

WORDS MATTER

A tool for promoting dialogue rooted in diverse contexts that explores the words, images and symbols we use for God, self, and other human beings for the purpose of building trust and transformational relationships through the art of story-sharing.

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In 2001, within weeks of starting my first call as rector, I was faced with the events of 9/11. It seemed that the best pastoral response was to open the church that night and offer a place for people to come to pray, sing, and be together. We then started a series of ecumenical prayer vigils. The vigils rotated from our Episcopal Church, to the local Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and United Church of Christ churches. Monthly, for almost a year, our congregations gathered to pray together for a world that seemed to be falling apart.

Eighteen months after 9/11 the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire elected Gene Robinson as bishop. While, personally, I celebrated this event, the congregation I served was anxious and concerned. For a few months I found myself engaged in a friendly

email debate with a couple of parishioners. I referred to Richard Hooker and the founding principles of Anglicanism (via media), to support the ordination of gay and lesbian people. In his book *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* Hooker lays out a middle way between the positions in his time of the Roman Catholics and Puritans. He argues that reason and tradition are important when interpreting scripture stating that the Bible was written in a particular historical context for



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particular situations. Regarding scripture Hooker writes, "Words must be taken according to the matter whereof they are uttered." There is more than one way for scripture to inform Christians on the matters that concern us. I no longer remember the sources my companions used to argue their point, mostly because regardless of who was quoted or how the argument was framed, it did not persuade me to change my mind. Likewise my arguments failed to sway the minds of those who argued against the ordination of partnered gays and lesbians.

It seems to me that issues such as the ordination of women and LGBT people, changes in worship, language we use for God, and similar movements within the church, are matters of the heart. These issues before the Church are of the heart because they deal with how we know God, know ourselves, and know others. They are of the heart because they deal with how we understand God's self-revelation throughout time. They are of the heart because they are matters of relationship. Limiting our discussions of these matters to intellectual discourse enables us to draw and maintain hard lines. But when we engage these matters through real lived relationships, those hard lines blur. It is much more difficult to tell someone they are not worthy of serving God as an ordained person when that person has prayed for me, shared coffee with me, or in other ways been a pastoral presence in my life; when, because of a mutual relationship, I have come to see them as God sees them and know how God is living in and through their lives.

As a parish priest, I yearned for a way to move the congregation beyond the head and into the heart. I invited us into a dialogue regarding human sexuality and the priesthood of all believers that comes through baptism. (The idea being that when the church baptizes a person, they are then qualified to be discerned for all ministries in the church, lay and ordained, of every order). Some of our conversation took place around resources that we read. Some of our conversation took place in the context of facilitated personal narrative and intentional listening, led by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, a non-profit organization that is involved in a ministry of reconciliation and conflict resolution, based in Lombard, Illinois. Some of our conversation took place with workshops: "Human Sexuality in the Old Testament" led by a seminary professor of the Old Testament; and "Development of Human Sexuality," led by an Episcopal lay-woman who is also a psychologist and a lesbian.

All of these were good efforts. We learned a lot. But even still our conversation was lacking. We deepened our relationships with one another but not with others outside our community. I longed for a tool that would help us grow beyond ourselves. Years later, I think I have not only found that tool, but have helped to create it, through the WordsMatter Expansive Language Project. I hope this conversation guide affords congregations opportunities to have sacred conversations that build relationships of trust, expand our awareness of self and others, and deepen our sensitivities of the words, images, and symbols, that reveal the living God in a globally diverse world.

Faithfully,
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Join the Episcopal WORDSMATTER Conversation

BLOG

<http://expansivelanguage.blogspot.com/>.

FACEBOOK

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WORDS MATTER

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introduction

What comes to mind when you hear the terms “inclusive language” and “expansive language”? This question is at the heart of the WordsMatter Expansive Language Project, pondering what comes to mind when each of us hear or experience language used for God, self, and others; that stretches those understandings beyond what is normative in our cultural context. By “language” we mean the “words, images, or symbols” we use to talk about God, self, and other human beings.

The term “expansive language” is used in some circles to indicate that respectful language that honors all of God’s people is more than just gender inclusive. It also seeks to find words, phrases and images that do not offend or reinforce stereotypes harmful to anyone. As Christian denominations celebrate being multicultural and multiracial communities of faith, welcoming forms and styles of worship not historically or traditionally associated with our origins, the conversation about the use of language in our churches becomes more critical; and more challenging. Different languages are used in worship, some of which have feminine - or masculine - designated nouns. Some new immigrant communities bring with them an eighteenth or nineteenth century missionary theology imposed when their lands were colonized by Europeans or North Americans.

As church communities consider worship in contexts such as - diverse ethnicities, the ordination of women, sensitivity to GLBT members, the physical abilities of the people in our pews, and the experiences of people, regardless of age, in an increasingly diverse and interactive world, a call for more expansive language is rising to the surface.

As a result, the WordsMatter project began in earnest in 2009 with the restructuring of the National Council of Churches Expansive Language Committee. It was immediately clear to this committee that language issues were as important as ever, but that the conversation must now move deeper, explicitly linking our words to the realities of injustice.

Participating in this conversation is one way the Episcopal Church is contributing to the National Council of Churches Expansive Language project. We have been part of this work for decades. For us the conversation on language found authority in the General Convention of 1985 with resolution A95 which authorized the creation of inclusive language materials for Sunday and daily worship. Collections of these materials became known as *Enriching Our Worship*, supplementing the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. The Rev. Terri C. Pilarski, an Episcopal priest, joined the Expansive Language Committee representing the Episcopal Church in 2009.

Our vision was to bring a diverse group of Christians together for a conversation on the language we use to talk about and describe God, ourselves, and others. From that conversation we hoped to create a resource that would enable other groups to have this same kind of focused discussion.

The Expansive Language Committee organized a consultation that took place in Chicago, August 9-11, 2010. We brought 30 people from as wide a range of Christianity as we could gather in terms of: ethnicity, sexuality and gender, denominations, and theology. We asked the group members to come prepared to share a story about a time when language (words, images, and symbols used for God, self, and others) impacted a person's faith; the stories were to be about three minutes long. This idea built on the same concept of personal story sharing used by deputies and bishops at General Convention in 2009, who engaged in what is called "public narrative."

The website for public narrative describes this as "a leadership art that can be used by members of the Episcopal Church to articulate the call to action that is rooted in one's own journey and that of one's community." Public narrative was used to help articulate the theme of General Convention in 2009, *Ubuntu*, an African term, which means: "I am because you are; we are interdependent." The Expansive Language project has adopted story-sharing narrative as part of our conversation. Through public narrative and this conversation guide, we have an opportunity for the Episcopal Church, a community of 7,000 congregations and over 2 million members, to hear and articulate a deeper understanding of one another.

The sharing of stories and the subsequent discussion process offered in this guide is intended to expand and deepen our understanding of the cultural contexts in which Episcopalians live and worship. We shall increase our sensitivity to the ways in which the language one person or group uses to express God/self/others may also

be the very language that wounds another person or group. For example, one of the participants at the August consultation was blind. She spoke about the disparaging way we use blindness when talking about faith and spirituality – being “spiritually blind.” For her, being blind is her most precious gift, the very characteristic that makes her who she is in God’s image – not a negative thing at all. She asked, “When will being blind be the cool thing?”

The document presents the process for holding this conversation in your small group or congregation. We offer it with the hope that it will assist you in building trust and forming communities of faith within and between multicultural contexts. May it increase our sensitivity of how we experience the living God, the Incarnate Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the sacramental reality of God revealed in and through human beings and all creation.

