

WORSHIPPING THE FULL GENDEREDNESS OF GOD:  
EPISCOPAL LITURGY THAT EMBRACES THE FEMININE PART OF GOD

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## ABSTRACT

### WORSHIPPING THE FULL GENDEREDNESS OF GOD: EPISCOPAL LITURGY THAT EMBRACES THE FEMININE PART OF GOD

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The Episcopal Church liturgy lacks the feminine divine. Attempts to overcome exclusively male language have offered only male and neutered language for God. In order to offer worship that includes the full genderedness of God, it is essential to include feminine terms for God.

Having served in Episcopal churches for many years, I have found my understanding of who God is to be changing and growing. *The Book of Common Prayer* uses only male language for God. If women are truly made in the image of God, our liturgy must include female terms for God.

Modern biblical scholars point to female attributes of God in scripture: breasts and womb. God as Wisdom and Spirit are feminine in both Hebrew and Greek original texts. Early church liturgies also included the divine feminine. When those texts were translated into Latin, the third part of the Trinity became neutered.

*The Book of Common Prayer* continues to portray God as male or neuter, with only references to women who surrounded Jesus' life. More recent attempts to create inclusive liturgies have fallen short of including the full genderedness of God.

In searching for examples of parishes who have embraced the feminine side of God, I found many denominations who worship God as fully gendered. These clergy and parishes provide examples of how the Episcopal Church could transform our liturgy to fully embrace the feminine part of God. While I found one Anglican Church in Toronto,

Canada that is attempting to include feminine language for God, even they are falling far short of embracing the full genderedness of God.

The Episcopal Church needs to embrace the feminine part of God and create liturgies embracing God's feminine nature. I present a guide with essentials to create Episcopal liturgy that worships God's full genderedness. I present two Eucharist services that rewrite the male language of "inclusive" approved liturgies. These services include the beauty of our prayers and embrace the full genderedness of God, especially the feminine part. The Episcopal Church must embrace the feminine part of God in liturgy if we are to truly be an inclusive church.

## DEDICATION

To my incredible family who joined me in online learning during Covid shutdowns and gave me the place to begin to discover the feminine God in whose image I am made.

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## Introduction

In the halls of the academy, feminist scholars have argued for patriarchal language to be removed from places of faith. In the writings of liturgical scholars, the arguments for naming God ring out. The debates over the original intent of liturgical acts and words cross over with which translations to use and who is providing the translation.

This is a discussion into which I seek to enter from an entirely different viewpoint and experience. As a practitioner of liturgy, my life and vocation has been formed by words repeated through centuries. Week in and week out I pray over and with the faithful in their everyday lives trying to make sense of life and faith. Together we share in prayers written throughout the ages, but often do not stop to reflect on the theology behind the words we say.

Liturgy is designed to welcome all into the presence of the Holy One. Unlike other forms of worship, entering the presence of God does not rely on creating the correct posture or pureness of heart. Liturgy works its magic even and perhaps especially when a worshiper does not “feel” God’s presence. The Holy Spirit shows up in the words prayed through the centuries. As a worshiper, you do not have to will God to be present. As you speak the ancient prayers, the community of the saints draws you into the Holy of Holies. The words and prayers of those around each worshiper usher them into the presence of the Holy to meet God even when you cannot muster the strength to go yourself.

This is why I worship in a liturgical tradition. This is why I lead others through repeated recitations of the same words, day after day, month after month, year after year. This is why I believe in the transformative power of liturgy - why I keep coming back to



it and leading others to also keep coming back to it. Liturgy provides us strength and encouragement to journey with God throughout our lives.

Being a practitioner of liturgy for almost 20 years, I have had opportunities to lead liturgy in many stages of my own life: as young and single, newly married, raising a family, and now past the ability to bear my own children. I also have prayed over the very young, the very old, and everything in between. My body has been growing new life, as I prayed those at the end of life into God's glory. In all of it, I have faced the varying challenges of being a woman, preaching that I am made in the image of God, yet reinforcing that the image of God is male in the words that I share.

This paper seeks to examine a specific problem I have come across over and over as an Episcopal liturgical practitioner, as a parish priest. The authorized liturgies in English-speaking Episcopal/Anglican Churches have not included the full image of God. They have omitted the gender with which I identify, and in doing so have missed the full glory of God in our worship and in our lives.

I will share more of who I am and why I came to this place. What follows is an examination of how my own identities (as an ordained woman and practitioner of liturgy) have brought me to this current position. Liturgy must include feminine language of the divine and so I briefly examine some of the history of how some liturgical spaces once included the Divine Feminine in liturgy. Using the blessings found in the English language prayer books of the Anglican Communion, I present how, in seeking to make our liturgies inclusive, in reality the liturgies have neutered God instead of embracing the full genderedness of God.

Following this brief history and overview of current resources' inadequate attempts, I examine where modern liturgical scholars have fallen short in their teaching and leading our larger faith communities about liturgy. I then examine the Episcopal Church's General Convention actions that have reinforced this failure. Next, I shift toward some present-day examples of our faith communities and liturgical practitioners who have created liturgies that do, in fact, embrace the full genderedness of God. Finally, I share my own liturgical writings that seek to move our faith communities towards worship that embraces all of God's genderedness.

## Chapter One

### My history with this project

When I began parish ministry nineteen years ago, I thought it was extremely important to create a liturgical space that was comfortable for those who had been in the church for many years. This included the need to follow the Trinitarian language that my denomination has used for centuries: “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” In traditional Anglican Eucharistic liturgy, the service is bookended in Trinitarian language. The opening acclamation calls us in to worship “In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,”<sup>1</sup> and we are sent forth into the world with a blessing concluding with “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

After almost ten years as an ordained clergyperson in the Episcopal Church, I began to search for more breadth and depth in the blessings I use at the end of the services I lead. At the time, the only resource I knew that included expanded options for blessings utilizing inclusive language was *Enriching Our Worship*, a supplement to the *Book of Common Prayer*.

In 2017, I moved to Hawaii to be the Rector of a parish known for being quite educated and pushing boundaries, including worship terms that moved beyond simply patriarchal forms and images. Over my five years there, I experimented with different Trinitarian blessings to conclude the services at The Parish of Saint Clement in Honolulu,

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<sup>1</sup> Episcopal Church. *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church*. New York: Seabury Press, 1979, p. 355.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 339.

Hawaii. I finally rested on one that felt the most equal and all-encompassing: “and the blessing of God, Creator, Christ, and Spirit” and have been using it at the end of most services I have celebrated.

While reading *Holy Misogyny: Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter* by April D. DeConick, I was convinced that this blessing was not gender inclusive, as I had thought. Instead of expanding the way I spoke about the Trinity, I had neutered God by removing all of God’s genders.

