

Statement and Guidelines on Language for Diversity & Inclusion

Since the early 1980s the Union Presbyterian Seminary faculty has recognized the importance of language that exhibits care around areas of diversity and inclusion. The following represents our continued efforts to exhibit grace and welcome in the language used in worship, classroom, and community settings.

We affirm, without exception, that all persons are created in the image of God, and that, in Jesus Christ, all persons are worthy of the dignity, respect, and love inherent to their status as members of God's beloved community. As a community, we commit ourselves to language that intentionally expresses care and breaks down harmful assumptions and stereotypes as we speak about God and God's people. We recognize that members of the community bring with them communal traditions, varied language practices, and constitutional requirements; therefore, we endeavor to be a community that is graceful and patient with one another in our ongoing conversation about language practices that honor the dignity of all.

With respect to language about God, we encourage use of the wide variety of biblical metaphors, as well as gender-neutral language. By expanding our language about God to include a variety of images, we expand our understanding of God's presence and activity in our lives.

With respect to language about the people of God, we affirm that care should be taken to reflect the diversity of the Creation. When referring to God's people, the community is encouraged to use words and phrases such as humanity, humankind, human beings, folks, friends, people, persons, parents, siblings, kindred, Beloved Community, and God's family. Similarly, we encourage the use of words including pronouns, phrases, and metaphors that are sensitive to the diversity of God's people (avoiding, for example, the simple equating of white with goodness and black with evil, and metaphors that correlate sin with various disabilities such as blindness, deafness, and paralysis).

Sensitivity to language of diversity is incumbent upon those who prepare and lead worship for the seminary community, but it also bears upon classroom engagement and community etiquette in all the spaces in which we live, learn, and fellowship together. We affirm the full dignity of all persons and commit ourselves to mutual encouragement of one another as we continue to develop and use language in which all persons find themselves included.

*Approved by the Faculty
March 19, 2020*