Acknowledgements

Parts of this study guide are taken from:
“Inclusive Language Policy and Guidelines, 1981” of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

and from “More Than Just Words: A Study & Reflection Guide to the Issues of Inclusive Language Within MCC” by Reverend Dr. Jeffrey Pulling

and from my 20+ years’ experience in MCC’s.
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Section 1
What is Inclusive Language
Chapter 1
History
In the 1970's and 1980's, the issue of inclusive language (in worship, scriptures, publications, speech) came to the forefront of the whole Christian Church and to the attention of the Universal Fellowship. In 1979, the Board of Elders appointed an Inclusive Language Task Force whose report to the 1981 General Conference in Houston, Texas, was passed overwhelmingly after some amendments were made. That final report forms the policy base for the Universal Fellowship and its local churches regarding the use of inclusive language.

**A WORLD OF DIVISION**
Because of human sin, we live in a world of division and oppression. Groups which have traditionally exercised control over other groups inevitably and often unconsciously seek to preserve that superior status by denying the same access to power and privilege to others that they themselves enjoy. Such denial may be blatant in the form of discriminatory laws or customs, or it may be hidden but even more potent in the form of oppressive concept or language. The insidious nature of language which serves to emphasize one group as the norm or standard is that it reinforces that group's primacy and importance every time we think or speak, thus, it becomes automatic or 'natural' to ascribe greater weight to that group.

**NOT SIMPLE**
Language is not as simple as it might first appear. How we speak about something not only describes the experience, but often shapes and creates it. The power and significance of language, words, the word, was clearly understood by the authors of Scripture who identified the act of creation with God's Word, God's speaking. The imagery of God's interaction with humanity is consistently expressed in terms of God's Word or speaking. The early prohibition against uttering God's name was a recognition of the power that a name or word holds. Indeed, God's delegating to humanity the authority to name the creatures was an act of empowerment. Thus, when we deal with language in general and God language in particular, we are venturing into an area of the deepest significance and it is important that we proceed with care and with caution.

**CHANGE IS CONSTANT**
Both the Biblical tradition and the history of the faith community reveal that the one constant in God language is that of change. And how could it be otherwise? For it is a living God whom we worship and respond to. Both
as individuals and as communities our understanding and experience of this God grows as we grow and growth inevitably brings change.

The Bible in its present form evolved over a period of many centuries. Beginning as stories of faith passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation, these stories were eventually written down and added to. Different generations of faith communities shaped, edited and retold these stories in light of their own understanding and experience of God. Still other communities later on discussed and debated which stories and which versions would be included as scripture and which would not.

Very significantly for all of us in UFMCC, these guidelines have been used in the editing of our Statement of Faith as we know it today.

The clergy and lay delegates of the 10th General Conference recognized that:

1) local churches are entrusted to use and adapt these guidelines for local use and that

2) the work of education and consciousness-raising is a lifetime commitment for all of us.

Finally, the Inclusive Language policy of the University Fellowship is not written in stone -- our understanding of what it means to be inclusive must continue to evolve.

The denomination of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) has been struggling for most of our history with how to be inclusive in our language, our attitudes, and our actions.

As far back as 1973, UFMCC Bylaws were amended so that neither God nor church leaders would be referred to with only male pronouns. At the 1974 and 1976 UFMCC General Conferences, strong stands were made for inclusive, non-sexist language in church documents, publications, Bylaws, Statement of Faith, and worship. This culminated in 1981 with the adoption of guidelines for using inclusive language in church life and worship and the amendment of the wording of the UFMCC Statement of Faith according to these guidelines.

Most of the controversy in the last twenty years over inclusive language in both church and society has been over sexism. There does seem to be a growing consensus in Western culture that language should be non-sexist when referring to human beings.
Section 1
What is Inclusive Language
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So what is Inclusive Language?
DEFINITIONS

What is inclusiveness?
Inclusiveness is an attitude of mutuality and openness toward others that recognizes everyone's right of equal access to the experience and realization of wholeness and it is a commitment to remove barriers between individuals and among communities that deny such access.

What is inclusive language?
Inclusive language reflects an attitude of mutuality and openness toward others that recognizes everyone's right of equal access to the experiences and realization of wholeness. Inclusive language reflects a sensitivity to overcome barriers that exist between individuals and among communities in such areas as gender, race, class, age, physical differences, nationality, theological beliefs, culture and lifestyle.

