

PERSISTENT VOICE WEB EXTRA
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20th Annual Convocation on Inclusive and Expansive Language

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Each year the Wartburg Seminary community gathers around tables in the refectory to listen and speak together about the seminary's commitment to using inclusive language for human beings and expansive language for God. Sam Giere, Assistant Professor of Homiletics, and Amy Carrant, Interim Director of the Center for Youth Ministries, shared the podium this year to introduce the topic and lead the discussion. Giere spoke about his experience of being required to use inclusive language in college before he fully understood why it was important. Through its use he began to see the effects of non-inclusive language and that one's understanding of God changes as language for God expands. He shared with the group some quotes from ELCA documents, including this from the ELCA Publishing Standards from 2003. "We who work so closely with language in the realm of faith are challenged to use words and metaphors that will summon all of God's children to see themselves as created in God's image, and that will invite them into a deeper, richer, more mature faith." As Giere said, "In short, the language we use for humans and for God is missional."

Current acknowledged the differing views and feelings about this issue. Each person present completed an anonymous ballot regarding their belief and practice. The results were announced after the table discussions. (See below.) Current shared her personal experiences with language – as a child questioning words like "manmade" and "mankind," in her college and seminary years where she was encouraged by the spirited dialogue about language, and finally in her role as pastor. A male church member challenged her use of inclusive and expansive language. They engaged in dialogue but he could not agree to disagree. It was another man in the congregation who was able to get through to him, explaining how the changes in language opened his eyes and renewed his faith. Current reflected, "Language has power – and it is a gift to be prayed, pondered, and put to good deliberate use – and even if our intention is inclusivity – our call as God's people is to pay attention and listen to the cries of our neighbor, and continue to find ways to meet one another along the way by the grace of God."

Conversation at the tables during the convocation was lively. Some visiting high school students had not heard of this issue, but were excited to bring it up at their church. Other tables of students, staff and faculty continued conversation even after the convocation ended. WTS began using the new *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* in Advent. The Psalms have been translated with inclusive and expansive language, and the liturgies offer alternative wordings to expand God-language. In the hymns good effort has been made to avoid male pronouns for God and deepen and enrich our images for God. We look forward to diving into

this new resource as we worship the One who is abundantly far more than any words we humans use, and yet is the Word who is with us.

Community response from anonymous balloting prior to table discussions:

1. Inclusive

38% – I embrace inclusive language with all my being.

39% – I use inclusive language most of the time.

6% – I use inclusive language when around people different from myself.

6% – I am reluctant to use inclusive language, but do so because it is a WTS requirement.

2% – I never use inclusive language.

2. Expansive

32% – I embrace expansive language for God with all my being.

37% – I use expansive language for God most of the time.

11% – I use expansive language for God when people might think differently than I.

8% – I am reluctant to use expansive language for God.

3% – I never use exclusive language for God