

General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2024 Archives' Research Report

Resolution No.: 2024-A077
Title: Additional Guidance for Inclusive and Metaphorical Language
Proposer: Task Force on Individuals with Mental Illness
Topic: Inclusive Language

Directly Related: (Attached)

2022-A060 Endorse Guidelines for Expansive and Inclusive Language

Indirectly Related: (Available in the [Acts of Convention](#) database, searchable by resolution number)

2018-D046 Encourage Development of Inclusive-Language Liturgies
2018-D048 Review Use of Disability Language in Governance Documents
2018-D067 Urge Compliance with the Principles of Inclusive Language

In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1973 through 2022, selecting “direct” resolutions that have a substantive bearing on the proposed legislation. The “direct” resolutions are attached and “indirect” resolutions are available in the Acts of Convention database. Committee members who require other research assistance should contact the Archives through the [Research Request Form](#).

A077 - Additional Guidance for Inclusive and Metaphorical Language

Final Status: Not Yet Finalized

Proposed by: Task Force on Individuals with Mental Illness

Has Budget Implications: No

Cost:

Amends C&C or Rules of Order: No

Requests New Interim Body: No

Changes Mandate Of Existing Ib: Yes

Directs Dfms Staff: No

Directs Dioceses: Yes

Directs Executive Council: Yes

HiA: No House Assigned

Legislative Committee Currently Assigned: No Committee Assigned

Completion Status: Incomplete

Latest House Action: N/A

Supporting Documents: No

Resolution Text

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring,

That the 81st General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to include additional guidance in The Guidelines for Expansive and Inclusive Language regarding non-stigmatized language in the inclusive language section and non-ableist language in the metaphorical language section when drafting revisions and new liturgical materials; and be it further

Resolved, That when liturgical materials in languages other than English are developed for use in the Episcopal Church that they follow, to the greatest degree possible, the spirit and intent of these guidelines; and be it further

Resolved, That the 81st General Convention commend these guidelines to all persons who write or speak on behalf of the church for their serious reflection and consideration; and be it further

Resolved, That these guidelines be referred to Dioceses, Interim Bodies of General Convention, Executive Council and related bodies, Provinces, Church Publishing, and other organizations of the church for serious reflection and consideration when writing, speaking, or educating on behalf of the church.

Explanation

Language is important for ensuring clear and concise communication of ideas. However, certain idioms and expressions have become hurtful for those in our communities. Stigmatized and ableist language prevent affected communities from growing beyond their stereotypical place in society.

Stigmatized language affects how individuals feel welcomed by a community. It can be regionally specific and culturally informed. As an international body, we need to make sure that we are respecting the dignity of all human being through words. Some words will be harder to give up and we will fight for favorite phrases that have long been divorced from their stigmatized origin. Thoughtful language is the first step in the invitation to the welcoming love of the church. We have seen this welcome in the symbols we adopt. It is now time to reflect on how language becomes a barrier to welcome, a barrier to reaching people in our communities. Most resources will highlight terms related to Mental Health and Substance Abuse.

Ableist language perpetuates a standard of a perfect human being. We know that only through God may we be made perfect. How that perfection is manifested on earth is not for our judgement. Ableist language abounds in our sayings and reflects the deeply imbedded use of metaphors in how our society describes and connects when communicating. Phrases like, 'falling on deaf ears', 'the blind leading the blind', 'dumb' and 'lame' all come from and perpetuate the societal ignorance of the perceived limitations of individuals with disabilities. Additionally, when discussing action, we must be intentional about how we refer to the action and what is being accomplished. To 'go on a Walk' puts an unintentional focus on the action of walking, which can distance individuals that use alternative methods to move from one place to another. Replacing this language takes creativity to understand the invocation to participate.

Ableist and stigmatizing language can also overlap. Terms like 'crazy', 'spastic', and 'idiot(ic)' started as stigmatizing language to denigrate the populations living with mental, physical, and neurological health conditions. Continued usage transformed these into ableist language as people use them to distance and separate what is perceived perfect from the imperfect.

As we look through the liturgies of the church, the formation documentation, the prayers and spiritual resources, we should reflect on how small changes to how we refer to the saints, how we ask for intercessions and give thanksgiving to be inclusive to all (or to not be exclusive to some). As we refer to scripture, we need to make sure we do not perpetuate the sins of the past with unhealthy language around the message of the stories and lessons from the old and New Testament. The hope of this resolution is for the Standing Commission on Liturgy in partnership with other bodies, like Church Publishing (and the potential Standing Commission on Human Health and Wellness) to offer guidance through the language they propose to change.

Specifically, we want to make sure that:

- Under the Inclusive Language Section on Page 3, please add a sixth point in the list stating, “Stigmatizing language should be replaced with affirming statements and words that are more relatable and promote understanding.”
 - You can help eliminate the misunderstanding and stigma that prevent people from speaking up and getting support by choosing words that are clearer and more neutral.
Reference: <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI-Language-Matters.pdf> (October 2023)
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 - Stigmatizing language – such as “crazy” — perpetuates negative perceptions, which can result in people to be excluded from jobs, housing, social activities and relationships. Additionally, people may begin to believe the negative things that others say about them, delaying them on their recovery journey.
<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2022/04/use-person-first-language-to-reduce-stigma/> (October 2023)
- Under the Metaphorical Language Section on Page 3, please add a second point. The second point should be, “Ableist language should be reviewed against the intent and action of the speaker and call. Ableism perpetuates a “normal” human experience to life that places artificial barriers around what is considered perfect. Language used should reflect the intent, not the action used to accomplish the intent. As an example, ‘We shall go with Jesus’, rather than ‘We shall walk with Jesus.’”
 - Ableism is defined as discrimination or social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. It can manifest as an attitude, stereotype, or an outright offensive comment or behavior. When it comes to language, ableism often shows up as metaphors (“My boyfriend is emotionally crippled.”), jokes (“That comedian was hysterical!”), and euphemisms (“He is differently abled.”) in conversation.
<https://hbr.org/2020/12/why-you-need-to-stop-using-these-words-and-phrases> (October 2023)
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 - Many people don’t mean to be insulting, and a lot have good intentions, but even well-meant comments and actions can take a serious toll on their recipients.
<https://www.accessliving.org/newsroom/blog/ableism-101/#:~:text=Ableism%20is%20the%20discrimination%20of,defines%20people%20by%20their%20disability.> (October 2023)

Note: this resolution and/or its explanation contains external references, such as URLs of websites, that may not be in the required languages of General Convention. Because of copyright restrictions, the General Convention cannot provide translations. However, your web browser may be able to provide a machine translation into another language. If you need assistance with this, please contact gc.support@episcopalchurch.org.



Resolution Number: 2022-A060
Title: Endorse Guidelines for Expansive and Inclusive Language
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred
Final Text:

*Resolved, That the 80th General Convention adopt **The Guidelines for Expansive and Inclusive Language**, contained in the reports to the 80th General Convention of the Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision and the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, as the working principles for the revision and development of liturgical materials of The Episcopal Church; and be it further*

Resolved, That the 80th General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to follow these guidelines as they develop revised and new liturgical materials; and be it further

Resolved, That when liturgical materials in languages other than English are developed for use in The Episcopal Church that they follow, to the greatest degree possible, the spirit and intent of these guidelines; and be it further

Resolved, That the 80th General Convention commend these guidelines to all persons who write or speak on behalf of the church for their serious reflection and consideration.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Baltimore, 2022* (New York: General Convention, 2023), p. 444.