Inclusive language is not an issue that is ever resolved once and for all, however. New people are always being integrated into our churches, and they may or may not come with an inclusive understanding of God and humanity. Also, MCC is not alone in its consideration of these issues. Nearly every mainline Protestant denomination, Roman Catholics and many other Christian churches have serious dialogue about inclusive language. Moreover, UFMCC as a denomination and as local churches are continually growing in understanding what it means to be inclusive. It is an ongoing process.

Generally speaking, the issue of using inclusive language for human beings is much easier to understand and implement than the issue of inclusive language for God. So we will deal with people-language first, and then move to God-language.
Section 2
Why Use Inclusive Language?
Chapter 1: People
INTRODUCTION BY THE REVEREND DR. JEFFREY PULLING:
Anyone who has been around Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) for any period of time will undoubtedly notice that MCC strives to be inclusive in its language -- that is, not limiting God or human beings to one gender, one race, or any other human category.

Those who have been around MCC for a while and have the occasion to visit a church of a different denomination, such as for a family visit, wedding, or funeral, often have the experience of feeling slapped in the face with all the male imagery still used in that church, with God always being referred to as "He" and "Father," and much use of "man," "mankind," "sons," "brothers," etc.

Have you had that experience?

A common testimony of MCC members is that when they first came to MCC, they had a teeny-tiny God, and that God has grown and grown. It is not only our conceptions of God that expand, however, but also our understanding of ourselves, our understanding of other people, and our understanding of what the church is. To be spiritually growing and maturing, our image and understanding of God and ourselves should always be expanding. We need to leave behind our limited, inadequate "gods" and embrace the one true God, who is much more than we could ever imagine. To express our expanding understanding of God and ourselves, our words need to start catching up.

This is where inclusive language comes in.

Why Use inclusive Language?
The reason we need to find and use inclusive language in our church life has been widely misunderstood. Inclusive language has often been urged upon congregations on the ground that the use of traditional, exclusive language upsets and angers some who then avoid the church. As Christians, we need to be concerned about the feelings of others; however, if the only reason we use inclusive language is that it keeps some people from getting upset, then what of those who find the use of inclusive language disturbing because of its unfamiliarity? The principle which guides the life and practice of the church cannot be 'what do most people find comfortable,' but rather, 'what is God's will and purpose?' The reason we need to use inclusive language is not because we want to keep a particular group happy,
but because it is necessary to promote justice, reconciliation and love, the agenda to which we Christians have been called. Justice, reconciliation and love demand that we overcome oppression wherever it exists and we cannot exclude the oppressive structures of our language from this task. The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches is committed to inclusivity in its life and faith.

WIDENING OUR HEARTS
The use of inclusive language does more than overcome a barrier to equal access. It frees us to grasp and convey the wider truth. Paul urged the Corinthians to widen their hearts that they might fully experience the gospel (II Cor. 6:13). In the same spirit, we are urged to widen our understanding so that we might better grasp the richness and fullness of God as well as of our own humanity. It is our openness to move beyond comfortable and familiar images that enables us to grow in our relationship with God. The importance of inclusive language is that it serves to liberate everyone.

RETELLING THE STORIES
It is not surprising then, that we, in our age, following the tradition of our ancestors in the faith, are retelling and reshaping the great stories of faith in light of our own experience and our own understanding of that same living God. Such a restatement is a particular hallmark of any prophetic age, when God calls us into wider understandings of old truths and relationships in light of changing events and experience. It was the reformulation of the faith by the prophets in response to the destruction of Israel that renewed that faith. It was the restatement of the law in the life and teachings of Jesus that fulfilled that law. It was the reinterpretation of who is the faith community by Paul that laid the foundation for an inclusive and universal church.

GOD IS NOT LIMITED
The changes that these guidelines represent are in the interest of enlarging and expanding our understanding and experience of God. By no longer identifying God with words or concepts primarily or exclusively associated with one gender, one race, one group, we more faithfully witness to the nature of a God who is not limited to one gender, one race, or one group.
The fact that such a change is neither familiar nor comfortable for many of us does not mean that we need not expend the effort. Allowing our lives to be transformed by the power of God often involves our submitting to changes that we initially resist.

The work of learning to restate the traditional formulations of our faith in light of God's present Word is no less than other communities of faith have had to do before us. Indeed, to be part of such an emerging restatement of God's Word is not a burden, but a sacred privilege.

Why be inclusive in our language?
It is a matter of justice to include people rather than exclude them. It is also a matter of following Jesus. That is, paying attention to Christ Jesus as our teacher and guide. Jesus saw his mission as inviting people into an intimate, trusting relationship with God. He strove to include people in God's circle of love, not to exclude. The following passage from Mark's Gospel records a dramatic example of this:

MARK 11:15-18:

When they arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began to drive out those who were selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves, and he would not allow anyone to use the temple court as a thoroughfare for carrying goods. Then Jesus taught them, saying, "Does not Scripture say: My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the peoples? But you have turned it into a den of robbers! The chief priests and the scribes heard this and began looking for a way to do away with Jesus. They were afraid of him because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching."