THEOLOGY OF THIS CONVERSATION

Religion comes from the Latin root word, *religare*, which means: “to tie back or connect.” The Christian writer Lactantius, writing in the early fourth century, said in his book *Divinae Institutiones*, we are “tied to God and bound to (God) by the bond of piety. “Religion” reveals the reality of the relationship of men and women to the world around us as a relationship that includes God. Practicing our faith is an act of binding us to God. As Episcopalians we believe that praying shapes believing. Furthermore, the act of worshipping, since our worship is primarily prayer, shapes what we believe.

Sunday morning and weekday worship tend to be the primary occasion when most of us take the time to pray, to reflect on who we are in relationship to God, and who God is in relationship to us. Worship offers us the opportunity to reflect on this mutual relationship between God and ourselves through scripture, prayers, sermons, and hymns. Our worship uses non-verbal language too such as music, incense, bells, stained glass windows, crosses and other visual signs and symbols. The sacraments are offered and received, taken into our bodies, yet another way of binding/connecting/communing with God. Gestures and postures such as bowing, standing, kneeling, lifting our hands, and touching others convey meaning and belief. Worship is also the place where those seeking a relationship with God, or a deeper relationship with God, encounter others on their own journeys. Christianity has at its core a relational theology, expressed in particular through the Trinity and the Incarnation.

James E. Griffiss, in the 1997 Cowley Publications, *The Anglican Vision*, from the New Church’s Teaching Series, argues that Episcopalians have an incarnational theology as the primary locus of our identity. We read scripture through the lens of the incarnation and worship with an understanding of God in relationship to humanity through the life of Christ. This incarnational theology states that the creative energy of God is and has been present since before creation. This energy of God manifests in many forms such as breath, wind, the Word, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, and it resonates in and through all creation.

The prologue to the Gospel of John gives us some insight into creating a theology for this conversation.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Word was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Word, and without Word not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Word was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:1-5, adapted).

Some suggest that *logos*, translated here as “Word,” can also mean “discourse” or “story” or, perhaps, even “conversation.” The *logos*, by nature, invites relationship and sharing in and within creation. Our belief in the Trinity helps us understand how the Holy Spirit enables the *logos* to be activated through time. Eastern theologians use the word “perichoresis,” an interpenetrating dance-like relationship, when trying to describe the Holy Trinity. That divine community of interpenetrating love continues to go outward, so to speak, inviting all creation into the dance. As Christians the Nicene Creed is historically the way we profess our faith in a triune God, a God of relationship.

In the Nicene Creed we speak of one “catholic” church. But what does “catholic” mean? Simone Weil and Teilhard de Chardin suggest a broad definition of catholic: it must include the whole world. God’s household is the whole planet: it is composed of human beings living in interdependent relations with all other life-forms and earth process. A theology of this project is inherently sacramental and incarnational: Sacrament is traditionally defined as “an outward and visible expression of an inward and invisible grace.” The world is sacramental because it is an expression of God’s self. The world is incarnational because we know the creative Word of God, which was with God before creation, is made manifest in the world in human flesh, in Jesus. Thus, the world is a sacramental incarnational reality.

A sixth-century monk, mystic, and theologian, “Maximus the Confessor” described the interaction between the Word of God and the expression of that Word into the world as a revelation of God’s self. Sallie McFague, a Christian “theologian” speaks of the world as God’s body.

Therefore the theologies that undergird this WordsMatter Expansive Language Project and conversation guide are “relational,” “sacramental” and “incarnational”: God reveals God’s self in and through creation in ongoing dynamics. One way we Christians understand God’s self-revelation is through scripture. Other ways we encounter God are through human relationships and our interdependence with creation. From these encounters with God we form language: words, images, and symbols; to convey that experience.

VISION STATEMENT

The National Council of Churches consultation in Chicago in August 2010 stated: “Our vision is for many conversations (to transpire) that take diverse contexts seriously in exploring the power of language (words, symbols or images) and how it can be used in life-giving ways that extend the hospitality of the church’s mission within the church and community.

This vision is grounded in the gospel mandate to affirm life and carry forth the healing love of God found within the gospel of Jesus Christ in the face of the death-dealing effects of sin in our world.”

PROCESS

The conversation guide approaches language issues using a descriptive rather than a proscriptive method. The guide is a tool for expanding the WordsMatter Language Project. This tool strives to build trusting transformational relationships through the art of story-sharing.

WHY SHARE STORIES?

From the beginning of time, human beings have been story-tellers. Generations of families and communities have shared stories about their common life. Each week in worship we listen to and reflect on the scripture, our Christian story of grace and healing. These stories frame our identity.

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2003 passed a resolution, A83, calling every Episcopalian to be able to articulate his or her faith story, and urging dioceses and congregations to create opportunities for these stories to be told. At the 2009 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, Bonnie Anderson, president of the House of Deputies, engaged all the deputies attending convention in a structured process of personal story-telling called “public narrative.” This exercise of sharing stories from one’s faith journey, as well as from the faith journey of one’s community, invited conversation around relationship and our interdependence as members of the Episcopal Church. The sharing of stories, of coming to understand more deeply who we are, is the foundation from which our mission as members of the Episcopal Church calls us to action in the world. Congregations around the church are launching their own “public narrative projects.”

The goal of the WordsMatter conversation is to embrace the charge of A83 and the public narrative project, and to acknowledge the power of story to move us deeper in mutual understanding. At the very least, shared stories heighten our awareness of self and others. Carol Howard Merritt, in her book *Reframing Hope*, reminds us of the importance of narrative. “Personal narratives put flesh and bone on historic facts. Stories introduce the ‘other’ by inviting us to enter into the experience of

someone else through her imagination. Stories allow the reader to become captivated by the other, to enter the other's reality. The listener forgets about herself for a moment, until something within her cries out: That's like me. Then a connection is made, a connection through emotion and empathy."

Those who gathered at the National Council of Churches consultation in August 2010 came prepared to share a personal story using the following prompt question: "Share with us an experience when you noticed the power and/or importance of language (words, symbols, or images) and the impact of that language on your life, your faith community, or your relationship with God. This experience may have helped you embrace the Divine more fully or it may have been destructive, harmful, or painful to you in your personal and/or faith journey."

After listening to one another's stories and noting our own responses, we met in small groups to discuss what we had learned from the stories. The things we learned helped us formulate how to develop the conversation. Each group using this conversation guide will work with two visions: 1.) the vision of the project to move the conversation into many diverse contexts and 2.) the vision within their particular context and setting. Simply by using the guide and hosting a conversation, a group will live into the vision of the original NCC consultation. The group hosting the conversation must also create a vision for their conversation. For example, one group may use this conversation guide to hold discussions with their worship committee on the use of expansive language in worship. Another group may use this guide to help them have conversations with young adults, some of whom are churched and some of whom are not, in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences of God and worship. Other visions will be formed within the specifics of the group and their needs.



Rev. Loey Powell (UCC) shares her ideas in a small group discussion.

CRAFTING YOUR VISION AND LETTER OF INVITATION

See Appendix F for a sample “Letter of Invitation.” Your letter of invitation will be focused on your vision and what you hope to accomplish through the conversation. Additionally, your prompt question may adapt the one offered in this guide to reflect your vision and hopes. For example, if your vision is to have a conversation on the use of music and hymns in your congregation you might draft a vision that says this: “Our vision is to continually explore the depth and breadth of our faith as expressed in music and hymns from our tradition and traditions new to our community. Our hope is that we will expand the hymns we sing and the music we hear in worship in such a way that we also deepen our worship experience and our understanding of God/self/and other human beings.”

