

# enfleshed

spiritual nourishment for collective liberation



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*Please remember, language is only one important piece of unlearning and re-assembling in our shared work of building just communities. A community that changes language but doesn't intend to address the other elements necessary for lasting cultural and theological change is misrepresenting the community's commitment to justice and inclusion.*

- [See all our crowd-sourced resource documents here.](#)

## Inclusive language for worship and preaching

The words we use matter! Words shape our understanding of the Divine, one another, and ourselves. We are all learning and we are all growing but being mindful of the ways in which we reinforce the oppressive powers we desire to address - through the words we use - is part of our work of faith. Mistakes and oversights are inevitable. We apologize when necessary, mend relationships, and move on better equipped! Undoing centuries of dominance work takes time, effort, seriousness, and compassion and understanding. Hopefully we are in this together...

### **\*This is a living document:**

*If you have corrections or additions to add that have worked in your context, please make a suggestion! **This is a crowd-sourced document with many authors** offering their contributions so that we might learn from one-another's experiences and insights. Please try to stick to language and word choices for this document rather than concepts and theologies. There are endless harmful theological doctrines that need to be addressed but simply cannot be contained in this one document.*

### **Queer gender and sexuality**

- Alternatives for "sisters and brothers" - a phrase which is not inclusive of other genders
  - People of God
  - Sacred kin
  - Siblings or Siblings in Christ
  - Family or Family in Christ or Family of God
  - Beloveds or Beloveds in Christ or Beloved Ones or Beloved of God

- Saints and sinners
- Saints
- Folks
- Friends
- Comrades or Comrades in Christ
- Neighbors
- Y'all
- Team
- Dear Ones
- Companions
- Kindred in Christ
- Children of the Living God or Children of God
- Resurrection people
- Church or Church family
- Children of Wisdom
- Followers of Christ
- Our image of God together
- Avoid making jokes about the letters in the LGBTQIA acronym
- If you're confused about using the word queer, [here's a good article](#) on why it's used.
- When necessary, shorthand for acronym should be queer and trans - not "gay and trans" which erases bisexual and pansexual people
- A single person is not "LGBTQ." Be specific when referencing an individual. Are they queer? Queer and trans? Bi and trans?
- Do not use "LGBTQIA" when you only mean trans people or only mean to address sexual orientation. Not all trans people are LGB and not all LGB people are trans. Do use "LGBTQIA" when you are referring to the communities of people who are discriminated against based on sexual orientation and gender identity. For example: You might say, "the church has a history of excluding LGBTQIA people." But you wouldn't say "Andrea, an LGBTQIA person" because Andrea is unlikely all of those identities.
- Never use "transgendered" or "transgenderism." Use "transgender person" or "trans person" or "a person who is transgender."
- Avoid "opposite gender" or "opposite sex" and other dualisms that erase additional genders and also reinforce gender stereotypes of men and women that suggest there should be or are less similarities between them and more "opposite" ways of being/thinking/acting/etc.
- When referencing gender, use "all genders," or "another gender" or be specific when needed. Referencing only "men and women" doesn't include all genders. If referencing those affected by systemic sexism, you may say "those who are not men" or "women and gender minorities."
- Avoid casually referring to any trans people as their assigned gender at birth. Example: Do not say of a trans man or non-female identified trans person, "when they were a woman" unless they have specifically told you that is how they identify with their past experiences of gender.

