

**HANDBOOK FOR  
INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE**  
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## A THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

The gospel of Christ breaks the chains that enslave people, and creates the conditions in which women and men can achieve the true personhood taught and modeled by Christ. Jesus indicated that only those who include the neighbor in the gospel are prepared to receive it for themselves (Matthew 18:23-35). The apostle Paul declared that the gospel transforms the way we view other persons (2 Corinthians 5:16). Because God has begun a New Creation in Christ, criteria for evaluating others that derive from the old order must now pass away, for the New Creation has its own criteria. Part of the gospel's good news is that we need no longer rely on the prejudices, fears, and exclusions that once characterized us. Because the Church is the sphere in which the values of this New Creation are on display, denial of full personhood to others within it is no longer acceptable. Rather, God's grace empowers us to recognize the other as our neighbor granting full personhood in a way that takes seriously the New Testament assertion that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Galatians 3:28).

Therefore Nazarene Theological Seminary believes that God calls and equips women as well as men for all forms of ordained Christian ministry, including parish ministry. Nazarene Theological Seminary is fully committed to the use of inclusive language as one way of demonstrating this conviction. The gospel of our Lord is our principal reason for doing so. In all forms of communication our goal is to speak in a manner that demonstrates fidelity to our belief that God has begun a New Creation in Christ in which there are no distinctions such as "Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female" (Galatians 3:28).

The statement on inclusive language found in the NTS catalog reads as follows:

*Nazarene Theological Seminary is committed to the equality of women and men. Recognizing that people have often used the English language in ways that imply the exclusion or inferiority of women, the Seminary urges students, faculty, and staff to avoid sexist language in public discourse, in classroom discussions, and in their writings. "In all written work presented to meet course requirements we encourage students to use gender inclusive language."*

This handbook is offered to the NTS community as a guide for using language in a manner that is sensitive and inclusive, and that affirms the call to Christian ministry and leadership God has given to women as well as men.

## GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSIVITY

### Use of Pronouns

Use of the third person singular pronoun *he* or the terms *man* and *mankind* as generic terms when *he* and *she* is intended is to be strictly avoided. These terms are ambiguous and are no longer perceived to include both women and men. The issue is not simply a matter of what the writer/speaker intends to communicate, but is a matter of what the reader/listener understands to be the meaning of these words. Terms such as *humankind*, *humanity*, *persons*, and *people* can easily be used in place of *man* or *mankind* as collective, generic terms. The following are options for avoiding the use of this sexist vocabulary:

1. **Omit pronouns.** Change the masculine pronoun to a neuter determiner.
  - a) Change the following:
    - The average student is nervous when *he* begins a new class.
  - b) Replace with:
    - The average student becomes nervous at the beginning of a new class.
  
2. **Use articles in the place of pronouns.**
  - a) Change the following:
    - A student is expected to do *his* homework.
  - b) Replace with:
    - A student is expected to do *the* homework.
  
3. **Use the plural.** Using *they*, *them*, *their* and *theirs* avoids the gender exclusivity of the third-person singular pronouns. Be sure that the original meaning of the sentence is not jeopardized in making these changes.
  - a) Change the following:
    - The average student is nervous when *he* begins a new class.
    - Everyone in college must eventually declare *his* major.
  - b) Replace with:
    - Average students are nervous when *they* begin a new class.
    - Students in college must eventually declare *their* major.
  
4. **Repeat nouns.** This can be cumbersome to readers, so it also should be used in moderation.
  - A *student* is expected to do the homework assignment. A *student* is also expected to come to class on time.
  
5. **Use formal/informal style.** Replace *he* or *his* with *one* or *one's* (formal) or with *you* or *your* (informal).
  
6. **Use specific examples**, alternating between male and female.
  - John, an average student, is nervous when *he* begins a new class.
  - Mary and *her* classmates are expected to do *their* homework assignments.
  
7. **Use compound words such as *he or she* and *s/he*.** The first is more commonly accepted, though both are distracting if they are used repeatedly. Use these sparingly.
  
8. **Use the passive voice** when other options are awkward or impossible.
  - a) Change the following:
  - b) *He must take special care* in preparing for classes.
  - c) Replace with:
    - *Special care must be taken* in preparing for classes.
  
9. **When quoting exclusive or sexist language** the quotation may not be changed.
  - Consider changing from a quotation to a paraphrase that omits the sexist terms. Remember that appropriate citations are still necessary.
  - If it is important to use the quotation place the marker [*sic*] following the sexist term(s) to show that the offending language comes from the original quotation
  - If the sexist words can be omitted without changing the meaning, those words can be replaced by ellipsis points (see Turabian for specific instructions).
  - In informal writing place bracket marks around the sexist term

## Use of Nouns

It is important to remember not to stereotype a specific gender with a particular role. Gender-specific nouns like *mailman* or *housewife* should be replaced with gender-neutral terms like *mail carrier* or *homemaker*.