Your prompt question may read like this:

Share with us an experience when you noticed the power and/or importance of language (words, symbols, or images) and the impact of that language on your life, your faith community, or your relationship with God. In particular consider an occasion when music or a hymn impacted you. This experience may have helped you embrace the divine more fully or it may have been destructive, harmful, or painful to you in your personal and/or faith journey.

THE PROCESS:

overview

FOR ONE SESSION WORKSHOP

(3-4 hours)

Ask people to prepare a short story answering the prompt question above, of approximately three minutes in length, or 300-500 words. NOTE: in some cultural contexts the story sharing boundaries will need to be adapted, accordingly. For example, some Native American cultures would never place a time limit on the story sharing of an elder. Smaller groups with more time may arrange for longer story sharing while larger groups may need stories closer to the 300-500 word limit.

- Gathering
- Welcome and Opening Prayer/Worship
- Introductions
- Background of the Project
- Group Norms
- Story Sharing
- Silence between stories
Followed by sharing of worship object for sacred table
(see follow up email in Appendix F)
- Reflect on what was heard
- (Small) Group Discussion:
What did we learn from the stories?
Imag(in)ing the Divine
- VOD: Vision, Obstacle, Direction Process
(see Appendix B for more information)
- Closing Prayer/Worship

FOR MULTIPLE SESSIONS

(approximately 5 sessions,
45 – 90 minutes each)

SESSION 1

- Gathering
- Welcome and Opening Prayer/Worship
- Introductions
- Background of the Project
- Group Norms
Guidelines for confidentiality and respectful listening
- Share the Question
- Listen to an Example
- Reflect on what was heard
- Preparing Your Story
- Closing Prayer/Worship

SESSION 2

- Welcome and Opening Prayer/Worship
- Review of Group Norms and Expectations
- Sharing stories
(3 minutes each) with Silent break between stories (1 minute) followed by sharing of worship object for sacred table (see follow up email in Appendix F)
- Sharing what was heard
(use final 15 minutes of gathering time)
- Closing Prayer/Worship

Repeat Session 2 until all the participants have had a chance to share their stories.

SESSIONS AFTER THE STORY SHARING

- Welcome and Opening Prayer/Worship
- (Small) Group Discussion:
What did we learn from the stories?
Imag(in)ing the Divine
- Closing Prayer/Worship

Repeat this session as many times as needed to explore what was learned from the stories.

LAST SESSIONS: Where do we go from here?

- Welcome and Opening Prayer/Worship
- Vision, Obstacle, Direction Process
- Closing Prayer

Repeat this session as many times as needed to create a vision, name obstacles, and brainstorm directions around those obstacles.

GATHERING

Arrange the room for comfort by placing chairs in a circle. If you like, place a music stand or podium at one point within the circle where people can come forward to read their stories. Include a table that can be “dressed” as a sacred table and upon which the sacred objects will be placed. This table can be used as the altar for a Eucharist, if that is desired. Include plants/flowers and cloth draping/covering. Perhaps light a candle to acknowledge that this is a holy conversation within a sacred circle. Incorporate a table with the needed equipment for showing video clips. Aim for the setting to be gracious and hospitable.



WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER/WORSHIP

Welcome those who have come and thank them for their willingness to have an intentional thoughtful conversation about the words we use to talk about ourselves, other human beings, and God. This conversation is sacred, symbolized by anchoring the gatherings in prayer or worship. Expe-

rience has proven that including prayer and/or the daily office of Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, or Compline, and celebrating a Eucharist enhance the conversation. Consider using services or prayers from the Book of Common Prayer, the New Zealand Prayer Book, Enriching Our Worship, or crafting your own expansive language worship (see appendix E for sample worship).

**SAMPLE
PRAYERS**

Holy and gracious God,
the giver of light and life,
we thank you for this gift of life.
We thank you for those who come into our lives as
prophets,
pointing us toward that most precious gift,
Jesus Christ.

We thank you for those we travel with us
as we seek to know more fully who we are
as your people.

Come to us this day
and every day.

Come to us in the trials and tribulations.

Be with us in through the storms of life,
weather
and otherwise.

Come to us in our birthings
and in our dyings.

Come to us
and comfort us.
Come to us
and give us your peace.
Come to us
that we might see the way.

Come to us
that we can be
Your hands and heart.

Come to us
that we might be
the source
of healing
and reconciliation
in this broken world.

O Come, Emmanuel. Come.
Amen.

Holy One
Growing in wisdom
Teach us your ways
That we may love as you love us

Eternal One
Bless leaders of every
city, nation, world
with your wisdom and grace

Gracious One
Heal those who suffer
Mend the broken
Fill the empty, tend the ill

Lover of Souls
forgive our weaknesses
Bring forth your strength
in us, through you, with us

Holy Teacher
help us to know your ways
may all we say - all we do - be for you Amen.

INTRODUCTIONS

Invite members of the group to introduce themselves. Ask them to comment briefly on what inspired them to come to the group and what they hope to get out of the conversation. The leader can model this by going first.

“Let’s take a moment to introduce ourselves and comment briefly, just a minute or two, on what inspired you to come to this conversation and what you hope to get out of it. I’ll go first”

BACKGROUND OF THE WORDS MATTER CONVERSATION

Referring to Appendix D, offer a brief history of the events that created this conversation. Include any relevant connecting points with your community setting. Ask participants to share their reactions when they hear the terms “inclusive language” and “expansive language.”

GROUP NORMS

Take some time to write on a flip chart or white board some group norms and boundaries for the conversation which will facilitate trust, confidentiality, and comfort.

Consider things such as:

- Listen with an open heart, try to place yourself in the shoes of the person sharing
- Speak in “I” terms: “I think,” “I feel.” Share from your experience only
- What is said in the room stays in the room; do not share with others outside this gathering, without asking permission from the person who shared
- Honor the silence and take time to reflect on what has been shared
- Do not criticize or attack others
- If something said is offensive or hurtful to you, say “ouch,” perhaps in writing. This way the offense is marked and can be explored at that moment or at a later time
- Focus on issues and ideas not people or individuals
- Do not interrupt the speaker, except if one can’t hear the speaker
- Be mindful of giving space for others to speak: extroverts try to hold back a little, introverts try to speak up more!
- Allow for a person to “pass” once before sharing her or his story, but eventually everyone will share a story.

When the norms are posted and agreed upon, say, “OK, these are our norms and what we have agreed upon to help us have a safe conversation. We’ll honor them at all times. But if at any time we find that these norms are not meeting our needs, we can amend them.”

This module will offer written texts of sample stories. Video clips of the WordsMatter consultation held in Chicago, August 2010, will be available on the WordsMatter.org web site or the WordsMatter:Episcopal blog, <http://expansivelanguage.blogspot.com>.

Stories for your group should use the same prompt question used by the original group, which is stated on page 14.

STORY WRITING HINTS

TELL A STORY: Make sure your story ties to the prompt question. Think of your own experience, work, and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching — it can even be funny — but it should be real.

BE BRIEF: Aim for about three minutes when read aloud at your natural pace, or about 300-500 words.

BE AUTHENTIC: Make your story about you; speak in the first person. Tell us about your experience with words, language, images, or symbols that speak to your experience of yourself, other human beings, and/or God. Avoid speaking in terms of “we.” Please avoid preaching or editorializing.