The story of Jesus' cleansing of the temple is often used to illustrate that it is okay to get angry if it is a righteous anger. This point may have some validity but it is not the primary issue at stake here. This story has also been used to put down Judaism and Jewish worship practices. That is a misreading of Jesus and what he did here.

Remember that Jesus was Jewish himself and engaged in Jewish worship on a regular basis. What this story of the cleansing of the temple is about is the abuse of religion to benefit a few and exclude others. First-century Judaism has not been the only religion to have institutions and individuals
guilty of this. Christianity has a sorry record in this regard too. All religious institutions and leaders need to be held accountable.

To understand this Gospel story, we must ask ourselves: why were there people selling and buying in the Temple courtyard? And who were these money-changers? Keep in mind that worship in the temple was essentially sacrificial worship. Animals such as goats, sheep, and doves were offered to God in burnt sacrifices. Because the sacrificial animals and birds had to be top quality, it would not do to just bring some from home, especially if one had to travel any distance to get to Jerusalem. So there were animals and birds just perfect for sacrifices for sale in the temple courtyard. This was all very convenient. In addition, the priestly aristocracy which ran the temple could make a profit on the sale of sacrificial birds and animals.

The money-changers were needed because there were so many different monetary systems in the surrounding areas where Jewish people lived, and only one kind of silver coin could be offered in the Temple. So for a fee the money-changers would give worshipers the right kind of coins in exchange for whatever kind of money they had. All of this was legitimate business to enable the kind of sacrificial worship done in the temple. Jesus never challenged that kind of worship, but he was upset that this religious commercial business was being done in the temple court.

This outer court of the temple was called the Court of the Gentiles. Inside that was the Court of Women where Jewish women could go to pray. Inside that was the Court of Israel where only Jewish men could go to pray, and inside that was the Holy of Holies where only the priests could go. This was a very hierarchical system with progressive exclusivism. The outer court, the Court of the Gentiles, was the only area in the temple complex where Gentiles or non-Jews could come to worship the Hebrew God. Any non-Jews who felt drawn to the Jewish religion or God could come to this court, but no further. It was in this outer court that all the buying and selling was going on. So in effect there was no place for Gentiles to come to worship God.

Note what Jesus says after he drives out the merchants, overturns the tables of the money-changers, and prohibits anyone from using the temple courtyard as a shortcut for carrying goods from one part of the city to another part.
This is what he says, "Does not Scripture say (or Is it not written) that my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the peoples, for all the nations?" Here Jesus is quoting a prophecy from the Hebrew Scriptures, from the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 56. This is a prophecy that says that those who have been excluded from the original Hebrew covenant will be included by God. Let's look at this prophecy itself:

ISAIAH 56:1-8:
Thus says the Living God: "Keep justice, and do what is right, for my deliverance is close at hand, and my saving justice will soon be revealed. Blessed is anyone who does this, anyone who holds it fast, who observes the Sabbath, not profaning it." The foreigners who have joined themselves to God should not say, "God will surely exclude us from God's people." And the eunuch should not say, "I am nothing but a barren tree." For thus says the Living God: "To the eunuchs who observe my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant, to them I will give in my house and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name, a name which shall not be forgotten. And the foreigners who join themselves to me, to minister to me, to love my name, and to be my servants, all who observe the Sabbath and do not profane it, and who hold fast to my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain, and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar. For my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Thus says the Sovereign God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, "I will gather in yet others besides those already gathered."

In this prophecy God promises to give to eunuchs and foreigners a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters. Those who have been excluded for not fitting the sexual norm and for reason of race or nationality are now included by God. Jesus draws attention to this prophecy as he clears the temple area of religious abuse and exclusivism.

Other examples of Jesus being inclusive, rather than exclusive, are interacting with Samaritans (considered "half-breed" Jews) and with non-Jews in his travels; dialoguing with women both in public and in private;
including women in the band of followers who accompanied him; and using paired images or parables, one male and one female.

For instance, in Luke 15:3-10 we find Jesus comparing God's searching love for us to a man looking for a lost sheep and a woman looking for a lost coin. In Luke 13:18-21, Jesus presents two images of the Kingdom or Dominion of God, one drawn from male experience and one drawn from female experience. In Mark 3: 31-35, Jesus is depicted as turning a situation around to be inclusive of his female disciples ("sister") as well as his male disciples ("brother").