- Double check proper pronouns are used when writing or speaking about others
- Be mindful of how you gender bodies - be trans inclusive. Not all women have a uterus. Some men menstruate and/or give birth/need abortions. Non-binary people exist in all bodily forms. Any gender could potentially have any body part.
- Practice normalizing the sharing of pronouns in your church. As you welcome people in worship try including your pronouns like: "Good morning! Welcome to \_\_\_\_\_. My name is \_\_\_\_ and I use \_\_\_\_ pronouns."
- Include pronouns on name tags, zoom name labels, and in all introductions.
- Avoid welcoming new people with phrases that assume their gender such as "good morning, ladies" or "welcome, gentlemen." This is perfectly fine if you know the people and know that these words reflect their actual gender.
- Fantastic trans writing guide here:  
<https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2017/08/31/transgender-style-guide/>
- Don't assume a person's sexuality based on their relationship (two women together may be bi, queer, or lesbian; similarly, in a relationship of two men, they may be bi, gay, or queer. If a woman and a man are dating, they may be straight, or one or both may be bi. The same applies for non-binary people.)
- Use 'they' when you don't know someone's pronouns (if for instance, you are speaking about an encounter with a stranger whose gender was not explicitly communicated to you)
- Use "gender affirming surgery" rather than "sex-change"
- Avoid homosexual, transexual, hermaphrodite, or transvestite unless you specifically know someone prefers these terms for themselves
- Avoid reference to "birth sex" and use "assumed gender at birth" (though rare are the situations where one would use either of them respectfully if talking about someone else's experience or body)
- When speaking generally, use language such as parents, caregivers, or guardians rather than "mother and father"
- When speaking generally (gendered terms are ok when you know they're accurate for someone or someones!), use "nibling" instead of "niece and nephew."

## Sexism

- Try on alternatives for God other than "he." "She" or the [gender neutral singular "they"](#) challenge patriarchal teachings of God and culture.
- Practice using many of the metaphors for God that are more gender expansive. [A few are listed here.](#)
- "Father," "Lord," "Kingdom" or other masculine descriptions of God should be used very seldom if at all. If necessary, use feminine and gender neutral descriptions in conjunction.
- Avoid using "guys" as a gender catch-all.
- Replace "mankind" with "humankind" or humanity
- Remember when preaching, "Adam" means "earth creature" and was not gendered until God created a second human.

- Avoid referencing God or Jesus as “the Savior of men.”
- Try Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer or Mother, Lover, Friend instead of Father, Son, Spirit.

### Imperial language

- “Kindom” or “beloved community” can be used as an alternative to “Kingdom”
- Do not say the Pledge during worship or display country/state/territorial flags in the sanctuary.
- Avoid associating Christianity or discipleship with things such as:
  - Being soldiers
  - Being in an “army”
  - War
  - Lordship or Master
- Be careful with language around citizenship—it involves privileges and competing loyalties for those who have it, and can be used to set up an insider/outsider dichotomy. If you want to talk about “good citizenship” you might consider framing it as building healthy relationships with neighbors.
- “America” and “Americans” refers to the majority of the western hemisphere. Say something akin to “the US” if that’s what you mean.

### Race

- Avoid using biblical language and concepts that correlate “dark” with bad and “light” with good.
- Avoid language that lifts up whiteness as divine or pure like being made “white as snow.”
- Never suggest one person’s take is reflective of a whole community.
- Learn about the use of [‘latine’ as a replacement for ‘latino’ here](#).
- Learn the differences between Latinx, Hispanic, and Spanish and use them accurately. Great [video here](#).
- Refrain from calling people “illegal” in immigration conversations. Replace with “under documented.”
- Avoid using the word “citizen” for references to the whole population of the United States as in “US citizens.” When the legal framework of citizenship specificity is not needed in order for what you’re saying to be accurate, just say people, folks, or the public.
- Avoid the use of the term “alien.”
- If you are preaching on racism as a white pastor, be mindful of how you use the language “we” as if everyone in the congregation is the same. If you mean “we who are white,” say so.
- Try “BIPOC” (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) instead of POC (people of color) when talking generally about all people who are targeted under racist systems.
- Capitalize “Black” and generally use Black rather than African American unless this is the preferred language for a specific person or group

- If you're addressing something about a concern or population that is specific and specifically targets people of a certain race or ethnicity, your language should also be specific. Say anti-Black or anti-Indigenous if the issues are specific to these communities rather than vague references to all "people of color."
- Avoid appropriating "spirit animal" language
- Use white instead of caucasian
- When possible, refer to Indigenous people by their communities
- Avoid referring to people simply as "minorities." Be specific about what you mean with something else like "racial minorities," "ethnic minorities," Asian communities, Indigenous people, etc...
- Refrain from calling people 'exotic'
- Refrain from referring generally to Africans when you are specifically referring to a person or people from a specific country in Africa.
- Refrain from calling people just "mixed." Use "bi-racial" or "multiracial" or "mixed race."