I believe that God is greater than gender, and, at the same time, inclusive of all genders. As God affirmed from the beginning of creation in Genesis 1:26-27, “ ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’ ... So God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”<sup>3</sup> God’s nature is both male and female and yet the “inclusive” liturgical practices I was using chose to neuter God instead of affirming the wideness of God’s character. I took away the glory of God’s image and replaced it with a sterilized being.

I immediately knew I had to reexamine the main Anglican prayer books written in English to seek new ways to express the Trinity during liturgy, especially to search for words and blessings that encompass the full-genderedness of God.

Anglican liturgy has been written using male pronouns for God since the Book of Common Prayer was created during the Reformation. As the Anglican Communion spread from England and its colonies throughout the world, it continued this practice. During this last half century, increasing numbers of people have longed for a more gender inclusive representation of God, various scholars and liturgists of the Communion

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26-27, New Revised Standard Version.

have created their own “inclusive” language versions of the prayers and services. However, upon examination of these liturgies, feminine language and feminine images of God have not appeared. Instead, neutered images and expressions have replaced masculine terms and these liturgies have simply been declared inclusive without any actual inclusion of feminine gendered terms.

Despite the beautiful biblical imagery of the female nature of God, Anglicans have not embraced the full genderedness of God in their prayers, but have neutered God. Liturgists have chosen a neutered God instead of using expanded gendered language for God. “Our sensitizing to the issues of language and its formative power in social and individual identity has made us aware that far from being a trivial matter, the language we choose to use is intimately linked with what we think and believe.”<sup>4</sup> It goes back to the ancient concept of “Lex orandi, lex credendi.” The law of what is prayed is the law of what is believed. In Anglican liturgy and theology, our prayers shape our theology. If our prayers do not include God as female, then we cannot fully embrace that women are made in the image of God. What follows is an examination of the core issues in this situation in which we, as Anglicans, find ourselves.

By insisting the God is male or neuter, we continue to play an almost two thousand year old game of telephone. Our translations that do not include the female part of God come from the vulgate or Latin translation of the original scriptural texts. When English is translated from the Latin, it naturally has the Spirit as a neutered being. When we rely on these translations of translations we lose the true nature of God like a group of

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<sup>4</sup> Warner, Sharon, "The Value of Particularity: Inclusive Language Revisited," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 29:4 (Winter 1994), 249.

school children whispering in each other's ears around a circle. With each translation, we get further and further from grasping the God of our scriptures.

When as a church, we insist on using male and neutered expressions from God we continue to deny that women are made in the image of God. Until we can embrace that our God is both male and female, that gender is important to our faith, we will continue to have harassment and abuse of women who seek to serve God. "The liturgy is the expression of all the people of God, and all those people need to have their voices heard."<sup>5</sup> Without speaking truth in our prayers women will always be second class citizens to a male God.

As my research for this project progressed, and I spoke with my new bishop about sexist and harassing comments I have received from parishioners and community members in my new ministry setting. He apologized that I have had to experience that. My response was simply that I have been a priest for eighteen years. I have served through and experienced so many sexist and sexual harassing comments that I could not list them all if I tried. Gender based violence whether through words or actions are everywhere in the church, including the more "progressive" churches and leadership structures. If every woman who experiences them left ordained ministry, there would be no women serving God and the church.

By striving not to offend those who believe that God is male, we continue to reinforce that women are not the image of God and we continue to oppress women both in the church and in the world. "Much evidence indicates that the metaphoric use of

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<sup>5</sup> Ramshaw, Gail. *Liturgical Language: Keeping It Metaphoric, Making It Inclusive*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996, 10.

‘Father’ for God has led to the support and continuation of patriarchy.”<sup>6</sup> How can our church be an example of the love and justice of God if our prayers continue to express that women are not made in the image of God? If it is necessary for God to have male anatomy, then women will never be embraced by the structures of the church in roles of leadership and authority much less by those who sit in the pews.

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<sup>6</sup> Clarkson, Shannon, "Inclusive Language and the Church," *Prism: A Theological Forum for the UCC* 5:2 (Fall 1990), 41.

## Chapter Two

### Why Gender Matters

When we choose not to use feminine terms from God, our worship is hindered in two ways. First, we are worshipping only a part of who God is and not the full majesty of the greatness of God. Second, we reinforce the discrepancy of genders so that those who are not male are not seen as the image of God.

In most churches, worship that has sought to include a non-masculine expression of God has moved to more neutral terms. Episcopal and Anglican liturgy is no exception. Neutered language for God tends to be easier to embrace for many who have only previously heard of God in masculine terminology. However, even as this might be an easier stepping stone, worshipping a God with no gender does not mean we should say we have created an inclusive liturgy and not embrace feminine terms for God.

What is perceived as "neutral" in worship is in fact a constant negotiation and establishment (through its very performance) of particular and specific power relations based on a particular and specific understanding of gender, and this has consequences for all aspects of church life, including theological reflection.<sup>7</sup>

I have found many people who initially supported using feminine terms for God now are pushing to be beyond the binary nature of gender. They want to ensure that they are creating a safe space for those who are non-binary, individuals who either do not feel they are either male or female exclusively, or those who feel that they have aspects of both or neither genders. They suggest in creating inclusive liturgy we should not include any gendered terms and God's pronoun should always be "they." In trying to jump right

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<sup>7</sup> Garrigan, Siobhan. "Queer Worship," *Theology and Sexuality* 15:2 (May 2009), 216.



to referring to God as “they” or God as beyond gender, what is actually achieved has two very negative consequences. First when you have always called God “He” and you use a gender-neutral term, those worshipping are going to fall back to the masculine God. “Neutral "inclusion" causes no change of practice; dominant power structures remain intact.”<sup>8</sup> Even though on paper it looks inclusive, in reality all but a few word conscious individuals are praying to a male God. The leader feels they are being fully inclusive, but most worshippers have not moved God into a non-male category in their mind.

The second worrisome part of moving straight from God as male to God as non-gendered is that women are still not seen as the image of God. In freeing non-binary people to see themselves as God’s image (which they are), women are continued to be pushed to the outside. This is the same concept when people who learn about racism jump to the idea of being color blind. In truth what it does when one says they are color blind is push down and say the individual aspects of each ethnic group do not matter. The truth is there are great differences among Asians or Asian Americans, because Asia is a vast place. Koreans and Japanese have huge cultural and language differences, as do Chinese and Filipino.

When expressing gender there are similar chasms created when one is seeking to create justice for all. “Neutral inclusive language is not enough in the historic and social moment in which we live. The oppression of dominant groups and mentalities and systems still remains a reality in our community, in our church, and in our society. In that context neutrality is never neutral.”<sup>9</sup> My experiences as a woman being made in the

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<sup>8</sup> Warner, 254.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 253.

image of God are negated when God is not expressed as a woman. I become a second class citizen, an “other” being, who is not a child of God, not made in God’s image.