So let's follow Jesus' example. Let's be inclusive of other people in our speech and in our actions.

By being careful to use inclusive language for human beings, we expand our grasp of what it means to be fully human. No longer is our understanding limited to what is male, white, able-bodied, etc. The more of the variety of the human race that we include in our understanding of "humankind," the richer and the more accurate is our understanding.

Jesus came to include people in God's circle of love, and we who minister in Jesus' name today must do the same.

This ministry of inclusion can be illustrated in a story from Poland in the post-World War I era. There was a Quaker nurse working in Poland at that time, and when she died there was a question as to what to do with the body. In that heavily Roman Catholic country, the only cemetery in the area was Catholic. Since the nurse was Quaker, she could not be buried there. Finally, after much discussion, the church officials decided to bury her just outside the cemetery fence. During the night the peasants of that village came and moved the fence.

That is our ministry: moving fences to include people, removing barriers that divide and keep us apart, inviting everyone to join in God's circle of love with our words and our actions. To Tear down walls and build up hope.
Questions for reflection and Discussion

(1) In what sense is inclusive language for people a matter of justice and sensitivity for you?

(2) In what sense is inclusive language for people a matter of "following Jesus" for you?
Section 2

Why Use Inclusive Language?

Chapter 2: God
There is a story about Thomas Edison, who invented the electric light bulb. The first light bulb was naturally quite primitive and not very efficient, but when Edison knew he was onto something, he immediately started to work with his team on improving the light bulb. After much effort he came up with a new, improved light bulb. He handed the finished bulb to a young helper, who nervously carried it upstairs step by step. At the top of the steps, the boy dropped the bulb. The whole team working with Edison had to work another 24 hours to make another bulb. When it was done, Edison picked it up and looked around at his team and helpers, and handed the bulb to that same boy. That gesture probably changed the boy's life. Edison knew that more than the light bulb was at stake.

This story about Edison is a contemporary parable of what God is like.

God's love and God's belief in us is like that. Love so amazing is hard for us to understand. God's love is unconditional. How do we talk about such a God? How do we address such a God?

As long as we are talking about people, about fellow human beings, it is a fairly clear-cut case that we should be inclusive in language. It is a matter of simple justice and sensitivity.

It is more difficult, however, to maintain inclusive language when referring to God. Here we get into theology.

Many of us, when we first come to MCC, are so accustomed to using male pronouns for God that even when we come to understand God as beyond gender and other human categories, even when we come to view God as Spirit who is neither male nor female, it is still difficult not to say "he," "him," and "his" for God. This male terminology, however, limits God to our cultural view of the Divine, which is a male-dominant point of view.

A Bible passage that has helped and challenged many in their understanding of God is the following one from 1 Kings 18, one of Israel's history books found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

1 KINGS 18:17-21
When King Ahab saw the prophet Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel? Elijah replied, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, you and your father's family. You have forsaken the commandments of the living God YAH-WEH
and followed Baal. Now summon all the people of Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal with them, and the 400 prophets of the goddess A-she-rah, who eat at Queen Jezebel's table.

So Ahab called all Israel together and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before all the people and said, "How long will you waver between two different opinions? If YAH-WEH is God, follow YAH-WEH. But if Baal is God, then follow Baal." And the people did not answer him a word.

The prophet Elijah confronts his hearers: "If YAHWEH is God, then follow YAHWEH. If Baal is God, then follow Baal." Elijah asks his hearers: "How long will you waver between two different opinions?" How long will you go limping between two different conceptions of God? How long will you straddle the fence? Is it YAHWEH or Baal?

YAHWEH of course is one of the primary Hebrew names for God. It is a strange name in that it is a verb form rather than a noun. It is a form of the verb "to be," and it means something like, "I am who I am." YAHWEH, the God of Israel, could not be limited by any name or category or image. As much as the Israelite people tried to contain their God into being their God and their God only, into being a warrior-general for them, and into being male only, as much as the Israelites tried to limit YAHWEH their God, it didn't work.

YAHWEH kept bursting out of the boxes into which they put their God. YAHWEH just would not stay in the neat shelf compartment in which they placed their God. Through the prophets, YAHWEH kept surprising people and challenging them to grow and expand in their conception of God and God's will. YAHWEH is boundless, eternal, and universal. YAHWEH is beyond gender, beyond nationality, beyond race, beyond any time and place.