## Ability

- Avoid using "blind" or "deaf" in a negative figurative way
  - "they were blind/deaf to..." use instead "they were ignorant of/to...."
  - "blindly follow" instead "mindlessly follow"
- Address healing stories of the Bible with mindfulness, care, and guided by disability justice perspectives. Do not reinforce theological teachings that suggest or imply:
  - Bodily healing is related to faithfulness and/or behavioral actions.
  - All people with disabilities desire to have their disabilities "healed."
  - Having a disability is inherently a negative experience or reality. Ableist systems and cultures should be the focus for speaking broadly to what's challenging about being disabled.
- Avoid using words such as:
  - Barren
  - Wheelchair bound (try: someone who uses a wheelchair. Wheelchairs can be liberative!)
  - Lame
  - Invalid
  - Crazy
  - Insane
  - Luny/looney/lune/loon
  - Nuts - (If you're trying to say something is irrational, be precise in saying so. Some alternatives are: wild, absurd, nonsensical, irrational, terrifying, intense, inconceivable, silly, hard to comprehend, ridiculous)
  - Crippled (but do learn about the re-claimed use of cripp and mad)
  - Learn about [dynamic disability](#)
- [Use neurodivergent and neurotypical correctly - good one pager here](#)
- Avoid use of defect, defective, differently abled, or handicapped when you mean disabled

- Use living with rather than 'suffering from'
- Avoid referring to people without disabilities or non-disabled people as healthy, abled, or normal.
- Avoid "impaired" language as in "hearing impaired." Use deaf or hard of hearing.
- Avoid patronizing language such as "special, gifted, or differently abled." Refer to people with disabilities or disabled people.
- Replace language such as "we stand with Mary" with "we support Mary" or "we affirm Mary" or "we gather around Mary" or "solidarity with Mary."
- Be mindful of the ways you imply all people can walk, see, hear, etc. Be mindful of the way these words are used as metaphors and what words you can use instead.
- Alternatives for walk or march: travel, move, traverse, explore, go, quest, forge, journey. Or add "stroll"
- Alternatives for see: perceive, recognize
- Alternatives for hear, listen: discover, understand, pay attention, receive, take in, heed
- Many d/Deaf folks do not consider themselves disabled; if specifically including d/Deaf try Deaf/Disabled community.
- Instead of "Can everyone hear me?" use "Is this mic on?" or "Is my audio on?"
- Use "living with HIV or AIDS" rather than "infected with..." Similarly, used "diagnosed with" versus "infected with."
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## **Class**

- Instead of saying "poor people," say "people who are impoverished" or "people living in poverty" or "economically exploited" or "economically oppressed." "Poor people" sounds like a natural state, and the point is that impoverishment is not natural. Systems are to blame not birth nor the individuals.
- Avoid referring to people as "the needy." If you are addressing a specific need, say so. For example, "people who face economic hardship." Or "people experiencing food insecurity." Or "people without housing stability."
- Rather than saying "the homeless," you might say "those who are experiencing houselessness" or who "have experienced homelessness" or "those living with housing instability" or "housing insecure" or "houseless" (as not having a physical shelter is different than not having a home).

## **Carceral systems**

- Avoid criminal, convict, felon, prisoner, and try "a person..." convicted of a crime, convicted of a felony, on parole, or incarcerated.
- Try "criminal legal system" instead of "criminal justice system." Very little about it is "just."