### **Feminine Images of God in Scripture**

Women and feminine images of God are present throughout scripture. It is vitally important to ensure that the fullness of God is shared and expressed, especially in worship. As we look anew at ancient passages, we find that God is not presented in Biblical canon as only male or neutered, but language and translation influence our understandings of God. Just as important to consider is where we choose to focus in pulling scripture for our liturgy. Since most Anglican liturgy derives from Biblical passages, in creating liturgy for communities to pray, which passages do we pray regularly and which do we choose to ignore or place out of worshippers’ minds?

Humanity’s origin, according to Christian scriptures, is presented in the first chapter of Genesis. “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...So God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Even this NRSV translation of Genesis has trouble dealing with pronouns, but still contains vital references to both God and humans. Humankind is made in the image of God, both male and female. “God is female and male, and when God gets around to creating creatures in the divine image, they will be female and male, as God is.”<sup>10</sup> God is not made exclusively male, nor without gender.

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<sup>10</sup> Gafney, Wilda C. *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2017, 20.

This is important both to understand the completeness of who God is, but also the nature of all who identify as women. “Women enjoy the dignity of being made in God’s image and are therefore capable as women of representing God.”<sup>11</sup> Women are the image of God, just as much as men are. When we speak of God in exclusively male or neutered language, we lose the full glory of who God is. We speak and worship only a part of who God is. At the same time, it is important to understand that women are the image of God. They represent God both in our world and in our worshipping communities. “Women realize that they participate in the image of the divine and so their concrete reality can point toward this mystery.”<sup>12</sup> Without seeing and experiencing God in and through women, it is impossible to understand all of who God is.

When we do not embrace feminine expressions for God, we essentially do not get to see and experience the full nature of the divine. “It prevents the insight into holy mystery that might occur were female symbols set free to give rise to thought.”<sup>13</sup> We should not be content with only worshipping part of who God is. If we believe God is greater than our imaginations, as nearly all Christian theologians have asserted, it is essential that we, at the minimum, use all the linguistic and liturgical resources at our disposal to express God’s glory. “Feminine language occurs in the text repeatedly of God; this means that feminists and womanists advocating for inclusive and explicitly

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<sup>11</sup> Johnson, Elizabeth A. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992, 55.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

feminine god-language are not changing but restoring the text and could be considered biblical literalist.”<sup>14</sup>

When seeking to broaden expressions and terms for God for use during worship, this reality becomes even more essential. “Insofar as God creates both male and female in the divine image and is the source of the perfections of both, either can equally well be used as metaphor to point to divine mystery. Both in fact are needed for less inadequate speech about God, in whose image the human race is created.”<sup>15</sup>

When our worship contains only male and ungendered expressions for God, we are not worshipping all of God. “If women are created in the image of God, then God can be spoken of in female metaphors in as full and as limited a way as God is imaged in male ones, without talk of feminine dimensions reducing the impact of this imagery.”<sup>16</sup> Why would faith communities want to share only part of God’s image in their worship? When we gather in prayer, we should desire the inclusion of God’s full majesty and magnificence.

Some theologians argue that the church should move away from all expressions of God’s humanness, except for Jesus. These beliefs assert that God is beyond language requiring a human body, and opt for instead using terms such as “creator.” Elizabeth Johnson counters this in her foundational work *She Who Is*. “Given the powerful ways the ruling male metaphor has expanded to become an entire meta-physical world view,

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<sup>14</sup> Gafney, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, 55.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

and the way it perdures in imagination even when gender neutral God-language is used, correction of androcentric speech on the level of the concept alone is not sufficient.”<sup>17</sup>

By removing expressions for God that are androcentric, one does not in fact eliminate the overarching patriarchal language for God “At the same time God is not less than personal, and many of the most prized characteristics of God’s relationship to the world, such as fidelity, compassion, and liberating love, belong to the human rather than the nonhuman world.”<sup>18</sup> By eliminating the humanness of God, we lose more than just the feminine expressions of God, but a vast multitude of aspects of God expressed in the scriptures.

As humans are made in God’s image, it is impossible to remove the characteristics of God that are reflected in humanity. God is, by the foundational description of God’s being in Genesis, androcentric and reflected in humankind. If we desire to worship the great majesty of God as presented in the Bible, it is essential to embrace the image of God that is found in human life and expressions. When we remove this androcentric part of God, we, in essence, white-wash part of God. Our worship and, especially, our liturgy must express the fullness of God – depths of the sea to the highest mountain, from the smallest of traits to the grandeur of God’s majesty. God is our creator, mother, friend, companion, father. We do not seek to worship only one aspect of who God is, but the full spectrum of God’s being and majesty.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

As we create, form, and worship through liturgy, the flow of familiar words and meter of our worship becomes a part of us. The words of the liturgy become embedded upon our hearts and minds, changing and shaping our beliefs and thoughts. “Lex orandi, lex credendi” transcending the ages and forming Christians in each generation. After 18 years of leading the Eucharist from the Book of Common Prayer, I find that the emphasis and syllables of each line often come out while praying it together. As we seek to more fully include the full genderedness of God in spoken liturgy, we must continue the richness of the language. Liturgy is poetry in prayer and, as such, changes must embrace and complete that prayer. It is clunky at best to replace beautiful language for God with such one syllable neutered “God.” The phrasing and terms we use for God, when repeated in liturgical prayer over decades, shape and define how we see God and how we see ourselves in relation to God.

It is important when speaking of modern Episcopal liturgy to not go forward without an examination of Leonel Mitchell’s *Praying Shapes Believing*. This theological analysis of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer has been a foundation in liturgics classes for almost forty years. The concept of how and what we pray in liturgy molding our beliefs as Episcopalians has been drilled into almost every seminarian since it was published. Mitchell’s words have probably done as much if not more to shape congregations’ liturgies in the past generation than the Book of Common Prayer. By laying the foundation for parish priests to follow, Mitchell has had great influence on how modern Episcopal priests lead liturgy and which parts they choose to include in the life of their parishes.

Mitchell, on the one hand, recognizes the downfall of always using masculine terms for God, and yet at the same time, he greatly encourages the continued use of patriarchal language in worship. “The fatherhood of God is so frequently proclaimed in the liturgy that it would be both endless and unnecessary to document it.”<sup>19</sup> He finds it not needed to even provide examples of how we pray to a male God. His guidance is to not even move our words into gender neutral territory. “To reduce God the Father to God the Creator is to leave out a part of the proclamation.”<sup>20</sup> He encourages clergy and theologians to continue to express the nature of God using the traditional masculine Trinitarian formula.

Mitchell at the same time calls readers to not eliminate the androcentrism of God. “To say that God is personal, having memory, reason, and skill as well as love and knowledge is unquestionably a part of what we mean by saying that we are made in God’s image.”<sup>21</sup> The essence of being made in God’s image continues to be an essential part of not only God’s nature, but our nature as worshippers of God.

