

## Final Report

### **Inclusive Language Ad Hoc Committee Report February 5, 2006**

Prepared by: Mike Messinger and Claire Cifaloglio, co-chairs, Myrtle Corrales, Barbara Fischi and Steve Brown.

#### **Revised Working Statement**

*The PAX community supports the use of inclusive language in its liturgy and respects our diverse expressions of faith.*

#### **Formation**

Our inclusive language (IL) committee was an ad hoc committee formed at the request of the community after the Dec. 2004 PAX Community General Meeting. In that General Meeting the Steering Committee had submitted a proposed working statement on inclusive language to the community. The proposed statement affirmed PAX's commitment to use of inclusive language for liturgies. The statement also set forth certain aims and suggestions for carrying out this commitment to inclusive language in practice. The proposed statement was submitted in response to friction that had arisen within the community over proper use of inclusive language. Some members chafed at continued use of gender-specific language in PAX liturgies - as being inconsistent with one of PAX's core values - justice in Church. Other members chafed at policing of language as being inconsistent with another of PAX's core values - acceptance in Church.

A recommendation was made to form a small group, the IL committee, to discuss the issue around use of inclusive language and bring the fruits of their discussion to the steering committee. A goal was set to have the IL committee provide a revised working statement on inclusive language to the next general meeting.

#### **Experience**

The IL committee met five times throughout 2005. Oral reports of the group's workings were provided to the community at general meetings. Oral and written remarks were also provided to the Steering Committee in furtherance of an interim statement on inclusive language prepared by the SC and sent to the community in July 2005. This document is a final summary report of the IL committee.

The IL committee was composed of people who volunteered or who had worked on inclusive language issues in the past. Initial members of the IL committee were Claire Cifaloglio, Mike Messinger, Myrtle Hendricks, Marilu MacCarthy, Steve Brown, Mike Schaefer, Kay Larrieu, and Barbara Fischi. During the course of the year, some members were unable to continue due to other PAX duties, personal needs, or dissatisfaction with the IL issue itself.

Our initial meeting was difficult. Each member shared his or her experience and feelings. We discussed inclusive language, its role in PAX liturgies, and community members' conduct toward one another. We listened. We prayed. We were struck by the intensity of our feelings, encountered real disagreement, and tried to understand.

We met four more times. Each time we understood and respected one another more. We became more comfortable. We reviewed resources, received input from other community members, and tried to reach a consensus. Other exchanges in the community, especially e-mail comments, spilled over into our committee. We planned a mass with a theme of "radical hospitality" and still encountered tension.

In our discussions, we quickly affirmed PAX's commitment to inclusive language. We valued its importance as matter of justice in Church – welcoming women and men equally. We also welcomed the challenge and inspiration of using language reflecting masculine and feminine images of God as we seek a God beyond our knowing. We appreciated the value of gender-balanced and gender-neutral language in our liturgy.

We also were mindful of PAX's acceptance of one another. We appreciated the respect, charity and kindness members accorded to one another. We understand much gender-specific language is part of our genuine faith experience and rooted in our Roman Catholic liturgy. We valued worship in Church having a humility and openness that allows people to express themselves in prayer and song freely.

We did not reach agreement however. We kept returning to the tension between promoting inclusive language with gender-neutral or gender-balanced references to God, and accepting expression in language that is part of our faith tradition including gender-specific references to God. For some, PAX's support of inclusive language led to policing of language that inhibited mass planning and detracted from prayer and song. On the other hand, repeated occurrences of gender-specific language narrowed for some the experience of Mass and detracted from prayer and song. In this way, the issue of inclusive language in a remarkable way acted as a wedge to separate us at the time where we value our unity most – our Eucharistic celebration.

Despite our disagreement, we found ourselves coming closer together. From the divisive, raw emotion at first, we moved to a place where we disagreed but with more appreciation. We saw each other's approach to caring for community and breaking bread together. In our final meeting we were able to reach a consensus on the above working statement on inclusive language. We affirm the PAX community's use of inclusive language in the celebration of the liturgy. We respect our diverse expressions of faith. Along the way we also thought of suggestions and received many as well from the community and SC. Many of these are listed below even though we did not reach any agreement or consensus of these suggestions. Beyond that we have had to accept a tension of justice and acceptance in our language. Pilgrims after Christ - encountering Christ differently together. We think it best now to stop our consideration and report to the community for more broader discussion and reflection.

## **Suggestions/Comments**

- \*Be sensitive to this issue.
- \*Strive for tolerance of various perspectives.
- \*Support mass planning.
- \*Recognize that the Folk Group should not be a lightning rod for this issue.
- \*Understand constraining factors such as copyright laws, inadequate resources, inappropriate alternate translations, and insufficient time.
- \*Many songs have gender-specific language in original lyrics that sound very differently or poor if altered.
- \*Many composers and music publishers are re-writing their songs and re-publishing songbooks to include more inclusive language.
- \*PAX lectionaries (Priest for Equality and Canadian Bishops') vary in their degree and use of inclusive language and in translation accuracy.
- \*Much gender-specific language also has connotations such as relationships (Father/Mother) or humility (Lord) that may not be present with abstract terms (Creator).
- \*Take advantage of inclusive language resources.
- \*Support our presiders – some have felt as if they were on eggshells when speaking.
- \*PAX's support for inclusive language is intended to encourage each member to feel free to pray and talk about a loving God in terms they find meaningful. This is not limited to using gender neutral/balanced terms.
- \*Our community support is not intended to exclude anyone from praying and expressing thoughts in terms they find meaningful. All members are entitled to feel comfortable in offering their prayers, readings, songs, and mass sheets in terms they find most meaningful. We should treat all with love and respect.
- \* Inclusive language is a community aspiration and responsibility – no one bears responsibility to correct others on their well-intentioned choice to use or not use gender neutral/balanced terminology.
- \* Renew having 1 or 2 Inclusive Language resource people in our regular PAX ministry listing to answer questions, provide resources, etc.
- \* Add revised working statement on inclusive language to mass sheets, new member brochures, and letters welcoming new celebrants.

## **Resources**

1. "Creating Just Language" from The Eighth Day Center for Justice
2. An article, "The Language of Hospitality" by Mark Buckley, Coordinator of Priests for Equality
3. An article about Holy Spirit Ecumenical Catholic Church, "Inclusive Language, Inclusive Church" (parishioners believe that "language is a tool that not only describes reality but also shapes it."