BE PERSONAL: Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. We recommend you read/tell your story aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your experience and your voice.

SAMPLE STORY

See Appendix A for sample stories

SILENT REFLECTION

Following each story, allow time for the group to sit in silence and reflect on what they heard. Notebooks and pens can be used to journal thoughts and feelings about what was heard.

Create a system for selecting the next story presenter. This may be a random drawing from a bowl, by the previous reader, or some other process. The norms allow for people to “pass” once, but eventually everyone will share a story.

SACRED TABLE

Create a sacred table within the circle of attendees. In a way similar to adorning the altar in worship, you are encouraged to decorate the sacred table. The sacred table can hold plants or flowers, candles, a bowl with names for drawing for story sharing, and small offerings (icon, prayers, prayer beads, photos, etc.) that are significant in the worship life of each of the attendees. The sacred table can also be the altar for the Eucharist if one is offered. Each person places their object on the table after they have shared their story and the silence that follows. Following the presentation of their object, the story sharer can draw the name of the next person to share their story.



SUMMARY OF WHAT WAS HEARD TODAY/TONIGHT

Create a process for people to share what was heard at the end of each session of story presentations. This may be by offering flip charts and newsprint for people to write a word or a phrase that stood out for them from the various stories. During the breaks or at the end of a session (in a multi-session series) invite people to write on the newsprint any significant words or phrases they heard and want to discuss further. Take some time at the end of each session to discuss as a group why each word or phrase was significant.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Offer a prayer for the end of each session, such as one of these:

“O God, your unfailing providence sustains the world we live in and the life we live. Watch over those who, both day and night, work while others sleep, and grant that we may never forget that our common life depends on each other’s toil. Amen.” (BCP p. 134)

“O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect. Amen.” (BCP p. 824)

OR another prayer, as appropriate.

SMALL GROUP CONVERSATIONS

After all the stories have been shared, debrief story-telling time with a discussion in small groups of 4 or 5 people. Consider these, and/or other questions, that may have come from the story sharing and the words/phrases that surfaced in the group.

- What did we learn from the stories about the power of language and how it affects people?
- How did I come to know the language I used to tell my own story?
- How have we come to a new or fuller understanding of God’s justice through the stories we’ve heard?
- What insights have we gained into the cultural construction of God-language?
- How did the stories unmask the power of language and the part it plays in larger structures of power?

IMAG(IN)ING THE DIVINE

- What were some of the new images/metaphors/ideas/stories/descriptions of the divine we have heard today?

What other images/metaphors/ideas/stories/descriptions were heard?

- Both denominationally accepted and personally important images
- Ethnic and cultural images
- What (or how do) images of God surface in our experience of prayer?
- Where can we go to find these images?
- How can they be used in worship?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE (VISION, OBSTACLE, DIRECTION: VOD)

(A more detailed description of VOD can be found in Appendix B)

VISION

By hosting a conversation in your setting you are helping us live into our vision. The WordsMatter Expansive Language Project has a working vision created at the National Council of Churches consultation in August 2010:

“Our vision is for many conversations (to transpire) that take diverse contexts seriously in exploring the power of language (words, symbols or images) and how it can be used in life-giving ways that extend the hospitality of the church’s mission within the church and community.

This vision is grounded in the gospel mandate to affirm life and carry forth the healing love of God found within the gospel of Jesus Christ in the face of the death-dealing effects of sin in our world.”

That said, in your context you will need to create your own vision. It is important that you create your vision BEFORE you invite people to conversation. It is from your vision that you will understand the context for your conversation and articulate what you hope to gain from it. Within your vision, your prompt question for the narrative may be the same one we offer in this guide (see section “Why Share Stories?”) or it may be adapted for your purpose.

Sample Visions

“Our vision is to expand the hymns we sing in church beyond those in the 1982 Hymnal to reflect a more expansive understanding of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and our relationship to other human beings.”

“Our vision is to have conversations with young adults, blending groups of individuals ages 18-35 who attend church with those who do not, in order to understand why young adults do not come to church.”

OBSTACLES

Name the barriers and/or opportunities for your group/community to live into the vision. Having shared stories and reflected on those stories and discussed what was learned from the sharing of stories it is important to return to the vision created for the purpose of your group. In light of that vision and what you have learned has your vision changed? Keep in mind that the goal is for the conversation to help you grow in your understanding of God, self, and others, within the context of your setting. Now consider what obstacles you will face as you strive to live into your vision.

Consider these and or other questions your group may have:

- How have we seen concern for language lived out in our community of faith?
- What can keep our community of faith from paying attention to its language?
- How and where have conversations around language been stuck in the past?

DIRECTIONS AROUND, OVER, OR THROUGH THE OBSTACLES

- How can we take on these “barriers”?
- What does our community need to help us approach this issue?
- What will you do now to further this conversation in your life and congregation?
- What actions can you take to create a deeper sensitivity for language into the worship life of your congregation?

APPENDIX A

Sample Stories shared at the NCC's
Words Matter Gathering Aug. 9-11, 2010, Chicago
used with permission by the authors

Ever since I first had the opportunity to study foreign languages, I have been captivated. I studied as many as I could in school and college and seminary. Friends and family asked if I wanted to travel, or study abroad, but language for me was not about seeing the world—rather it was about seeing my own world differently.

Just before I left for college, my father was diagnosed with a brain tumor and also laid off from work. I saw for maybe the first time in my privileged life how easy it is for illness to take such a toll on any family, and began to realize both my family's privilege and the injustice of so many systems in our society.

Justice, however, was not something people who shared my faith wanted to talk about in my Christian community. Faith was more about believing the right things for the future than it was about concerns for justice in the here and now. At college, I joined a completely secular club focused on social justice, but that just left me feeling fragmented—like a person leading two separate lives.

This was when I began my study of Hebrew. Knowing all my life that this book—the Bible—that I loved so much was originally written in languages other than the ones I was reading it in had always bothered me. “But what does it really say,” I had wanted to know.

But it was not simply in the tenses and participles that was interested, rather it was the sudden complexity created in trying to translate from one language to another, in the necessity of asking questions, and in the vast possibilities that opened. Learning that a word might have

several possible translations, trying to weigh why translators had chosen one over others, often realizing that this or that was a word with no English equivalent, opened up the possibility of God and God's work in this world for me in profound ways.

MEAGAN MANAS

PCUSA
NCC STAFF

Imagine my surprise when I saw in what my tradition had called “the God of the Old Testament,” not fire and brimstone but compassion and care for those outcast by society.

I learned that “righteousness” might be better understood as something more like “social solidarity,” and that the word for Eve that had shaped my formation as a young woman, “help-mate,” was used other places in the Bible in reference to God helping God's people—often with military strength.

This newfound freedom was also frustrating. I remember trying to explain the complexities and subtleties of the translation of a certain word to a college roommate who told me she simply did not see how the words she read could mean that, I was so angry at God for giving us a book. “Why did you use words??” was my bewildered prayer.

Words can be so easily misinterpreted, so subjectively defined, so difficult to understand in all their complexity, historical contexts, original languages, and on and on...but over time my frustration has been balanced by the beauty and adventure of God using words to communicate with us. Suddenly faith is not a cut-and-dry dogmatism, but a dynamic place of imagination and hope. In this openness I have found a way to put parts of myself back together, finding the connections between faith and justice and a call to ministry that I might never

When I was four I had a vision, or maybe a dream, depending on how you want to view the memories of a four year old. It was Easter morning and I was sitting in the living room, a pile of candy colored cracked plastic eggs laid out in front of me, sorting jelly beans, my favorite, from chocolate, my un-favorite. Suddenly a figure crossed my living room, a shadow, but made of light. As it crossed the tiny basement apartment an image appeared, floating above the blue shag carpet, Jesus, above my blue shag carpet, well not Jesus, but an image, an icon, pointing toward his sacred heart.