Mitchell and Johnson agree that an essential aspect of God is the humanness of God. “Behaviorism notwithstanding, human persons are the most mysterious and attractive reality that we experience and the only creatures who bear self-reflective consciousness. God is not personal like anyone else we know, but the language of person points in a unique way to the mysterious depths and freedom of action long associated

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<sup>19</sup> Mitchell, Leonel L. *Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary on the Book Of Common Prayer*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1985, 283.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 284.

with the divine.”<sup>22</sup> “We dare not avoid personal terms and substitute abstractions lest the personhood of God seem to be denied and God appear to be an impersonal force.”<sup>23</sup>

God is more than beautiful expressions of a vast creator. God has made humans in God’s image with many similar attributes. How do we learn to love God, except by learning to love God’s people? It is our human interactions that teach us the most about God and God’s love. When we are able to see the image of God in both a homeless person and someone who is wealthy and well educated, we begin to see the fullness of God’s image. When we see God’s children in the very young and elderly, we see the vastness of God’s love for each of us. How do we feel God’s love, if we do not know what love is on earth? We understand the personal traits of God by exploring similar attributes in people around us. The intimacy of God knowing each hair on our head cannot be comprehended without God being personal to each of us.

Mitchell seems to understand, in part, the need for more language that includes the fullness of the nature of God. Specifically, he writes, “Therefore, we need to be always on guard against any use of language, particularly in the prayers of the liturgy, which can appear to suggest that God is, if not an old man with a long beard, at least a male person.”<sup>24</sup> He does not seem to understand the link between using male terms like “father” and how few people can hear that word and not think of a physically male being. Mitchell assumes that people from the mid-1980’s, when he wrote *Praying Shapes*

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<sup>22</sup> Johnson, 55.

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, 283-284.

<sup>24</sup> Mitchell, 284.



*Believing*, are able to hear male terms and assume a being without gender. Even with more recent understandings of gender-fluidity, male terms and pronouns do not denote a non-male being. Our English language does not allow a worshipper to hear the word “he” without assuming a male gender. Modern sensitivities to the use of pronouns make it all the more essential to embrace the full genderedness of God in our liturgical language and prayers.

Mitchell also fails to take into account the biblical references to God having female body parts. “Since we do not properly attribute to God other human characteristics, such as having a body, we need to beware of seeming to attribute sexual characteristics to the God-head.”<sup>25</sup> There are no Biblical passages that describe God as having traditional male body parts.

However, there are multiple passages where God is described as having female body parts. “Though the Divine is articulated with feminine and masculine gender in the Scriptures, in translation and tradition God became virtually exclusively male.”<sup>26</sup> Translators choose which English words to use. Most words being translated do not have one equal word in the other language that expresses the full meaning of the original.

Wil Gafney has repeatedly argued for the importance of returning to the original languages of the Biblical text to recover the full meaning. When the Hebrew of the Old Testament is reexamined, references to the feminine aspects of God reappear for modern readers. “Often the love God feels for humanity is expressed as emanating from the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Gafney, 20.

womb, *rechem*, using the verb *r-ch-m*.”<sup>27</sup> God loves people with a love coming forth from God’s womb - a love as a mother for a child.

Wil Gafney also has returned to the original Hebrew to provide translations of many passages where the female side of God has been lost in translation. For example, she translates Job 33:4, “The Spirit of God, She has made me, and the breath of the nursing God, She gives me life.”<sup>28</sup> This passage provides yet another example of how translation has hidden many of the references to God as feminine from modern English readers.

In New Testament passages, the image of God having female body parts has not been lost in translation, but rather interpreters and preachers, like Mitchell, have chosen not to see them. There are multiple passages in both Testaments whose imagery calls God’s people to the need to be breast fed like infants. Isaiah 66:11-13 is a good example,

that you may nurse and be satisfied  
from her consoling breast;  
that you may drink deeply with delight  
from her glorious bosom.  
For thus says the Lord:  
I will extend prosperity to her like a river,  
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream;  
and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm,  
and dandled on her knees.  
As a mother comforts her child,  
so I will comfort you;  
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

In the New Testament, the breastfeeding God is found in references to believers as infants needing milk from their mothers. 1 Peter 2:2 calls out “Like newborn infants, long

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>28</sup> Translation by Wil Gafney <https://www.holytroublemakers.com/blog/god-in-feminine-form> April 7, 2022.

for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation.” The letter to the Hebrews also references believers need for the milk of God for nourishment in Hebrews 5:12-14.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

These images of God providing breast milk (there was not infant formula substitution at the time) require us to take a step further to think of God as having breasts. If women are truly made in God’s image, this is an easier leap to take. “Images and names of God do not aim to identify merely ‘part’ of the divine mystery, were that even possible. Rather, they intend to evoke the whole.”<sup>29</sup> How do we worship the majesty of who God is without recognizing these truly feminine images of God nourishing us at Her breasts - nourishing us from the depths of Her being?

Throughout the Old Testament there are references to both the Spirit and Wisdom (sometimes seen as the same being) as the female side of God. In Hebrew both terms are feminine and translations directly from the Hebrew often include feminine pronouns for both. Wil Gafney translates Genesis 1:1, “In beginning, He, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and shapeless and darkness covered the face of the deep, while She, the Spirit of God pulsed over the face of the waters.”<sup>30</sup> It is when the same text is translated into Latin that the feminine disappears. “The Spirit (of God) is

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<sup>29</sup> Johnson, 54.

<sup>30</sup> translation by Gafney, Wilda C. *Womanist Midrash*, 19.

feminine in form and function, taking feminine verbs exclusively in the Hebrew Bible. (It is neuter in Greek. Masculine translations of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament are postbiblical, stemming from the translation of the Bible into Latin in the fourth century.)”<sup>31</sup>

The second main reason that gender matters in expressions of God is because of how it shapes our lives and experiences. If we are not praying with the full genderedness of God, then we are not believing and affirming the full spectrum and glory of who God is. As a female priest, my experience of ministry is shaped by my experience as a woman in the world. I am treated differently because I have breasts that people stare at, work through cramps of menses, have my stomach expand greatly with growing children, and have children who come before the church in my priorities of time. None of these in and of themselves make me fully a woman, but they are all experiences I have because I am a woman.

None of this discredits or diminishes the experience of those who are non-binary in their gender expression. As we embrace the full genderedness of God, we embrace a God who speaks to and works through those who find themselves presenting as feminine beings whether partially or wholly. I seek not to eliminate gender neutral expression for God, but to fill out all the colors of God’s majesty and glory. “People tend to hear neutral or inclusive language through a masculine cultural filter, so that they hear ‘the Spirit’ as ‘He,’ just as they hear ‘God’ as ‘He,” no matter what I write or say, unless I specify ‘She.’”<sup>32</sup> It is rare that individuals in western cultures hear neutered expressions and think

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<sup>31</sup> Gafney, 291.