## **Avoiding Christian supremacy**

- Christians should stick with "Old Testament" and "New Testament" language. Pastors must do the work of reinforcing an understanding of "old" not as irrelevant or replaced but recognizing it as foundational and requiring respect. (Which is not a bad task for

combating ageism too). Efforts to replace “Old Testament” with “Hebrew Scriptures,” though intending to avoid the supersessionist implications that the NT has replaced the OT, ultimately erase the distinctiveness of the Tanakh (language for the scriptures in the Synagogue). The term “Hebrew Bible” also erases the Septuagint and the use of Greek texts in the Old Testament used by some Roman Catholics, Anglican/Episcopalian, and Eastern Orthodox Bibles. For more background, check out [this book](#).

- Other scholars name the limitations of “Hebrew Bible” but argue it ultimately disrupts the otherwise unchecked problems of “Old Testament” language in ways that are important in practical application. Use of “First” and “Second” Testaments or “Hebrew Bible and Newer Testament” are used by some.
- Avoid the language “Judeo-Christian.” This is typically an attempt to reference the Old Testament and add on Christianity which has little, if anything, to do with Judaism given the differences between the Old Testament and the Tanakh.
- Do not host Christian [Seders](#).
- Do not use the word ‘religious’ or ‘religion’ or ‘faiths’ when actually referring only to Christianity.
- Do not correlate Pharisees or Sadducees or the Law with negative values. Jesus was a Jewish person of faith who took his religion and tradition seriously. He engaged in debate with religious leaders - both devout and corrupt (all religions have both) - because of his investment in Jewish teaching and community. He was not anti Jewish law and was not anti purity rituals. He engaged in debate about how, when, where, and why such beliefs are lived out and practiced, as does any devout follower of any religion.

### **Children/youth**

- When ministering to children, ask before hugging or embracing them.
- Do not assume children will marry or be heterosexual. Avoid using phrases or questions that reinforce heteronormative assumptions that they will “have a girlfriend” or “a crush on a boy.”
- Do not assume children are cisgender.
- Look for curricula where the Biblical characters are not white.
- Look for ways to involve all children in worship including those with disabilities.
- Don’t refer to children as the future of the church, they are the church right now.
- Ask all children about their accessibility needs. They may know and enjoy being self-determined.

### **Substance Use**

- While some of these words may be appropriate for private conversations in mutual aid meetings, used by those who self identify with these words, they should be avoided in worship, teaching, writing, and especially via people who do not use drugs
  - Avoid: addict, junkie, alcoholic, substance abuser, relapse, drug abuse, drug habit, suffering from addiction, and “clean.”

- Try: person who uses substances, people who use drugs, recurrence of use, accidental drug poisoning, person with a substance use disorder, someone who is drug abstinent, not actively using, in recovery, in chaotic use.
- [You can learn more about why these words matter here.](#)

### **Miscellaneous**

- Avoid the language “prostitutes.” Use “people who do sex-work.”
- Replace 'committed suicide' with 'died by suicide'
- Replace 'successful or unsuccessful suicide' with 'died by suicide or survived suicide'
- Avoid calling someone suicidal as if an innate trait. Try "experiencing suicidal ideation" or "thinking about suicide."
- Avoid putting quotes around people’s accurately described identities. Use white not “white,” for example.
- Replace “domestic abuse victim” with “domestic abuse survivor.” “Relationship abuse” and “intimate partner abuse” are also helpful terms.
- Don’t assume all people choose to have children or are able to have children. Avoid asking people questions like “when are you going to have kids?” or saying things that suggest a couple’s happiness depends on having kids.
- Don’t assume that single adults long for or need a significant romantic relationship in order to be valuable, faithful Christians. Watch how much of your church language centers on families and neglects single people.
- Be aware that Mother’s Day and Father’s Day can be difficult and painful for many people for multiple reasons. (Including loss, painful relationship dynamics, family structures such as queer families, single parent families, barriers to creating a family, a general lack of trans awareness/inclusion on these days, and others...)
- Avoid using words or phrases that body-shame yourself or others.
- Do not refer to foods as morally negative. Do not reference foods - or eating them - as “bad” or “naughty” or in any way suggest some foods are something to feel guilty about enjoying.

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