national origin, physical ability, and sexual orientation not become barriers. Also, we covenant to heed and respect each other as we forthrightly confront the difficulties associated with a variety of theological language, particularly the reality that language dear to some is experienced as excluding to others.

#### In Honoring This Policy and Covenant

##### A. We covenant to use these seven practices consistently in all settings of our church.

- We will include non-binary, gender-neutral, female, and male language and imagery for God, taking particular care to be expansive in the language and images chosen so that they do not inadvertently suggest that God is exclusively associated with gender (Examples: Parent-Mother-Father-God" instead of "God the Father"; "Source of Life," "the Holy" and other non-binary and non-hierarchical terms.) Male pronouns make sense when referring to the historical Jesus. We can choose from many biblical non-masculine words to emphasize his qualities or roles, including ones that do not denote power-over (Examples: "Teacher, "Shepherd," or "the Human One" rather than "Lord" and "Master.")
- When referring to people, we will include language and images that fully represent the breadth and range of gender because our congregation and ministries are filled with people who identify in many ways. We will seek to include language that helps to avoid use of male-only terms in pronouns and images. (Examples: "siblings," "spouses"; "chairperson" or "chair" rather than "chairman"; "forebears" rather than "forefathers; "upper voices" instead of "women's voices.")
- We will include language and imagery that are not presumptuous nor defining regarding the different abilities and physical conditions of persons. (Examples: "Rise as you desire" rather than "Please stand"; "persons with leprosy" rather than "lepers.")

- We will include language that avoids referring to people by category unless it is specifically relevant. (Examples: “John, a representative from First Church” rather than “John, a blind man from First Church”; “pastor” instead of “female pastor.”)
- We will include language that does not lend itself to being understood as being pejorative of persons when referring to color and illumination. (Examples: “the presence of evil” rather than “the darkness of evil”; “lies” rather than “white lies”; “discriminated against” rather than “blacklisted.”)
- We will use language that avoids stereotypes (Examples: the color, race, ethnicity, or physicality of persons being associated with socio-economic status; elderly people as being infirm; younger people as being rash; traits of nurturing or decisiveness based on assigned gender.)
- We will find, create, and use worship services and worship, educational, and administrative materials, that further our understanding and capabilities to use language, pictures, and imagery in ways that are faithfully inclusive. We will support this understanding with diverse leadership and participation in church activities and programs.

#### **B. We covenant to be mindful of the language we use in scripture and music.**

The scripture read during worship carries extra weight as the voice of God. We will use a variety of translations, lectionaries, and versions of the Bible from week to week (including the *Inclusive Language Bible* and *Inclusive Language Lectionary*) in order to present an expansive and inclusive picture of scripture. The Bible frequently uses metaphors that equate disabilities and deafness to a variety of sins in need of healing. When language in texts – especially regarding people and God – does not meet our practices, our policy is to have our pastors and liturgists make it as close a match to the biblical terms as possible and to interpret as needed.

Much of our church music was created before language concerns arose. Hymnals and choral music have been slow to adapt. Some substitutions to make language more expansive are simple, e.g., “God” instead of “Lord.” Others are more complex, but still possible (Example: “was bound” instead of “was blind” in “Amazing Grace”). Being able to make such substitutions is a skill that we expect in our Music Directors. We ask that they use this skill proactively and consistently.

Adapted from: United Church of Christ, Local Church Ministries, “Inclusive Language Covenant,” undated. Metropolitan Community Churches, “Inclusive Language Guidelines,” rev. April 2017.

Phyllis Windle, April 8, 2019; approved by the Worship and Music Committee, April 10, 2019; approved by Council May 14, 2019.