<sup>32</sup> Gafney, 287.

“she” instead of “he.” This is a similar concept to being told that using “mankind” or “men” includes women. “Nonbinary and inclusive language can obscure women and girls. The commitment to the visibility of women and girls is not in conflict or competition with the commitment to the visibility of nonbinary persons, this language, my language like all language is simply inadequate to express the fullness of God in and beyond the world or even in human creation.”<sup>33</sup> Though the argument is made, without specifically addressing women as feminine you are diminishing them and not representing them in the group.

When refocusing language about God to reflect God’s female side, the question arises about whether this will ultimately harm males. Will it serve only to hasten the decline of men attending local churches? Gafney responds, “Androcentrism, sexism, and misogyny in the scriptures, in their translation and in their preaching and liturgical use, hurts men and boys and nonbinary children and adults as much as it does women and girls. Exclusively masculine language constructs and reinforces the notion that men are the proper image of God and women are secondary and distant.”<sup>34</sup> Expanding liturgical and theological language to include feminine God language would harm males no more and no less than exclusively male or neutered God language already has.

It is not helpful for people who do not express themselves as female to eliminate the feminine side of God, just as it is not helpful to women to eliminate the feminine side of God. For each child of God to fully be formed and transformed by God, we must

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<sup>33</sup> Gafney, Wilda C. *A Women’s Lectionary for the Whole Church*. New York, NY: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2021, xv.

<sup>34</sup> Gafney, *A Women’s Lectionary for the Whole Church*, xx.

together embrace the beautiful diversity of images for God. To limit the image of God to one gender reinforces limits to God's people and the images they have of themselves as made in the image of God.

It is essential that the fullness of God's being be expressed and represented both in scriptures and in the worship of faith communities. "Reorienting the imagination at a basic level, this usage challenges the idolatry of maleness in classic language about God, thereby making possible the rediscovery of divine mystery, and points to recovery of the dignity of women created in the image of God."<sup>35</sup> How much deeper and meaningful our worship can be when the full expressions of God's glory are magnified in our churches. "Only; if the full reality of women as well as men enters into the symbolization of god along with symbols from the natural world, can the idolatrous fixation on one image be broken and the truth of the mystery of God, in tandem with the liberation of all human beings and the whole earth, emerge for our time."<sup>36</sup>

Eliminating the feminine language for God only continues to exacerbate the problem of women being seen as a weaker gender who should not be leading.

Further, the simple reality that men and boys have always heard their gender identified with God cannot be overlooked as a source of power and authority and security in terms of their place in the divine household and economy. Many, if not, most, women and girls have not heard themselves identified by their gender as and with the divine for those who have had that experience, it has been profoundly moving, rare, and even sometimes profoundly disturbing.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Johnson, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>37</sup> Gafney, *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church*, xx.

When we worship without including the feminine expressions of God, we lose the power of women being made in the image of God. How can women be fully seen in leadership roles in the church, if they are not seen as the image of God that they are?

## Chapter Three

### History of Liturgy removing God's feminine side

Anglican theology is based on a three-legged stool: scripture, tradition, and reason. When we look at the tradition of liturgy, if one examines the very early worship experiences of the church God was worshiped as both male and female. In *Holy Misogyny: Why Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter*, April DeConick presents a deep reading of scriptural references to God's feminine side. She argues that "One of the great tragedies of Christianity has been the loss of the female aspect of God."<sup>38</sup> As presented throughout the Hebrew Bible, God has both female and male characteristics. "Both human genders were created simultaneously to reflect the image of the male and female Elohim."<sup>39</sup> The concept of God being both male and female is not new in worship. Worshiping God as both male and female has been lived out before in religious history. There have been times and places where God's full genderedness was embraced and worshiped.

This foundational aspect of God has been lost to modern Christianity. "The locus of women's erasure from history and leadership continues to be about our bodies, which continue to be hidden away, covered, controlled and removed."<sup>40</sup> According to DeConick this began early on in the history of the people of Israel. During the periods of exile,

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<sup>38</sup>DeConick, April D. *Holy Misogyny: Why Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., x.



prophets looking for a theological justification for the hardships experienced by the people of Israel blamed the Hebrews' worshipping the female aspects of God. When times got tough, it was easy for men in power to use the feminine side of God as a scapegoat. In doing so, those who worshiped the feminine side of God were oppressed and said to be the cause of the trouble they were experiencing.

The suppression of female attributes of God continued in early Christianity. "I argue that the locus of the erasure of women and the Mother within the Christian tradition was the female body itself, which was misogynously conceived by the ancients as a body deficient, as an imperfect male, even as subhuman."<sup>41</sup> These feminine characteristics of the divine continued to be suppressed in Western Christianity as liturgy and worship were created. Feminine expressions of the divine were removed from the Deity and placed upon Mary, the mother of Jesus.

It is not easy to explain why the Mother Spirit was neutered and masculinized in the Christian tradition because none of the writings that have survived offers an explicit explanation. Rather, what we see in the literature is slippage, a gradual loss of her from Christian memory. The loss is quicker among Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking Christians where 'spirit' is neuter in Greek (*pneuma*) and masculine in Latin (*spiritus*).<sup>42</sup>

By the time Anglican liturgy was written down during the Reformation period this shift had occurred. The Trinity was expressed as two male beings (Father and Son) with a neutered third being (Holy Spirit). No longer did the Spirit represent the feminine divine. In the centuries since the creation of the Book of Common Prayer there has been little evidence of Anglicans seeking to regain this lost part of the nature of God.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 31.

## Chapter Four

### Inclusive Anglican Liturgies?

“Inclusive” liturgies written by the English-speaking churches in the Anglican Communion in the last 40 years have not included the full genderedness of God. In the attempt to be more inclusive than solely male, Anglican liturgies have neutered God. Instead of embracing the full spectrum of God’s genderedness, God is once again only portrayed as male. One could write for hundreds of pages analyzing each and every substitution and how it reflects the genders of God. In order to keep to a reasonable length, I focus on one of the foundations of Anglican liturgical theology, the Trinity. Words and images expressing God as three in one and one in three occur throughout Anglican worship services. One of the most prominent recitations is in the blessing that the clergyperson speaks over those present at the end of the liturgy. By examining these blessings, one can understand the issues involved and examine the depth of who God is said to be.

#### **The Book of Common Prayer 1979**

The Episcopal Church’s main service book, *The Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*, uses a Trinitarian formula that does not embrace the full genderedness of God. This resource compiled in the 1970’s was the first Episcopal Prayer Book to acknowledge women’s access to ordination, but in many ways refused to move any further in moving language beyond a masculine image of the Trinity.