Baal, on the other hand, was the god of Israel's neighbors, the Canaanites, the people who were native to that area. Now Baal was definitely a male god. He was worshiped as a fertility deity who had sexual relations with female deities to bring about the fertility of the land, the livestock, and the people.
The shrines used in the worship of Baal were large phallic symbols. And Baal was localized to a particular place and a particular people. In fact, there was not just one Baal, but many.

Ask yourself what your conception of God is. Is it YAHWEH or Baal? Is your God a male figure? Is your God restricted to certain functions and certain times in your life? Then your God is too small, and you need to meet YAHWEH, the boundless God, the God beyond categories.

The Hebrew Scriptures provide a huge variety of names, images, and terms for God. That is why it is wrong to use one, and only one, imagery for God, like always saying "Father," or always saying "Creator" or "Maker," or only thinking of God as solely indwelling Spirit. God is more than any one particular conception of God.

The Scriptures give us a richer and fuller picture of God than we could ever imagine. Besides the name of YAHWEH ("I am who I am"), there are also the names Elohim (God the mighty one) and El Shaddai (God the Breasted One, that is, the One who nurtures us and provides for our needs).

The Song of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy (Chapter 32) depicts God as like a mother eagle, who stirs up her young ones to leave the nest and learn to fly. The song we sing in MCC called "Our God Is Like An Eagle" is based on this passage. This same Song of Moses refers to "the God who gave you birth."

Psalm 131 is a short psalm which says that being calmed and quieted by God is like being a child at the mother's breast. The Hebrew prophets were very daring in their imagery for God, including feminine imagery, especially the prophets Hosea and Second Isaiah1.

These and other feminine references to God have been overlooked and dismissed by those who can imagine God only as male, but they stand in the Scriptures to remind us that God is beyond our imaginings and projections. They clearly point out that God is beyond gender.

There are all kinds of images and terms that are applied to God throughout the Bible. These include shepherd, fortress, rock, liberator, judge, spouse, suitor, friend, potter, ruler, father, mother, midwife, light, love, breath, 

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1 Some Scholars believe that chapters 40 -66 of the Book of Isaiah were written by a different author. Others use the term to refer to chapters 40 - 66.
wind, and so on. These are all human analogies and images that we human beings use to describe God or to say what God is like. God may be like these things, but God cannot be contained in any of these images, not even in all of them put together. God is much vaster than we can ever imagine, and God cannot and will not be restricted by any words that we attach to the Deity. It is idolatrous, theologically wrong, and Biblically unsound to use just one word or phrase to definitively portray God, because God transcends our human words.

God is not limited by our understanding of God. God is not bound by any of our cultural or personal biases. God has revealed God to have both masculine and feminine attributes. This means of course that God is beyond gender, and it is wrong to present God in exclusively male terms.

God is beyond gender, beyond race, beyond nationality, beyond any church or religion, beyond any culture or time. If God is beyond our human categories, including gender, then we need to speak of God in that way.

Our God is boundless and inclusive.

Is not this what Jesus taught and showed us about God? Jesus' whole life and ministry was an embodiment of God's boundless and all-inclusive love.

At this point some readers may want to ask, "Well, what about the term 'Father' for God, the very gender-specific term that Jesus often used for God?" The concept of God as our loving Father is very dear and precious to many persons, both men and women. It is so deeply imbedded in Christian thought and tradition that it is hard for many people to conceive of God in any other way. "Father" is one valid way of conceiving and addressing God. Indeed, it seems to have been one of the primary images used by Jesus for God. But it is only one image, only a partial picture of God. Keep in mind the huge variety of ways that God is presented in the Bible and as ultimately beyond male and female categories.

It was not uncommon in the Jewish religion of Jesus' day to refer to God as "Father," but when Jesus used the term, he gave it a much more intimate meaning.

Jesus emphasized the closeness and loving intimacy of God. In fact, Jesus did not use the formal word for "Father" like his fellow Jewish rabbis did. Rather Jesus used the simple Aramaic word Abba to address God. This was a very informal, intimate term, and was what Jewish children might call their father in the home. The only thing close to it that we have in
contemporary American English is "Daddy" or "Papa." Jesus shocked his contemporaries by talking about God in such an informal, direct, and personal way.

Jesus transformed the image of God as Father which was common in Judaism at the time. Jesus changed the picture of God from an aloof, stern, cold, demanding, distant Father into a close, loving, forgiving Abba.

To illustrate this, Jesus used both male and female images. He ascribed many "feminine" or "motherly" qualities to God, such as God feeding, clothing, nurturing, supporting, and comforting us. In Biblical times, these functions were definitely aspects of the "motherly" role, not the "fatherly" role.