During my freshman year of college I came out to my parents over Christmas break with the words, "I'm seeing someone. His name is Dwight." In my parents minds the words "gay sex" flashed their glaring cultural headlights into their unsuspecting eyes. In a moment their golden child vision of my future was blinded as if I'd screamed the words across the crowded San Antonio restaurant. I never used those words, that word. I refused to use the word "gay" and chose "queer" as an alternative, not that I was "a queer" but rather that "queer" was a place to which I belonged. Gay had been used too violently against me, as a child, as a teenager, as a cultural stereotype. Queer was a remnant of someone else's trauma, someone who suffered for me. It had long been appropriated by a class of thinking, striving, community oriented white academics, who also found gay too narrow. Queer was a movement, a place on the horizon, a place to which not only I belonged, I and those who made similar life choices, but to which all might belong, a place of thinking, lived, unlimited human potential.

**JASON
SIERRA**
TEC

When I began dating a woman four years later, my father came to me with a puzzled look. I had broken his perfect box and now was I asking to be returned? What was I? It was this question of "what" and not "who" or "whose"...

Queer was, for me, a lens, a vision of the body liberated from the normative narratives of heterosexuality and gender differentiation, returning to the primacy of the body, the emotions, the spirit. It represented centeredness not in my social fixedness, but in my very createdness as a source of beauty and revelation. Queer led me back to the cross. An image suspended above my living room floor, vibrating in the pre-rational mind of a four year old.

Like all great ideas, words get copyrighted. Somebody capitalizes the Q or the C and puts an "s" on the end, signifying the insiders and the outsiders. Flags go up and fences go 'round. Christian, a place toward which we orient our lives, becomes a territory we must protect, God, a peak with room enough for only one flag and one altar. I belong fully to Christian, to queer, but I do not own them, I just can't look away.

Take One: We attended and chose St. James because they had two other ministries: one Hmong and one Latino. Things were going pretty well until the Sunday when my 3 year old grandson visited us for worship and asked me who that was over the altar. St. James had a large white – I mean alabaster marble white – Jesus over its altar with the whitest blonde hair and the lightest blue eyes... I was unable to tell my grandson that it was Jesus over the altar. It would have been a lie on so many levels!

I approached the leadership requesting they consider moving the marble white Jesus with the reddish blond hair and blue eyes to the fellowship hall or some other place – I also suggested that I would be an excellent volunteer to spearhead finding other cultural depictions of Jesus of Nazareth so we could show ourselves as a community that truly embraced multi-culturalism. I was told we would have to vote as a congregation.

**INEZ
TORRES
DAVIS**
ELCA

I made my argument. Two days before vote I learned that St. James had adopted the tradition of requiring a unanimous vote for anything to do with the sanctuary. The vote was taken. The snow-white Jesus remains to this day. We left St. James shortly after that vote. Maybe for some, the vote was about race rather than cultural relevance. For some Jesus is the palest white...

O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow; no other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus...

Take two: I have referred to God as both Father and Mother for about thirty years. I started calling Her Mother when I found my own woman strength; it was both liberating and affirming to consider the Motherly aspects of God.

One year I wrote the devotions for one of our publications. It was the May issue and I wrote the Mother's Day devotion. In the prayer, I referred to God as Mother. I received only a few hate emails as a result of that devotion, and I thought it spoke well of those in our organization that I received only a few such emails...

What does it mean that this conversation goes forward? More and more, I think the church struggles to remain relevant. When we argue about such things as Spirit's gender, we expose ourselves as being dogmatic, limited, and chauvinistic. When we call the European manner of worship and liturgy *traditional* and label anything else as alternative or contextual, we expose our Euro-centrism.

What does it mean to me, personally that we are doing this consultation? It means that others can be liberated, affirmed, and given hope. At least, that is my hope. My prayer...

I am a native of Korea and, to my understanding, my maternal grandfather came up with two names for me, and one of them was chosen by a family vote. My given name is made up of two Chinese characters, phonetically written in Korean as 은 and 주 . The first character means 'blessed' and the second character means 'pearl.' The Korean naming practice that my family employed gave them freedom to give me a name that did several things: 1. My name was their faithful interpretation of my birth. By choosing the character for 'blessed,' they received me as a blessing from God, and they blessed me. 2. By choosing the character 'pearl,' they expressed their appreciation of me as being precious and beautiful. I am blessed to have a family that took such care in naming me. However, as much as I appreciate the care they have taken in giving me this name, I cannot deny the fact that "I was made a female" by their giving me this name. In other words, I was engendered. My beloved family was bound to their culture.



I grew up in a Christian family. The word 하나님 (Ha-na-nim, meaning a deity in heaven) is most likely the word I heard most frequently next to mother and father. We were steeped in Christian spirituality. But, this name was so intangible, so incomprehensible. To whom did this name belong? I was not sure. (In fact, I am still unsure most of the time.)

After making many detours, I ended up at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1985. In that fall, I took Hebrew. Every week, we took a quiz, and I earned small numbers. I was ashamed. Hebrew intimidated me. But then, one day, I experienced an explosion in my consciousness when I was doing word analysis of YHWH. I understood the word to be in the hiphil form, and I interpreted the name into "I will be whoever I will be." Some may be bothered by the nuance of indefiniteness in this name, but for me, it was most liberating. I could LOVE God who refused to be defined by human language that is a product of patriarchal culture. It was exhilarating to meet this God whose name was YHWH. With that experience, as far as I am concerned, my God was liberated from human language, and I was liberated from patriarchal definitions of God. My God is a verb, ever evolving, transgressing all human categories. YHWH is a perfect name for my God because this name "leaves open a large number of possibilities."⁷ This experience remains a critical memory in my God consciousness and faith journey. By the way, I received an A in Hebrew at the end of that fall semester.

⁷Martin Noth, Exodus, translated by J. S. Bowden (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 45.

APPENDIX B

Vision, Obstacles, Direction (VOD)
description from Sarah Moore-Nokes, used with permission

The idea behind this exercise is that in this fast paced, changing-at-the-speed-of-light culture we live in the language of goals and objectives has become cumbersome. When I am out with churches and I ask how many of them have participated in some form of 'strategic planning' in the last ten years, nearly everyone raises their hand and at least half the group groans. The next question I often ask is how did it work? And the responses don't vary much. 'It didn't work... it doesn't work ... we had a great plan but nobody wanted to implement it... or the leadership was on board but then congregation didn't know what was going on and why they needed to participate and the whole thing fell apart.' I rarely, if ever hear, we made a plan, we followed it and our results were exactly what we expected.

In many cases, Goals (general intentions like increase membership) and their inevitable counterpart Objectives (more precise like increase membership by 2% annually for five years.) are very specific to meet the SMART⁹ requirements (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) It's difficult to measure objectives that are not specific, however, objectives can also be too rigid – if you miss one, or fail at one what does it mean? Do you repeat the task until you get it right? Scrap the whole project and call it a failure?