The primary service included in the BCP for community worship is the Eucharist, and this service is typically bookended with Trinitarian declarations. It begins with the opening acclamation “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>43</sup> This opening statement is offered in both the Rite II, modern language service, and the Rite I, old English version.

The only options for the wording of blessings for concluding the Eucharistic service are included in the Rite I service.

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you, and remain with you always. *Amen.*”

*or this*

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. *Amen.*<sup>44</sup>

These blessings present the Trinity with only masculine and neuter expressions.

### **Enriching Our Worship**

In order to provide a more inclusive language alternative liturgy, The Episcopal Church in 1998 authorized the first volume in what is now a six-book set, *Enriching Our Worship (EOW)*. Though EOW did help to remove the exclusively masculine language for the Trinity, it did little to bring light on the feminine aspects of God in the Trinity.

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<sup>43</sup> Episcopal Church, p. 355.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

Most of the Trinitarian references in The Holy Eucharist were neutered. The opening acclamations were changed to,

Blessed are you, holy and living One.  
You come to your people and set them free.

Or

Blessed be the one, holy, and living God.  
Glory to God for ever and ever.<sup>45</sup>

*Enriching Our Worship* also provides a variety of concluding liturgical blessings.

However, in creating less masculine language, the writers turned mostly to a neutered representation of the Trinity, here as well.

Holy eternal Majesty,  
Holy incarnate Word,  
Holy abiding Spirit,  
Bless you for evermore. Amen.

God's Blessing be with you,  
Christ's peace be with you,  
The Spirit's outpouring be with you,  
Now and always. Amen.  
(source: Celtic.)

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. Amen.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Church Pension Fund. *Enriching Our Worship 1: Morning and Evening Prayer, The Great Litany, The Holy Eucharist*. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1998, 50.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

Enriching Our Worship 1 does provide two Trinitarian blessings that include references to God as both man and woman. The first one describes each being of the Trinity with a reference to women:

May the blessing of the God of Abraham and Sarah, and of Jesus Christ born of our sister Mary, and of the Holy Spirit, who broods over the world as a mother over her children, be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.<sup>47</sup>

The relationship of significant women to the first two beings of the Trinity allows one to see women's vital presence among the two usually exclusively male presenting persons of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is then described in similar terms as those that Jesus himself used by Jesus in some of the gospels--brooding as a mother.

The other blessing from EOW that includes female imagery does not include the traditional triad of the Trinitarian attributes. In this blessing, reflecting the words of Saint Clare of Assisi, God is said "to love as a mother."

Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Go in peace to follow the good road and may God's blessing be with you always Amen.<sup>48</sup>

The way this blessing is written, the female attributes of God are not part of the actual blessing, but merely a precursor to the actual blessing. The actual blessing contained in this service conclusion is more reflective of God's oneness than Trinitarian nature.

### **New Zealand Prayer Book**

The New Zealand Prayer Book (NZPB) has sparked differing responses among liturgists and worshipers. Many enjoy the prayers for creation along with the new ways of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 71.

wording some of the ancient prayers. However, a strong, vocal group of Episcopalians find trouble in the prayer book's creation by laity without the input of liturgical scholars. In the Episcopal Church, there are many bishops who will not allow its forms for the Holy Eucharist to be used in a parish's main liturgies.

With the recognition by some that the NZPB steps outside of the traditional liturgical scholarship, one might expect that the more inclusive language present in the book would include a full recognition of the genders of God in the Trinity. However, it offers only two Trinitarian formulas for blessings. The first is the traditional language: "and the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you for ever."<sup>49</sup> The alternative to the masculine Trinity that includes more inclusive language neuters God: "and the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life be with you always. Amen."<sup>50</sup> This same neutered Trinity, while beautiful in language and imagery, is offered again as the newer Trinitarian alternative in the opening acclamation in the Eucharistic liturgy, Thanksgiving for Creation and Redemption: "In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life. Amen."<sup>51</sup> Yet again the NZPB falls short of full-gendered language for God and presents the Trinity as only masculine and neuter.

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<sup>49</sup> Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. *A New Zealand Prayer Book. United States of America*: HarperSan Francisco, 1989, 526.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 456.

### Church of England Common Worship

When it comes to liturgy from the Church of England, the online resource for *Common Worship* is often shared as the modern, more inclusive language option. *Common Worship* Church of England online resources do not offer a new form of Trinitarian language to use during the final blessing. The contributions this resource provides merely expand seasonally appropriate beginning phrases and all end with “and the blessing of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>52</sup> The writers of this resource did not address the need to re-envision the Trinitarian blessing formula to include the full breadth of biblically relevant, Trinitarian genders.

### Anglican Church of Canada Book of Alternative Services

*The Book of Alternative Services* of the Anglican Church of Canada continues with the language in the Book of Common Prayer and offers no expansive or inclusive Trinitarian blessings. Its older service from 1962 has similar language as the Rite I blessing in the BCP.

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord: And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be amongst you and remain with you always. Amen.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Church of England, “Holy Communion Service”, accessed September 9, 2020. <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion#mm7g11>

<sup>53</sup> General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada. *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada with the Revised Common Lectionary*. Toronto, Canada: Anglican Book Centre, 1985, 248.

In the Anglican Church of Canada's more modern Eucharistic services, the blessing is listed as optional and no set words are given.<sup>54</sup>

Having isolated and examined the main liturgical resources in the English language Anglican prayer books, I have found that overall, they continue to use either exclusively masculine references to the Trinity, or, in a half-hearted attempt to embrace inclusive language, employ a neutered image of God. The only exception seems to be one blessing in *Enriching Our Worship*.

May the blessing of the God of Abraham and Sarah, and of Jesus Christ born of our sister Mary, and of the Holy Spirit, who broods over the world as a mother over her children, be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.<sup>55</sup>

It seems that my Anglican faith tradition has chosen not to embrace the feminine side of God, but continue to only include the male and non-gendered aspects of God in worship. As a female priest, seeking to share and bless those I lead with the fullness of God's greatness, it is imperative that I work to bring the feminine aspects of God into our Anglican Liturgy. After all, as DeConick says, "Jesus was part of God's plan to recover our lost luminous bodies, to restore us to our primal selves as beings of light made in the Image of God."<sup>56</sup> Anglican worship needs to embrace the feminine image of God, so that all worshippers are shaped and formed by prayers to our fully gendered God.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>55</sup> Church Pension Fund, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 20.



## Chapter Five

### Current Liturgical movements to be “Inclusive”

I wanted to see if there were scholars and liturgists in the last 20 years who presented a more fully gendered God in prayers. Since it takes years and even decades to have new prayers approved for worship, were there sources that had already been written but not yet gone through the lengthy process to be included in a prayer book? I found three of these resources that on the surface were seeking to be more inclusive than past sources: Ruth Meyers’ revision of Mitchell’s *Praying Shapes Believing*, Steven Shakespeare’s *Prayers For An Inclusive Church*, and the Episcopal Church’s Liturgical Task Force’s website with expansive language liturgies.