### *Examples of gender-specific terms and alternatives:*

Brothers in Christ	sisters and brothers, Christians, friends
Businessman	businessperson, business leader
Chairman	chair, chairperson, head, presiding officer, leader, coordinator, moderator (with a particular name, however, a gender-specific term is correct: Chairman John Smith or Chairwoman Susan Jones)
Churchman	churchperson, church member
Clergyman	clergy, member of the clergy, minister, elder, pastor
Congressman	member of congress, senator, representative, delegate
Fireman	firefighter
Layman	layperson, laity, people in (members of) the congregation
Mailman	mail carrier, postal clerk
Man, mankind	humankind, humanity
Manmade	handmade, artificial, synthetic
Policeman	police officer
Salesman	salesperson, clerk, sales representative
Spokesman	spokesperson, speaker
Stewardess	attendant, flight attendant
Waitress	server, food server
Workman	worker

## Addressing People

1. **Parallel References:** Refer to men and women with parallel terms so that neither are not put into a position perceived to be inferior or dependent. For example, a man should not be identified by gender and a woman by a role as in *man and wife* or *men and ladies*. Instead, the terms should be balanced by referring to *husband and wife* or *the men and the women*.
2. **Condescending terms:** Many women find it condescending to be called *ladies* or *girls*, especially when being addressed by men. Use *women* or *woman*. Again the issue is not what the writer/speaker intends, but what the reader/listener understands.
3. **General Titles:** Identify women by their own names, not by their connection to their husband, father, or son. A woman's first name should be as immediately available as her

husband's. For example, choose *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* or *Henry and Jane Smith* over *Mr. and Mrs. Henry Smith*; choose *Mrs. Smith* over *Mrs. Henry Smith*. Consult the person whom you are addressing or about whom you are speaking before using titles like *Miss* or *Mrs.* When a preference is unknown, use the neutral *Ms.* since it does not indicate marital status. Avoiding titles altogether may be preferable.

4. ***Gender Identification:*** Avoid using the word *woman* as an adjective before a title, as in *woman minister* or *woman teacher* unless there is a specific intention to point out the gender rather than the role. For example, it is not necessary to say, "A woman doctor raised the issue of proper anesthesiological procedure" if the fact that the doctor was a woman has no bearing on the issue. However, it would be necessary to say "this questionnaire is for women seminarians" if the intent was to include only female students in the questionnaire.

## **Communicating Inclusive Ideas**

1. ***Do not typecast gender differences.*** Though some men are assertive, and courageous, and some women are passive and nurturing, these characteristics do not describe *all* men or *all* women. Avoid the tendency to caricature women and men in particular ways. Girls should not always be shown playing with dolls or boys with trucks. All boys do not excel in math nor do all girls excel in English. Men are not the only scientists, ministers, executives, and breadwinners. Women are not only nurses, teachers, and secretaries. Provide a wide variety of options and role models to encourage wide participation in all activities rather than presenting choices limited by gender-linked role stereotyping.
2. ***Use equality in examples.*** When using illustrations, try to balance the number of references to men and women and girls and boys. Also, seek to balance the quality of the examples given in reference to each gender. For example, do not consistently use men as bad examples and women as good examples.
3. ***Use care in humor.*** Jokes can demean a person on the basis of gender. For example, *dumb blonde* or *hysterical female*.
4. ***Do not describe persons on the basis of the opposite gender.*** Terms like *tomboy* and *sissy* are unacceptable.
5. ***Do not use feminine pronouns to refer to neuter nouns.*** For example, a ship, a car, or a plane are all neuter nouns and should be referred to by the neuter pronoun *it* rather than by feminine pronouns *she* or *her*.

## **Note**

Although the primary focus of this document is gender inclusivity, many of these same principles apply to issues of race and class inclusivity. Our written and spoken language should reflect the inclusion of all people.

## WORKS CONSULTED

*Policies Governing and Suggestions Concerning the Use of Nondiscriminatory Language* from the Office of Student Services at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, Sept. 1995.

Thorsen, Don and Vickie Becker. *Inclusive Language Handbook: A Practical Guide to Using Inclusive Language*. Grantham, PA: Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy, Inc. C/O Messiah College, 1998.

## FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

Emswiler, Sharon Neuffer, and Thomas Neuffer Emswiler. *Women and Worship: A Guide to Non-Sexist Hymns, Prayers, and Liturgies*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974.

Hardesty, Nancy A. *Inclusive Language in the Church*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987.

Maggio, Rosalie. *The Nonsexist Word Finder: A Dictionary of Gender-Free Usage*. New York: Orynx Press, 1987.