

**GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH 2018
ARCHIVES' RESEARCH REPORT**

RESOLUTION NO.: 2018-D067
TITLE: Bias-Free and Expansive Language for God and Humanity
PROPOSER: The Rev. Winnie Varghese
TOPIC: Inclusive Language

Directly Related: (Attached)

2003-A026 Direct Executive Council to Appoint a Task Force on Baptismal Parity
1988-A073 Direct Episcopal Church Staff to Use Inclusive Language in All Communications

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

2009-D090 Encourage Inclusive Self-Identification on All Church Data Forms
2003-A027 Use Preferred Forms of Address for Men, Women, and Groups
1997-D039 Direct Use of Gender Inclusive Language in all Rules of Order

In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1976 through 2015, 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 at 800-525-9329 before Convention or at Convention in the General Convention Secretariat.

D067 Bias-Free and Expansive Language for God and Humanity

Proposer	The Rev. Winnie Varghese
Endorsed by	Cañas, Ms. Wendy; Lawton, Ms. Sarah
Sponsored by	
Page numbers	Blue Book: p. N/A; Constitution & Canons: p. N/A
HiA / Leg. Cttee	/
Current Status	Pre-Filed Resolution
Version	Original (as filed)
Review Status	Not yet reviewed

RESOLUTION TEXT

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the 79th General Convention acknowledge that “bias-free language respects all cultures, peoples, and religions” (SBL Handbook of Style sec. 4.3.1) and encourage the use of inclusive and expansive language for both God and humanity; and be it further

- 2 *Resolved*, That the 79th General Convention in the spirit of effective evangelism and proclamation of the Gospel affirm the use of “bias-free language” defined by the principles below:
 - Eliminate the perception of conscious or unconscious bias by the distracting use of biased language when not central to the meaning of the text.
 - Avoid the generic use of masculine nouns and pronouns which is increasingly unacceptable in current English usage.
 - Avoid the use of language that perpetuates stereotypes based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression.
 - Avoid the assignment of gender to God, except when required by the text.
 - Respect all cultures, peoples, and religions by sensitivity to the uncritical use of biblical characterizations such as “the Jews” or “the Pharisees” that can perpetuate religious and ethnic stereotypes.
 - Structure sentences to communicate clearly while using gender-neutral language, for example:
 - Omit the pronoun.
 - Repeat the noun.
 - Use a plural antecedent.
 - Use an article instead of a pronoun.
 - Use the neutral singular pronoun “one.”
 - Use the relative pronoun “who.”
 - Use the imperative mood;

- 3 And be it further

- 4 *Resolved*, That Executive Council, the Office of General Convention and the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society and all its employees shall follow these guidelines in all communications; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention exhort Episcopalians, dioceses and congregations,

and institutions and organizations affiliated with the Episcopal Church to follow these guidelines in all communications.

EXPLANATION

Our language matters. A website, printed bulletin, or sign is often the first engagement a newcomer has with the Episcopal Church. These guidelines will equip our congregations, dioceses, Episcopal institutions, and all Episcopalians to provide a generous welcome and avoid unintended bias.

Additional resources:

- The Society of Biblical Literature Handbook of Style. SBL is a widely-respected international organization of 8,000 biblical scholars who study the Bible from diverse perspectives.
- The Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition, a venerable guide for writers of English.
- “The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing,” by Casey Miller and Kate Swift, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988)
- “Guidelines for Bias-Free Writing,” by Marilyn Schwartz and the Task Force on Bias-Free Language of the Association of American University Presses (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995)

In a survey of guidelines in Episcopal seminaries, Nashotah House and Trinity School for Ministry commend the use of the SBL handbook, and Nashotah House also encourages use of the Chicago Manual of Style.



Resolution Number: 2003-A027
Title: Use Preferred Forms of Address for Men, Women, and Groups
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred as Substituted
Final Text:

Resolved, That the 74th General Convention strongly encourage bodies of The Episcopal Church to respect and reflect the equality of men and women in the Church bestowed by Baptism by (1) addressing individuals by the form of address each one prefers, and (2) addressing groups by forms of address that include everyone equally.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Minneapolis, 2003* (New York: General Convention, 2004), p. 181f.



Resolution Number: 1988-A073
Title: Direct Episcopal Church Staff to Use Inclusive Language in All Communications
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred As Substituted and Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That the 69th General Convention direct the Presiding Bishop and Church Center staff to ensure the use of inclusive language in all communications and materials issued by the Executive Council and the Church Center so these do not perpetuate stereotypes of race, age, sex, and disabling conditions; and be it further

Resolved, That they monitor all national, provincial and diocesan training under the auspices of units of the Church Center to ensure the use of inclusive language by trainers in training materials; and be it further

Resolved, That the Education for Mission and Ministry unit in collaboration with the Women in Mission and Ministry and other units identify and disseminate information concerning available educational resources which would help dioceses, congregations, educators and trainers teach at every age level about the influence of inclusive language and imagery in shaping and communicating our biblical and theological tradition, and in affecting patterns of relationship and participation within the Church.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Detroit, 1988* (New York: General Convention, 1989), p. 708.