

Guidelines for Gender Inclusivity

Q: What is "inclusive" and "included"?

A: According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary 'Inclusive' is defined as: *including everyone especially: allowing and accommodating people who have historically been excluded (as because of their race, gender, sexuality, or ability)*
Being inclusive is how we, through our words and our actions, welcome other people into our environment or space regardless of who they are. By not disrespecting people for being different (whatever that difference maybe) you are telling them that they are welcome.
The opposite of inclusivity is discrimination. Being discriminative is not only bad manners, it's against the law.

Q: Is inclusivity only about gender?

A: No, it is about all sorts of differences: race, religion, gender, sexuality, age, neurodivergence, disability, appearance, and so on.

Q: What are pronouns?

A: They are words used to refer to someone or something without using names or proper nouns. E.g. Him, her, they, it, I, we, you.

Q: What is "someone's pronoun"?

A: These are the third person pronouns someone has chosen for themselves to best reflect who they are. E.g. "My name is Sam and my pronouns are she/her", "I'm Alex, and I use they/them pronouns", or "Bailey uses he/him pronouns".
Most people use one set of pronouns: she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, etc.
Some people use multiple sets: she/they, or they/he.
If you are unsure of someone's pronouns, just ask.

Q: Is there a default or catch-all pronoun?

A: Yes, use 'they, them, theirs'. Also, if you know someone's name, you can just use that instead.

Q: Isn't it inaccurate to refer to a single person as they?

A: No, 'they' has been in use for a very long time to refer to a person of unknown or unspecified gender since at least the 14th century! Many famous writers have used singular 'they' including Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Austen.

Q: What if I get it wrong?

A: Quickly correct yourself and move on. It will take practice, but people are very forgiving. The worst thing you can do is bring your worship to a standstill and give a 15-minute monologue about "how this is very new" and that you're "so very sorry" and "really trying to get it right".

Q: How should I address/welcome a community or congregation?

A: We are all in the habit of using 'Ladies and Gentlemen' and/or 'Boys and Girls' when addressing a community. There are lots of alternatives, for example:

Formal: *“Welcome everyone”*

Casual: *“Folks, or Beautiful People, or Welcome one and all!”*

Gospel: *Siblings in Christ, Family of God, Friends of Christ, People of the Way, Disciples of Jesus, Humble, Hopeful, Holy Ones.....*

Q: Where can I learn more?

A: Talk to people. Listen to your communities and the world around you. If someone outside of your usual experience has time and patience to tell you about their life, ask questions and hear the answers.

Q: Why does this matter? Why is it important to worry about all this?

A: Because it is respectful. The public is increasingly aware and sensitive to this matter. Inclusive language lets everyone know we have a space where all are welcome and valued based on what we have in common; that we are welcoming of uniqueness, difference, and diversity. We have the opportunity to shape attitudes and give positive experiences. We have a public platform to make our community better, stronger, happier and our worship more prophetic.

Q: Why should I change my language?

A: To create an inclusive and respectful environment. Any fresh look can be positive and revealing. New ideas and theologies may emerge that you had not thought of before and of course to help everyone feel included, loved and welcome.

Q: Is this for children too?

A: Yes. Children are particularly vulnerable to judgement and unintentional negativity. During early years children are especially conscious of gender. There are clearly different approaches for children and adult shows, as well as for family shows. Children are constantly shaped by memorable experiences, and parents are watching.

Q: How can I do this overnight?

A: You can't. Nobody can, and nobody is expecting you to. It's an adventure of discovery. Don't pressure yourself. Just start.

Q: What if someone gets offended at my inclusivity?

A: If someone gets offended that you are being inclusive, then that's on them and not on you. It can take time for some people to get used to these kinds of changes.

Q: Isn't this political correctness gone mad?

A: No, "political correctness" is when people do something because that's what the rules say, not because they want to. Though true, sometimes it can be the doorway into breaking bad habits.

Q: Why is it so complicated? It seems like a lot. Help!

A: Relax, you may be getting this all at once. Start with small, inclusive changes, and go from there.