What Jesus was trying to communicate was that the love and ongoing concern of God for us is like that of our parents, both of our parents. God is our Father and Mother. God is our Provider and Nurturer, the One from whom we come and the One to whom we belong. By his use of Abba and by what he taught about God, Jesus did much to break the traditional stereotypes of a male, masculine, macho God.

The contemporary English word "Father" does not capture what Jesus was getting at when he called God Abba. "Father" is formal and can be used to set apart, to distance. More accurate and sensitive renderings of "Abba" might be:

"O God, you who father and mother us"
"Beloved God"
"Loving Provider"
"O God from whom we come"
"O God to whom we belong"

Terms like "Creator," "Maker," and "Parent" are certainly Biblical images for God, but they do not really capture the intimacy of Abba. When we translate the concept of God as Abba into contemporary American English, we should do so with "drawing near" terminology. "Father" and "Parent" may not be accurate translations of Abba because they can be distancing terms, not "drawing near" terms.

When Jesus talked about what God is like, he used both male and female images, as illustrated in this following passage from Luke's Gospel:
LUKE 15:1-10

Now the tax collectors and other disreputable people were all coming near to Jesus to hear him. And the Pharisees and teachers of the law grumbled, "This Jesus welcomes sinners and even eats with them."

So Jesus told them this parable: "What man among you who has a hundred sheep and loses one of them does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the one that is missing until he finds it? And when he has found the sheep, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders. When he comes home he calls together his friends and neighbors and says, 'Rejoice with me. I have found my sheep which was lost.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinful person whose heart is changed than over ninety-nine virtuous persons who have no need of repentance.

"Or what woman who has ten silver coins and loses one does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it she calls together her friends and neighbors and says, 'Rejoice with me. I have found the silver coin that I lost.' In the same way, I tell you, there is joy among the angels of God over one sinful person whose heart is changed." (4)

In these Lucan parables, Jesus actually compares God to a woman. He said that God's active searching love for human beings is like a man looking for one lost sheep and like a woman looking for one lost coin. It was a revolutionary idea in first century Judaism to say that God was like a woman doing anything!

By using a female example as well as a male example here, Jesus demonstrates the importance of presenting the Gospel message in more than one way so that it speaks to women as well as men. For the Good News of God's universal, unconditional love to be embraced by all kinds of people, the message must be driven home in a variety of ways in the hope
that at least one of these ways will be powerful, meaningful, and relevant to every person and group.

One image or term for God is not going to attract all people to a loving, intimate relationship with God. For some, "Father" or "Daddy" will be a powerful, meaningful image. For others, the term "Father" will drive them away, possibly because they were misunderstood, or neglected, or even abused by their own fathers. We must be open to using a variety of terms and images to express Abba.

Returning to this pair of Lucan parables that Jesus told, that is, the man searching for the lost sheep and the woman searching for the lost coin, the point of both of these parables is that God is just as persistent in seeking us out. Just like the man who goes out and searches until he finds the one lost sheep, just like the woman who tears her house upside-down until she finds one lost coin, so God hunts and searches until we are found. God's love does not give up.

If God's love is so inclusive, so all-embracing, and if God's very being or nature is so inclusive, then ought not we be inclusive? Ought not our conception of God and of ourselves be thoroughly inclusive?
Questions for discussion and reflection

(1) Which of the Biblical names and images for God are most powerful and meaningful to you? What is it about this name and/or image that speaks to you?

(2) Is there a Biblical name or image for God that is particularly challenging for you, pushing you on to a new or different understanding of God?
(3) How can you express Jesus' portrayal of God as "Abba" in terminology that is intimate and inviting, rather than distancing?

(4) If God truly is Spirit who is beyond gender, race, nationality, etc., then how can you express that in your language about God?
Section 3

How do we Use Inclusive Language?

Chapter 1

Guidelines
A LIFETIME COMMITMENT

We recommend that:

- inclusive language be introduced in membership classes;
- these guidelines be applied at all levels of the life of UFMCC, in written, visual and spoken form, on the local, national and international levels;
- Candidates for pastoral leadership and deacons serve as examples to others by following these guidelines.

As we practice using inclusive language, it becomes more natural for us. As inclusivity becomes part of our make-up and the way we think, we start to see that inclusive language means more than non-sexist language. If we really want to be an inclusive Christian community, then we must be careful not to exclude anyone merely because of the words we use. This means persons of different races, nationalities, age, abilities, whatever.

