

# REMEMBERING HER

". . . what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."  
Matthew 26:13



Article 19

## Retrieving Women's Histories

### Women Affirm the Importance of Language

In 1971, when the General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted its pioneering "Pronouncement on the Status of Women in Church and Society", it called upon members, local churches, Conferences, Instrumentalities, and other national agencies of the UCC to do nine things: expand opportunities for women in leadership, enrich knowledge about women's contributions in history and society, develop programs to support women's rights, work to overcome discrimination in employment and compensation, promote the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, support reproductive choice, commend other organizations and movements seeking to correct injustices inflicted upon women, affirm gender neutral life styles for children and explore additional areas relevant to the well-being of women. A Task Force on Women in Church and Society was created to oversee these tasks. [8<sup>th</sup> GS Minutes, pp.129-30]

Concern about language was not even mentioned in the original Pronouncement. By June 1973, however, things had changed. The Task Force asked the 9<sup>th</sup> General Synod to pass a "Statement on Women" which, among other things, called the UCC to become intentional about its use of language. It challenged church bodies to educate members in the UCC about the "issues and sensitivities involved in the writing and using of inclusive language." It requested that the Constitution and Bylaws of the UCC be changed to make all language deliberately inclusive. It declared that from now on all printed materials published and used officially by the UCC should be written (or rewritten when revised) to make all language deliberately inclusive. [9<sup>th</sup> GS Minutes, p.8]

Reactions to the issue of language are emotional and even divisive. Women (and men) who grew up assuming that mankind and brotherhood referred to women as well as men, and who pray to God as Father, sometimes feel that trying to make all language "inclusive" is picky and not that important. At the same time other women (and men) argue that when

language is used to refer to human beings and to God, the use of predominantly masculine words and pronouns leads to distorted assumptions about human community, gender roles and borders on idolatry.

During the past thirty years female leaders in the UCC have continually called the UCC to use more inclusive language, insisting that “people language” needs to be more comprehensive and varied (humankind) and that “God language” should not imply that God is masculine (Father, Lord, Master). Responding to concerns raised by women, in 1977 the General Synod requested the Office of Church Life and Leadership (OCLL) to develop a new book of worship using inclusive language. It also stated that an inclusive language hymnal was needed. The *UCC Book of Worship* (1986) and the *The New Century Hymnal* (1995) are products of the efforts of women to make the UCC more welcoming.

In the 1990s women revisited the inclusive language issue again, noting that using military metaphors (Christian soldiers, crusades and war), equating values with colors (black as evil and white as good), implying that persons with disabilities are deficient, and perpetuating cultural and racist stereotypes (Indians are devious, Hispanics cannot learn English, Asians are all the same) are unacceptable habits in the United Church of Christ. [*Common Lot* no.52]



Conversation about inclusive language never ends. There are UCC members who insist that prohibiting certain words and promoting linguistic variety is the only way to sustain radical Christian hospitality and worship God who is the Word beyond words. There are other UCC members who question many linguistic changes because they believe that changing words changes meanings and puts our Christian faith at risk. The one thing everyone agrees on is that language is important.

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