The strategy here is to have a more fluid process that allows for Direction Setting instead of goal setting. It has been suggested that a sailing analogy works well here – (I'm not a sailor so forgive me if this doesn't connect well). When sailing, a direct line from here to there is never possible because of the way a sailboat works. Instead, one has to vision where s/he is headed, take into consideration current conditions (wind, waves, obstacles – other boats, sand bars etc...) and then set a course that is not exact. The process constantly changes as new information is presented (wind gusts, speed boats) but the overall direction stays the same.

Another way to think about it is that it is more a way of being, then of doing. It is not a list of objectives to check off once they have been completed, it is a process that changes the way we are an organization (committee, community etc...) together.

INTRODUCTION

vision obstacles direction

⁸Copyright 2008 Kawata/Choy/Moore-Nokes (used with permission). For more information on VOD, contact Rev. Sarah Moore-Nokes, Associate Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of Winnebago, Presbyterian Church (USA) Appleton, WI sarah@winnebagopresbytery.org

⁹Peter Drucker, in his 1954 seminal work, "The Practice of Management" coined the usage of the acronym for SMART objectives while discussing objective-based management.

1 ASK VISION QUESTIONS

What is it that you want for your organization (committee, congregation, community)?

What dreams do you have?

What do you want to accomplish?

The key here is to focus only on what the dreams are and not get bogged down in 'but we can't do that because...'

EXAMPLES

1. We want to increase our membership and bring young families into the congregation.
2. We want to be the church that is known in the community for mission.
3. We want the best VBS in town

2 LIST OBSTACLES

If _____ is your vision then why aren't you there?

What is it that is stopping you from being there?

For each vision item, list the obstacles.

EXAMPLES

1. We can't bring in new families because St. Margaret Mary has a pre-school and all the families go there.
2. We can't do mission like we want to because there isn't enough money
3. No one wants to teach VBS. The same teachers teach every year and they only want to do the _____ program which nobody likes.

3 ASK DIRECTION QUESTIONS

Given your vision and the obstacles you have named, what are some directions you might go to begin to head toward your vision?

EXAMPLES

1. Provide childcare for every event at our church ensuring that young families can attend without having to worry about arranging for childcare and can participate without having to run to the nursery every ten minutes.
2. Begin to look at everything that happens in our church as mission. Look at the community to discover where the needs are greatest. Begin 'doing' mission by using people power – not money.
3. Merge with St. Gregory across the street and do joint VBS or scrap VBS altogether.

CRITIQUES OF THIS EXERCISE ARE

1. That it is too internal a process and does not have built in a way to examine external components.
2. It is not structured enough. This of course depends on the personality of the group and the facilitator and the tolerance for some ambiguity on both sides. Some groups love the flexibility – others are paralyzed by the lack of specific goals.

APPENDIX C

Initial Project Description

A draft proposal for this project was written by Loey Powell, chair of the Expansive Language Working Group committee and an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, (11/3/09):

Sensitivity to gender inclusive language, particularly religious language and metaphor, emerged in the 1970's with the advent of feminist theology and feminist biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. Many denominations began the process of developing gender inclusive worship materials, protocols for publications, and even biblical translations that offered metaphors and names for God that reflected this inclusivity. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible was authorized by the National Council of Churches (NCC) which provided inclusive language for humanity but not for God. Some inclusive language hymnals were also produced in subsequent years.

In recent years, many of us have noticed that there is a decline in the use of gender inclusive language throughout our denominations. Furthermore, new awarenesses have emerged from other communities within our churches about language that reinforces harmful stereotypes about persons with disabilities and persons of color; heightening sensitivity to the use of words in general – words that can create or disrupt community and wholeness. Biblical imagery of light and dark, for instance, tend to associate all that is good with white and light, and all that is bad with black and darkness, imagery that can be construed in today's context as racist, or reinforcing racist stereotypes. Or the use of "blindness" to designate not just the ability to see or not see with one's eyes but seeing or not seeing in a spiritual sense can be offensive to those with physical disabilities.

The term "expansive language" has been used in some circles to indicate that respectful language that honors all of God's people is more than just gender inclusive. It also seeks to find words, phrases and images that do not offend or reinforce stereotypes harmful to anyone. As our denominations celebrate being multicultural and multiracial communities of faith, welcoming forms and styles of worship not historically or traditionally associated with our origins, the conversation about the use of language in our churches becomes more critical, and more challenging. Different languages are used in worship, some of which have feminine or masculine designated nouns. Some new immigrant communities bring with them an 18th or 19th century missionary theology imposed when their lands were colonized by Europeans or North Americans.

THE QUESTIONS

The scholarly work has been done for some time now which provides the basis and rationale for using, encouraging and/or promoting expansive language, particularly in the context of our churches. Liberation theologies (feminist, womanist, mujerista, African American, etc.) created the "hermeneutic of suspicion" about texts written by the majority at the expense of the marginalized. So several questions emerge about where we are now which I would pose to the first group to wrestle with:

1. How do we create the opportunity to have considered, open-minded and honest conversations about the language we use in our churches about God and humanity that will move towards consensus on the use of expansive language?
2. What are some of the key issues and dynamics involved? (For example, Why is it that some feminists back off of gender inclusive language, particularly about God, when in the presence of people of color?)
3. What are the implications of such a conversation for pastoral training?
4. Who needs to be involved in this conversation?
5. Is there need for additional scholarly work to be done in this area, particularly as it relates to the intersection of the -isms and language, given our 21st century context?

APPENDIX D

History of the Project

INCLUSIVE AND EXPANSIVE LANGUAGE IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Episcopal Church has been addressing questions of inclusive language since the 1970s. As the 1979 Book of Common Prayer was being completed, the Standing Liturgical Commission formed a committee on sensitivity related to women. This committee reviewed drafts of the new prayer book and recommended wording that provided inclusive language regarding humanity. The committee also noted the predominance of masculine images and language about God, although no changes were made.

Consideration of language about God was initiated by the 1985 General Convention of the Episcopal Church in a resolution (A95) calling for the Standing Liturgical Commission to prepare inclusive language liturgies for regular use in the church. This resulted in a number of draft texts and ultimately in the creation and approval for use of Supplemental Liturgical Materials (1991). In 1997, General Convention authorized revisions of these materials to be published as *Enriching Our Worship* and in Resolution D087 called for supplemental liturgical materials for the Pastoral Offices. Since 2000, General Convention has authorized four additional books in the *Enriching Our Worship* (EOW) series: *Ministry with the Sick or Dying and Burial of a Child* (EOW 2), *Burial Rites for Adults* (EOW 3), *The Renewal of Ministry and the Welcoming of a New Rector or Other Pastor* (EOW 4), and *Liturgies and Prayers Related to Childbearing, Childbirth, and Loss* (EOW 5).

In 1997, General Convention widened the scope of expansive language with resolution C021, directing the Standing Liturgical Commission to prepare a plan for liturgical revision and enrichment that would include forms of worship reflective of our multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual and multigenerational church. Then in July of 2009 General Convention directed the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops, to collect and develop theological and liturgical resources for blessing same-gender relationships.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES:

JUSTICE FOR WOMEN WORKING GROUP “EXPANSIVE LANGUAGE COMMITTEE”

“Issues around the use of language in our churches have been on the agenda of J4WWG for years. Now the opportunity to take this discussion to another level has arrived. I hope this consultation will be the first of many conversations as we continue to explore ways to welcome and value every person who walks through the doors of our churches. The term ‘expansive language’ has been used in some circles to describe respectful language that honors all of God’s people and is more than just ‘gender inclusive.’” - Kim Robey, chair of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA (NCC) Justice for Women Working Group. The Expansive Language committee defined their goals and methodology like this:

OUR GOAL IS TO OPEN A (MANY) CONVERSATION(S) ON EXPANSIVE LANGUAGE THROUGH TWO PRIMARY QUESTIONS:

1. How does our language for God, one another, and our world move us toward God’s justice?
2. What new/other imagery is there to help us connect with God?