For example, MCC Hartford, Connecticut concludes every Sunday worship service with the song, "Let There Be Peace on Earth". In this song, the words are sung "Let us go with each other in perfect harmony," rather than the original wording of "Let us walk with each other..." This all stems from a former member of the congregation who used a wheelchair. This man told the others in the congregation that he could not walk with them but that he could go with them. There are other ways we could be more sensitive to those differently-abled than we are, such as not using the imagery of blindness and deafness as spiritual insults or put-downs.

Songs are especially onerous since not only do we need to deal with specific terms, but also matters of timing and rhyming. It can be done; it just sometimes takes more effort.
GUIDELINES FOR GENDER

A. References to people:

A.1 Use non-gendered terms or inclusive gendered terms when referring to all sexes.
A.2 Pronouns should not be of a single gender when referring to all sexes.
A.3 Terms for occupations and roles should not refer to one gender.

It is easy to understand that words like "man" and "mankind," when used to denote all people or human beings in general, clearly leave out women from the human race. It is sexist in that it takes the male half of the human race and holds that forth as normative humanity, ignoring the experience of women. It is thus more accurate and more sensitive to say "people," "humankind," "men and women." It is easy to change "brothers" (or "brethren") to "brothers and sisters" when both males and females are being referred to. Likewise "sons" can easily be changed to "sons and daughters" or "children" or "heirs," depending on the context.

The pronouns "he," "him," and "his" are male pronouns and should not be used to designate either females or people in general. The indefinite singular ("one") or the indefinite plural ("they" or "those") can be used. For example, instead of saying, "He who comes to me shall not hunger," the inclusive rendering would be "They who come to me shall not hunger." This does not change the meaning and in fact it more accurately expresses Jesus' intent in that it includes everyone in the invitation, not just men.

The use of inclusive language for human beings is a relatively simple matter and can be easily implemented. Using inclusive language does not mean making everything feminine that is now masculine. Rather it is using words appropriate to the subject being talked about. If one is talking about men, use masculine pronouns.
If one is talking about women, use female pronouns. If one is talking about both men and women, use both pronouns. Or if speaking about people in general or an unspecified person, use general pronouns, like "one," "one's," "they," "them," "their," "those."

Inclusive language has sometimes been ridiculed because of the overuse of the ending "-person" to replace the familiar "-man" endings in words like "chairman" and "policeman." We must be imaginative and creative, just as present-day society is being very creative in its language about occupations. Instead of policeman, it is not police person, but police officer. Instead of fireman, it is not fire person, but fire fighter. Mailmen are now mail carriers, not mail persons. Insurance men are now insurance agents. Linemen are now telephone line repairers. Jobs should be properly named by the work performed, not by the gender of the one doing it.

Similarly, Christians need to be imaginative and creative in their language. When we come across a word like "fisherman" in a Biblical text, a rendering of "fisher persons" sounds ridiculous. A simple "fishers" is fine, or a more quaint term like "fisher folk."

There is no reason to add "feminine" endings on words when they are ascribed to women, like "prophetess," "priestess," or "deaconess." The "-ess" ending can be sexist in itself in that it is often experienced as diminutive, signifying something less than the "real" thing. The Hebrew Scriptures refers to men prophets and women prophets; the same Hebrew word is used for both. There is no such word "prophetess." The New Testament churches had men deacons and women deacons; the same Greek word is used for both. There was no such word "deaconess" until hundreds of years later.
B. Inclusive language for God:

B.1 Use non-gendered or inclusive gendered terms for God wherever such changes do not alter the fundamental meaning. If gendered term is used, terms of the other gender should be used for balance.

B.2 Balance male images for God with female images.

B.3 Where possible, replace pronouns with non-gendered nouns, or use balanced gendered pronouns or words such as 'who', 'whom', 'one', and 'God-self.'

C. Inclusive language for Jesus, the Christ:

The historical person, Jesus, was male. The historical fact that Jesus was male affirms not that God chose to become incarnate with masculine characteristics, but that Jesus is fully human as well as fully divine. And because Jesus incorporates the humanity of both men and women, it is appropriate to emphasize the full humanity rather than primarily the maleness of Jesus.

D. Use direct address, adjectives and verbs to replace nouns or pronouns, carefully considering whether meaning or purpose would be adversely changed.

