



## **CCC Policy for the Use of Inclusive Language in the Music Ministry**

*September 12, 2016*

**Introduction:** As an open and affirming church, CCC strives to use inclusive language in worship and other settings. In our music repertoire, however, we continue to sing some anthems and hymns that use patriarchal phrasing that we have otherwise eliminated from our liturgy. We preserve these pieces because we value them for what they say and their beauty, even if some of the language they use falls short of our standard practices. Generally, these pieces have text and music that were composed centuries ago and are so integrated into literary and performance traditions that changing the text would harm the integrity of the piece. We trust that worshippers will take these musical offerings in the spirit they were written while understanding this church's intention to include everyone in the worship of God in our community.

### ***A Few Words about Words: A Historical Context for Inclusive Language***

Not only did the Elizabethan English of the King James version make God's voice sound distinguished with beautiful rolling cadences of iambic pentameter, so close to the rhythms of natural speech, its universal use of masculine nouns and pronouns conveyed indisputable authority to both the Old Testament God of wrath and judgment and the New Testament God of love and forgiveness. Great quantities of church music were composed from the seventeenth through the mid-twentieth centuries when the King James Version of the Bible was the Protestant standard. The Roman Catholic Bible, in use from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, was very similar to the King James Version. However, by the twentieth century, church leaders felt that Elizabethan English was too grandiose and archaic for modern times.

Beginning with the Revised Standard Version in the 1950s, publishers sought more modern language and grammar with various translations, but many Biblical figures remained male. In the 1970s, mainstream Protestant churches began revising their hymnals, which were reissued in the 1980s and 1990s, to incorporate inclusive language. New hymn verses created controversy. Many people knew hymns by heart; some felt well-known hymns and carols would be perceived as exclusive by those singing traditional versions memorized in childhood; others found the changes from familiar words disconcerting; people who prized the literary integrity of well-known poets were outraged. Conversely, many celebrated the new language; they embraced the diversity of included cultures and traditions; and they argued that eventually the hymns everyone remembers from childhood will be the inclusive language version. The

New Century Hymnal that we use at CCC also includes hymns from other cultures, such as Asian, African, and Latin American traditions, as well as American Indian/Native American.

### ***Current CCC Policy***

CCC aspires to update its library with texts that more ably reflect our understanding of how the language can erase gender stereotypes and include everyone in the community of the church.

CCC has over 1,000 choral scores, of which approximately 500 were purchased within the first ten years of the church's founding (1946-1956). We consider it wise stewardship of our resources to continue to use our older scores when replacing them would incur other expenses, such as payment of royalties. When it is practical and appropriate, we update the text of older scores with inclusive language. We also provide gender-neutral revisions of song sheets used in the children's music program.

When a piece says eloquently or beautifully what we want to say in expressing our faith, albeit in language that may not live up to our standards of inclusivity, the choir will sing the piece as written. When considering when it is appropriate to change the text of a choral piece, we typically will not change the wording if the text was originally published as a poem or essay, or if the words and music are so intertwined that to alter the words would harm the integrity of the piece. The texts of several hymns, for example, were originally poems published by John Greenleaf Whittier. Handel based his Messiah on the text of the King James Bible. These works reflect the conventions of their times; they express sentiments we can understand and appreciate; and even in their original vernacular, they provide a meaningful expression of our connection to God.

In many respects, any piece of music is a conversation among the composer, the listener and the performer. Just as in any other conversation, you are invited to ask what the language means, evaluate how it was used, and consider whether the meaning could have been conveyed differently. We are open to questions and discussion of any music we use in church, and why we may have chosen to preserve language that is jarring to our CCC ears. The Minister of Music and the members of the Music Committee are always open to comments and discussion on musical questions.

CCC hopes that by using inclusive language elsewhere throughout our worship service and in most of our music, everyone will feel welcome and will recognize that each of us is a child of God and belongs here.