WE WILL EXPLORE THESE QUESTIONS BY:

- a. Unmasking the power of language and the part it plays in patriarchy/kyriarchy, including exploring God-language as a cultural construct;
- b. Emphasizing the effects of language on real, physical lives, connecting our lives and our physical realities with God's justice;
- c. Learning how to have productive dialogue with folks of differing opinions, bringing this sacred conversation to the wider church and the world; and
- d. Lifting up other names or images of the divine which emerge from scripture study, prayer, meditation, or other life experience to express the multiplicity of who God is.

Building off of these questions the Expansive Language Working committee of the Justice for Women Working Group NCC organized a conversation held in Chicago in August 2010.

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, USA (NCC)

Since its founding in 1950, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) has been the leading force for ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States. The NCC's member faith groups — from a wide spectrum of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African American and Living Peace churches — include 45 million persons in more than 100,000 local congregations in communities across the nation.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The stories we heard called us to expansion—expanding the way we think and talk about ourselves, others, and our God. Instead of restricting language, the stories called for adding more diverse language. The stories called us to expand contextual cultural attentiveness—understanding that language speaks differently in different contexts. They called us to expand our understanding of how language is tied to systems of power and has been and can be harmful, oppressive, and death-dealing. And they showed us that in an environment created through respectful intentional listening, compliance to rules about specific words was not as helpful as commitment to understanding the impact of the power of language. This kind of commitment can lead to real, meaningful analysis of systems of power that oppose the gospel; extending a life-affirming hospitality within the church and community. Finally, the stories called us to spread this conversation to as many different places as possible.

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

This manual is designed to be used by small groups in local congregations and or ecumenical organizations. People gathering for newcomer classes or inquirer's' classes will find this a useful tool to learn about one another and guide them through a conversation about the issues facing the church today. Likewise, this conversation guide is designed to be used in adult formation groups or confirmation preparation. Staff in a large congregation or within dioceses/synods/presbyteries might use it to reenter these conversations in light of new learnings. It could be used in ecumenical gatherings with members from neighboring congregations/houses of worship to learn about each other. We recommend that groups frame their conversation on the prompt question used by the original group in the August 2010 consultation (p. 6).

APPENDIX E

Sample Worship

EVENING WORSHIP (COMPLINE)

After a time of silence

Officiant The Lord Almighty grant us a peaceful night and a perfect end.

People Amen.

Officiant Hear the teaching of Christ:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Officiant God has promised forgiveness to all who truly repent, and turn to Christ in faith and are themselves forgiving. In silence we call to mind the ways we have missed the mark in answering God's call to live fully as God's own.

Silence

Officiant and People: Lord, we confess that we have slept when you have urged us to remain awake. We confess that we have been passive and not active in living fully into you. We repent of our lack of courage in following you. We seek to follow you, no matter where the road may lead. We seek you to satisfy our deepest longing.

Officiant May the Almighty God grant us forgiveness of all our sins, and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

People Amen.

Officiant Eternal Spirit, flow through our being and open our lips,

People That our mouths may proclaim your praise.

Officiant and People Praise to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Psalm (choose a psalm)

Psalm concludes with

Officiant and People Praise to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Officiant The Lord be with you,

People And also with you,

Officiant Let us pray. Be present, Spirit of God, within us, your dwelling place and home, that this starless night will be penetrated by your light, all troubles calmed by your presence, all evil redeemed by your love, all pain transformed by your grace, and all dying glorified in your risen life.

People Amen

The Word of God (choose a reading from scripture)

Reader Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

People Thanks be to God.

Then follows

V. Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit;

R. **For you have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of truth.**

V. Keep us, O Lord, as the apple of your eye;

R. **Hide us under the shadow of your wings.**

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Jesus Prayer (or the Lord's Prayer)

All: Eternal Spirit: Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and all that shall be, Father and Mother of us all, creation resonates with celebration of your nameless name.

Let justice and mercy flood the earth; let all creation harmonize in your imagination; and let us recognize that every thought and thing belongs to you.

With the bread we need for today, feed us; in the hurts we absorb from each other and those we inflict on others, forgive us; in times of test and temptation, stand with us; from the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you alone are creating, redeeming and sustaining our universe, now and forever.
Amen

Officiant Lord, hear our prayer;

People And let our cry come to you.

Officiant Let us pray.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake.

People Amen.

Officiant Do not fear, for we are called by name. In the love of Christ we are fully known. Love bears all things, hopes all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit.

People Amen.

Silence may be kept, and free intercessions and thanksgivings may be offered.

Officiant and People Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace. Lord, you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised;

For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior, whom you have prepared for all the world to see:

A Light to enlighten the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.

Praise to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

All repeat the Antiphon

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.

Officiant Let us bless the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

The Officiant concludes

The almighty and merciful God: Father, Mother, Sister, Brother, Daughter, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us.

People Amen.

Morning Prayer

Officiant Lord, open our lips;

People And our mouths will proclaim your praise.

Officiant and People Praise to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Choose a seasonal opening sentence such as this one from Advent in the Book of Common Prayer

Officiant Our King and Savior now draws near: Come, let us adore him.

Jubilate

Psalm 100 (all pray together this, or another option from Morning Prayer)

Reading (choose a reading from Scripture)

After each Reading, the Reader says:

Officiant Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

People Thanks be to God.

Canticle (choose a canticle from Morning Prayer)

Presider The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Presider Let us pray.

Jesus Prayer

All: Eternal Spirit: Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and all that shall be, Father and Mother of us all, creation resonates with celebration of your nameless name.

Let justice and mercy flood the earth; let all creation harmonize in your imagination; and let us recognize that every thought and thing belongs to you.

With the bread we need for today, feed us; in the hurts we absorb from each other and those we inflict on others, forgive us; in times of test and temptation, stand with us; from the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you alone are creating, redeeming and sustaining our universe, now and forever.
Amen.

Suffrage (Choose a Suffrage from the various sources for worship)

The Collect (Choose a collect from the various sources)

People Amen.

Officiant Let us bless the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

Officiant May God direct our hearts in love.

People Amen.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST

The Liturgy of the Word (This service is adapted from *Enriching Our Worship* and other sources)

Leader: Let us worship the One who has named us, who calls us, who forms us and who sends us.

People: Here we are, named as God's own from before time, called by the one who lived and died and rose to live again among us.

Presider: Here we are, formed by your Word and united in your Body, bringing our everyday selves to praise and to pray, to know the Holy One in the midst of our lives.

People: Let us worship the One who calls us by name.

Presider: The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Presider: Let us pray, Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

People Amen.

Please sit

Scripture (choose readings appropriate for the occasions)

After each Reading, the Reader says:

Reader Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

People Thanks be to God.

The Nicene Creed (or another statement of faith, if desired)

The Prayers of the People

Leader Gracious God, enliven us for your mission;

People God our mother, have mercy.

Leader Breath fresh life into us, your people;

People God our father, have mercy.

Leader Help us to celebrate how we have been named as Your own.

People God our brother, have mercy.

Leader Help us to listen for and celebrate your call in our every day lives

People God our sister, have mercy.

Leader Creator of all, lead us and every people into ways of justice and peace;

People God, Jesus, Emmanuel, have mercy.