Ruth Meyers has been the Episcopal Church’s primary liturgist since Leonel Mitchell. She studied under and was mentored by Mitchell. She has had almost a permanent seat on the various worship committees created by General Convention and formed to shape and advise on all liturgical matters. In 2016, she published a revised version of Mitchell’s *Praying Shapes Believing*.

In this second edition, she edits and adds to Mitchell’s theological analysis of the Book of Common Prayer, as well as the authorized supplemental liturgies. Instead of addressing the need for expanding the liturgical language for God’s full genderedness, she glosses over the whole issue. She leaves in Mitchell’s statements about God not being an old man, but fails to offer the possibility of using feminine images to express God. The only pronouns she offers as possibilities for referencing God are “he” and

“it.”<sup>57</sup> Thirty years after Mitchell fails to offer seminarians and subsequent parish priests an opportunity to see and embrace the full genderedness of God, Meyers also glosses over even the possibility of overcoming our prayers to a male God, with a female pronoun.

I was very hopeful to discover Steven Shakespeare’s *Prayers For An Inclusive Church* published by Church Publishing in 2009. Here is a male priest from the Church of England presenting inclusive versions of a complete liturgical set (years A, B, C and holidays) of collects that follow the lectionary, reference the scriptures, and yet are written to be more inclusive of who God is.

Shakespeare’s introduction expresses some of the realities of seeking to be inclusive. Inclusion “has the power to shape unselfish habits of heart and communities of welcome.”<sup>58</sup> However, at the same time “Inclusion is costly and transformative.”<sup>59</sup> As a community of faith, welcoming an outsider can easily make the insiders feel uncomfortable. For example, the Gospels are full of stories of Jesus interacting with the “other,” while making his disciples uncomfortable and even shocked. Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors, interacted with Samaritan women at the well, and touched those who were sick. In loving those outside of his normal worshiping community, those on the inside were moved out of their comfort zone. Their image of who God is was shattered and they had to renegotiate who God is in their own lives.

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<sup>57</sup> Meyers, 335.

<sup>58</sup> Shakespeare, ix.

<sup>59</sup> Shakespeare, x.

In his introduction, Shakespeare also does what anyone who has been in a privileged group should do before trying to present a new way for others. He recognizes that he is a white, British man who cannot fully understand the experiences of those who have been systematically oppressed by their gender, sexuality, race, or ethnic background.

With all the great background, legwork, and introductory material, I had great hope for Shakespeare's prayers. Here, finally, would be an Anglican priest and theologian who was seeking to change our beloved liturgy in a way that it would no longer be oppressive in its expressions of who God is. However, Shakespeare fell into the same trap that so many other great liturgists in our communion continue to do. He includes some wonderful descriptions and imagery in his terms for God, but falls into the same old pronoun issue. The only pronouns he uses for God are "he."

By repeatedly using "He" for God, Shakespeare perpetuates that, despite a desire to express our prayers to an inclusive God, God is male by default of needing male pronouns. The female image of God is again pushed aside. Unfortunately, despite his best intentions, Shakespeare fails to embrace the full genderedness of God and reinforces the status quo.

The Episcopal Church has recently created a website as a repository for liturgical resources at [www.episcopalcommonprayer.org](http://www.episcopalcommonprayer.org) This website is being designed by the Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision as a result of Resolution 2022 A058 passed by the Episcopal Church's 80<sup>th</sup> General Convention.

On its website, the task force has included liturgy that has been approved for trial use, authorized to be used for a period of time in place of the language in the *Book of*

*Common Prayer*. Under this category there is a document entitled “The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two (expansive language) for Trial Use” that is authorized for use until the next *Book of Common Prayer* is completed and approved.<sup>60</sup> This document contains versions of the Holy Eucharist: Rite Two, Eucharistic Prayers A, B, and D. There is not an expansive language version of Eucharistic Prayer C provided in this resource.

These “expansive language” services do not achieve what they claim to be achieving. God continues to be expressed in male or non-gendered terms. All pronouns used are “he.” God is listed as “Father” but not “Mother.” There are some options to use terms for God that do not require a gender in the English language. There are no options to include God in feminine terms, not even in referring to the Holy Spirit who was expressed in female language until Latin translations of scripture were introduced.

To the worshipper, there is little evidence of change. A few instances of “He” in referring to God are changed to “God” or “Christ.” If one were to use this Eucharist without a reference to its subtitle, God would be concluded to be male. Substituting only some of the male pronouns does not make these services expansive in their language.

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<sup>60</sup> <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/24013> November 8, 2022.

## Chapter Six

### Parishes that embrace the feminine divine

In searching for parishes that use feminine expressions of God in their worship, I used social media connections for recommendations. Specifically, I looked to three Facebook groups whose members are clergywomen—“Episcopal and Anglican Young Clergy Women,” “YCW (Young Clergy Women) Alumni,” and “The Parlor.” I chose to use these networks because they each include a wide variety of clergywomen, both throughout the United States and the world. I have found that clergywomen tend to be more open to referring to God in feminine terms and overall are more aware of churches that do than our male colleagues. In my own experience, I have found the most clergy networking on Facebook as opposed to other social media networks.

The group “Episcopal and Anglican Young Clergy Women is composed of self-identifying young and middle-aged women. All of these clergywomen either are currently members or have been in the past members of Young Clergy Women International (formerly The Young Clergy Women’s Project). YCWI is an international group of clergywomen who are under 40 years of age and who were ordained before they were 35 years old. I was an active member of the group from near its beginning until the month I turned 40 and leveled up. The group was begun and continues to be a place for the youngest clergywomen to find support, encouragement, and education to help them with the challenges of serving churches where they do not represent what is typically conceived as “clergy.” This specific subgroup is for YCWI and alumni who are ordained in the Episcopal Church or in one of the sister churches in the Anglican Communion. (Of

note it does not currently include the very few clergywomen who are part of the breakaway group Anglican Churches of North America.) I chose to use this group because it contains many of the clergywomen under 50 in the Episcopal Church who, if they do not (for whatever reason) use feminine language for God in their own worship could point me in the direction of Episcopal churches they in their network who do use feminine language for God.

The next Facebook group I reached out to was Young Clergy Women Alumni. This is a group composed of clergywomen who were a part of YCWI when they were under 40 and chose to continue to network with others who had leveled up out of the youngest clergywomen to those in the middle-aged group. This group contains women across many denominations. Since Episcopal worship language is mostly mandated by General Convention and diocesan bishops, there are many places where a clergyperson would be in trouble with their bishop if they chose to use feminine language for God. By broadening the scope of denominations, I was able to ensure that I found enough parishes who use feminine language for God to provide enough information for this research.