GUIDELINES FOR RACE

If we are indeed going to be an inclusive church, we must acknowledge that we are the product of our past. Incorporated within our Christian religious heritage is a long history of racism (conscious and unconscious). Racism, whether conscious or unconscious, is destructive and must be overcome in order for us to be whole in our Christian faith. So, in keeping with our guidelines for inclusivity, we strongly recommend the elimination of racist language, imagery and symbols in references to people, God, Jesus Christ, scripture, hymns, song, liturgy and contemporary language.
"The paradox of Christianity is that what is wisdom to reason is foolishness to God, and what seems foolish or irrational to reason is the true wisdom that leads to redemption. The darkness from which reason flees is the true path to truth and being. This is the constant teaching of the scriptures. The greatest redemptive acts in the history of salvation were done at night or in darkness of Faith." [The Dark Center: A Process Theology of Blackness, Bulalia Baltazar, Paulist Press, New York, 1973. page 162-3]

We are troubled by the confusion of the issues of pigmentation (white, black) and illumination (light, dark). Because of its racism, society has so strongly interwoven the two. In a technical and a theological sense, they are indeed separate issues whereas, in their practical application, they are often combined. We need to be especially careful of how we use terms of lightness and darkness.

Racist language must never cross our tongues. Some of it is easy to spot: such as identifying white with goodness, purity, and God; identifying black with evil, death, and the demonic. Some may think that this is getting a little picky, and that these are just symbolic colors. But every time we use white and black in this symbolic way, we are perpetuating the dangerous myth that black is bad, that white is better than black.

Another inclusive language issue dealing with race is how we use the images of light and darkness. The issue of skin pigmentation is, of course, different from that of illumination or lack thereof. But Western society because of its racism has strongly interwoven the two. Light and dark images have gotten mixed up with racial prejudices. Now the image of light is too powerful and pervasive in Christianity and other religions to leave behind, but the racist connection can be broken by substituting the concepts of "gloom" and "shadows" for "darkness."

Inclusivity is not just a matter of what words we use. Words of course are important because they express how we view God and how we view humanity. But just as important is having an inclusive attitude, an inclusive mind set, an inclusive heart set, an inclusive life stance. When we do ministry in this way, we reflect the heart of what MCC is all about, which is proclaiming and living God's unconditional love for all people.
Questions for reflection and discussion

In your language about people, what will you personally do to stop making male terminology the norm for what it means to be human? How will you more intentionally include women?

What will you personally do in your language to stop reinforcing the myth that white is better than black, and that dark is evil? How will you more intentionally include persons of different skin color, race or ethnicity than yourself?
What will you personally do in your language to stop using blindness, deafness, and mental disability as put-downs or insults? How will you more intentionally include persons of different physical and mental abilities?
Section 3

How do we Use Inclusive Language?

Chapter 2

Exercises
Our goal with these exercises is not to show you the right and wrong of inclusive language, but rather to help you further understand the use of inclusive language. Each person is encouraged to share their results with the group and discuss why each piece was inclusified the way it was. Each group is encouraged to share their collective results and view other results at inclusivelanguage.blogspot.com. There is no “right” or “wrong” when inclusifying, only “currently correct for this time and place”. Inclusive Language will continue to evolve as long as language evolves. As a church, consensus needs to be reached for public worship but sometimes we will have to agree to disagree with one another over specific inclusifications.

Exercise 1

Inclusify the following song:

Original – He is Lord He is Lord
He is risen from the dead
And He is Lord
Every knee shall bow
Every tongue confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord

Inclusified - __________________________________________________________

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Exercise 2

Inclusify the following scripture – John 1: 1-5 - Original

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

Inclusified - __________________________________________

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Exercise 3
Inclusify the following scripture – John 3:13-19 – Original –

13And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. 14And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Inclusified - __________________________________________
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Exercise 4

Inclusify the following song: Good Christian Men, Rejoice (FOG 177, AH 110)

Original (v1) - Good Christian men, rejoice with heart and soul, and voice; Give ye heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today; Ox and ass before Him bow; and He is in the manger now. Christ is born today! Christ is born today!

Inclusified - __________________________________________
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36
Original (v2) - Good Christian men, rejoice with heart and soul, and voice; Now ye hear of endless bliss: Jesus Christ was born for this! He has opened the heavenly door, and man is blest forevermore. Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!

Inclusified - __________________________________________
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37
Original (v3) - Good Christian men, rejoice with heart and soul, and voice; Now ye need not fear the grave: Jesus Christ was born to save! Calls you one and calls you all, to gain His everlasting hall. Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!

Inclusified - __________________________________________
Exercise 5
Inclusify the following song: I Know Whom I Have Believed (FOG631)

Original (v1) – I Know not why God’s wondrous grace To me He hath made known, nor why, unworthy, Christ in love Redeemed me for his own. But I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I’ve committed unto Him against that day.

Inclusified – __________________________________________
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I Know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin, revealing Jesus through the Word, creating faith in Him. But I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I’ve committed unto Him against that day.