Leader Give grace to all whose lives are linked with ours;

People God the Holy Spirit, have mercy.

Leader God of hope, comfort and restore all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit;

People God of all creation, have mercy.

Leader Comfort those who mourn;

People Gracious God of love, have mercy.

Confession and absolution follows, if desired

The Peace

The Liturgy of the Table

Presider The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Presider Lift up your hearts.

People We lift them to the Lord.

Presider Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Presider It is truly right, and good and joyful, to give you thanks, all-holy God, source of life and fountain of mercy. You have filled us and all creation with your blessing and fed us with your constant love; you have redeemed us in Jesus Christ and knit us into one body.

Through your Spirit you replenish us and call us to fullness of life. Therefore, joining with Angels and Archangels and with the faithful of every generation, we lift our voices with all creation as we say:

Presider and People Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Presider Blessed are you, gracious God, creator of the universe and giver of life. You formed us in your own image and called us to dwell in your infinite love.

You gave the world into our care that we might be your faithful stewards and show forth your bountiful grace.

But we failed to honor your image in one another and in ourselves; we would not see your goodness in the world around us; and so we violated your creation, abused one another, and rejected your love.

Yet you never ceased to care for us, and prepared the way of salvation for all people. Through Abraham and Sarah you called us into covenant with you. You delivered us from slavery, sustained us in the wilderness, and raised up prophets to renew your promise of salvation.

Then, in the fullness of time, you sent your eternal Word, made mortal flesh in Jesus. Born into the human family, and dwelling among us, he revealed your glory. Giving himself freely to death on the cross, he triumphed over evil, opening the way of freedom and life.

On the night before he died for us, our Savior Jesus Christ took bread, and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his friends, and said: "Take, eat: This is my Body which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

As supper was ending, Jesus took the cup of wine, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said: "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Presider and People Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Presider Remembering his death and resurrection, we now present to you from your creation this bread and this wine. By your Holy Spirit may they be for us the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Grant that we who share these gifts may be filled with the Holy Spirit and live as Christ's Body in the world. Bring us into the everlasting heritage of your daughters and sons, that with all your saints, past, present, and yet to come, we may praise your Name for ever.

Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to you be honor, glory, and praise, for ever and ever.

People AMEN.

The Lord's Prayer

Presider We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ.

People We who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread.

Presider Let us pray.

Presider and People Loving God, we give you thanks for restoring us in your image and nourishing us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. Now send us forth a people, forgiven, healed, renewed; that we may proclaim your love to the world and continue in the risen life of Christ our Savior. Amen.

The Blessing (This or another)

The Wisdom of God, the Love of God, and the Grace of God; strengthen you to be Christ's hands and heart in this world, in the name of the Holy Trinity.

People Amen.

The Dismissal

Deacon Go in peace to love and serve our God.

People Thanks be to God.

APPENDIX F

Sample Letter of Invitation

Dear N.N.,

Greetings from the Seattle Office of the Episcopal Church Center. We are writing to you to tell you about an exciting project and to invite you to participate. On December 3-5, 2010, a small group of select participants will gather here in Seattle for pioneering work in a transformative program called the WordsMatter Expansive Language Project. This movement began recently in Chicago at an ecumenical gathering, and we are now carrying that work to the Episcopal Church.

In August 2010, the Justice for Women Working Group of the National Council of Churches in Christ, USA gathered 30 representatives from 10 member communions, including the Episcopal Church. The gathering was the beginning of a process to explore new ways of engaging Christian faith communities in conversations about expansive and inclusive language. Because our use of language has power to shape perceptions, the WordsMatter Expansive Language Project is of great importance.

The August gathering began with the stories of those present. Participants were invited to share a brief story about how language had impacted them in positive and negative ways in their relationship with God and their communities of faith. The conversation then moved to how these stories affected those in the room and what new ways of speaking about God they felt called to pursue by the telling of their own stories and the stories of others. The conversations were definitively narrative, personal, and descriptive, rather than prescriptive, introducing a community-based approach to language regarding the divine that welled up from the community gathered.

The Episcopal Church Center, in collaboration with members of the Justice for Women Working Group and the planning team for the August gathering are moving forward to create resources to engage local parishes and diocesan communities in this approach to expansive and inclusive language in the Episcopal Church. The Rev. Terri Pilarski in the Diocese of Chicago has worked with others to develop the WordsMatter Expansive Language Conversation Guide for facilitators to conduct similar gatherings in their local contexts.

We are now moving into a second phase of packaging and disseminating the conversation for broad use in the church, as well as training facilitators to work with the draft module in their dioceses and provide feedback. We would like to invite you to participate in this process by attending a gathering this December in Seattle and working with us over the next year to initiate these conversations in your diocese and provide feedback for the further development of the resource.

The December gathering has been planned for December 3-5 in Federal Way, Washington, just outside of Seattle. During our time together we will have the opportunity to experience the module firsthand as participants and provide feedback. We will also work with small groups to develop Publicity and Informational Materials about the project, a Facilitator Toolbox, a Community Toolbox, and a Feedback Plan.

Secondly, we also hope that you will help your diocese engage with the project. We will provide resources for you to present the project to your diocesan leadership and 2011 diocesan convention. We ask that you engage leadership from parishes around your diocese in conversations using the module and support them in taking it back to their parishes. We will work together to develop systems to do this effectively.

We have invited you intentionally because you have been recommended to us by N.N. for what you bring to the conversation and because we see your diocese as fertile ground for helping move this project forward, transforming and informing our approach to language as faith communities. We hope you will be able to join us in December and welcome any questions or thoughts you may have. Please contact us at your soonest opportunity so we can book tickets and arrange for your stay in Washington.

Sincerely,

Jason Sierra, Young Adult and Campus Ministries, Episcopal Church Center
Kim Robey, Justice for Women Working Group (NCC), Diocese of Long Island
The Rev. Terri Pilarski, Diocese of Chicago

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL WITH ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTENDEES

Dear N.N.

Our WordsMatter Expansive Language Project conversation will begin on (date). In preparation for our conversation, please come with the following:

1. A personal narrative responding to this prompt question: "Share with us an experience when you noticed the power and/or importance of language (words, symbols, or images) and the impact of that language on your life, your faith community, or your relationship with God. In particular consider an occasion when music or a hymn impacted you. This experience may have helped you embrace the divine more fully or it may have been destructive, harmful, or painful to you in your personal and/or faith journey." (Your prompt question may vary based on your vision. See p. 10 of the guide).

The narrative should be about 300-500 words, or three minutes in length when you read or tell your story. (Length can vary depending on size of group, longer for smaller groups and in accordance to the customs of your community).

SOME HINTS FOR HELPING YOU PREPARE YOUR NARRATIVE:

Tell a Story: Make sure your story ties to the prompt question. Think of your own experience, work, and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching — it can even be funny — but it should be real.

Be Brief: Aim for about three minutes when read aloud at your natural pace, or about 300-500 words.

Be Authentic: Make your story about you; speak in the first person. Tell us about your experience with words, language, images, or symbols that speak to your experience of yourself, other human beings, and/or God. Avoid speaking in terms of "we." Please avoid preaching or editorializing.

Be Personal: Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. We recommend you read/tell your story aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your experience and your voice.

2. Please bring a small "object" that is meaningful to you and your faith journey for our Sacred Table. This may be a photograph, an icon, prayer beads, a poem, etc.

We are looking forward to our time together and are grateful that you will join us in this important conversation as we explore (name vision and hope of conversation here).

Faithfully,
N.N.