The final Facebook group I approached is a rather new group called “The Parlor.” This group was recently formed in the summer of 2022 in response to the closing of RevGalBlogPals. RevGalBlogPals began in the early days of blogging as a webring and grew to an organization with thousands of clergywomen throughout the world. For a host of reasons, this organization chose to end its ministry in August 2022. The Parlor was started by board members from RevGalBlogPals who desired to continue some of the support network that had grown for clergywomen on RevGalBlogPals. This new group contains clergywomen of any age or denomination. I am hoping through this reach to

hear especially from some of the older women who are Episcopal or Anglican clergy of parishes within their networks.

To each of these groups I posed the exact same message,  
 “I am searching for parishes that use both feminine and masculine language for God in worship for my DMIN. Thank you for all help you can provide! (cross posted).”

To those who offered to help me with this project, I sent the following:

**Thank you So much for being willing to share your experience with using feminine language for God in worship! Here is a brief survey to help in my DMIN research paper in Women in Religious Leadership through Drew University in Madison, NJ. Please let me know if you have any questions.**

**Questions to ask parishes that include both feminine and masculine terms for God**

Name of Parish

Denomination

Location

Clergyperson

When did your parish start using feminine terms for God?

Do you make regular use of both masculine and feminine terms for God in your worship services? If not, when do you choose to use them?

Were you leading your parish when you started using feminine terms for God?

If yes, what sparked your desire to refer to God with feminine language?

How did parishioners respond at first to using feminine terms for God?

How do parishioners feel now about worshipping with this language?

How has your wider community responded to this expansive language?

How has your wider church leadership responded? (bishops, judicatory staff, etc.)

Has this expansion in worship language changed the spirituality of the parish?

What advice would you give to other churches considering incorporating broadened language for God to include a fully gendered God?

Where in worship have you chosen to use feminine imagery for God? What specific language/words have you used?

Where in worship have you chosen to use traditional masculine language/words for God?

Would you be willing to share a copy of your worship service?

Is there anything else you would like to share about this topic that I have not asked?

With these questions, I was aiming to discover a few key characteristics of parishes who are using fully expansive language in worship. First, the basic background information about the parish and denomination. Second, what sparked the desire from the clergy person to refer to God using female terms. How was this feminine language for God received by both parishioners and the wider church? Finally, what specifically was changed.

From these three postings I initially ended up with nine who responded that they used feminine and masculine language for God and were willing to answer some questions about it. After emailing those nine my survey, a few stated that they could not provide me with some of this information because they were retired or not serving in a



parish, and a few did not respond. The four completed surveys span four denominations, Presbyterian USA, Moravian, United Church of Canada, and United Church of Christ (USA).

The most remarkable discovery to me is that not a single Episcopal church was even suggested as a place to contact who uses feminine terms for God. The closest was a recommendation for a parish in the Anglican Church of Canada in Toronto. There were no other Anglican churches shared to inquire about.

These churches ranged in when they began using feminine language for God from 2010 through 2020. All of the churches who responded make use of varying terms for God. One of the churches was a new plant and began with inclusive language. None of the parishes had any problem with wider church leadership. In fact, two of them shared that their wider church leadership uses fully gendered language for God. The others do not have overseeing leaders who might direct that they worship in a certain way. “Moravians have long referred to the Holy Spirit as female, so ‘She’ language is not uncommon in my experience.”<sup>61</sup>

The responding clergypersons who said they phased in feminine language both shared some stories of parishioners inquiring why they were changing the language or if they would have to refer to God as feminine in that particular parish. When asked about how it changed the spirituality of the parish, the Rev. Parish C responded, “Using many names for God helps us continually reckon with who we understand God to be, and see and name the sacred in the many around us.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> The Rev. Parish B-parishioner.

<sup>62</sup> The Rev. Parish C.

For these parishes and clergy it was essential to understanding the full nature of God to refer to God in feminine terms. In response to why they chose to make the change, the Rev. Parish A simply stated, “I think to do otherwise is idolatry.”<sup>63</sup> None of the clergy preached a sermon series on making this change, but several did say they preached on occasion on God being feminine and the importance of language.

In seeking advice for parishes in making these adaptations toward worshipping a fully gendered God, pronouns seemed to be expressed as an early key. Some changed “He” to “God” and others to “She.” The other early change expressed as the transition was made in the parishes was to add “Mother” to references to God as “Father,” as in “Holy Mother and Father.” Three of the parishes shared that they have kept masculine terms for God in more historical type documents used during worship, hymnals and bible readings being the most common.

The concept of building pastoral relationships where deeper conversations about the nature of God could happen in safe spaces was lifted up as essential for this transition. Also, baby steps where a change would happen in one or two parts of a service to start and slowly grow to include more parts of worship. Easy changes suggested by multiple clergy were to introduce the Lord’s prayer by referencing God as Mother and then using the traditional language of “Our Father.” This way the change was expressed, but worshipers would still be praying in the words that they had known since childhood. Benedictions, which frequently change in worship were also stated as easy places to refer

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<sup>63</sup> The Rev. Parish A.

to God in feminine terms, inviting congregants to reflect on God in a new way, but not having to immediately refer to God as female on their own.

Overall, the answers from these clergy provided practical ideas for introducing new ways for parishes to refer to God in terms of gender. Parishes can gradually make changes that help everyone to more fully understand and embrace the nature of who God is regardless of denomination.

### **Holy Trinity Toronto**

The only parish recommended to look at for using feminine language for God that was Anglican was Holy Trinity in Toronto, Canada. I was hoping there would be a clergyperson there who would be open to sharing more about the congregation. However, Holy Trinity is between clergy right now, and lay leaders I was put in touch with did not feel they could adequately discuss their liturgical decisions.

I pivoted with my research at this point and focused on what I could learn from their website. Like many churches, especially those between clergy, their website was quite dated. They had a few bulletins included from before Covid. Their opening “welcome” statements were almost too many and overwhelming to figure out. There did seem to be a very conscious effort to include accommodations for every person who might otherwise feel an outsider in a church service--hearing devices, large print

bulletins, scent free zone, coffee and tea available, all in service of seeking to be “an accessible, active, vibrant, justice-seeking, queer-positive community.”<sup>64</sup>

Holy Trinity’s bulletins included more references to women than traditional Anglican services, including Mary and God as midwife. They began the Lord’s prayer similarly to the other churches I researched with, “O God, our Mother and Father.” They even renamed the Lord’s Prayer, “Saviour’s Prayer.” They included rewrites of familiar hymns which removed patriarchal and male dominated imagery. Their readings were not limited to Biblical passages, but included modern authors. They even included a cartoon of smashing the patriarchy after their “reflection.” Despite including the full text of readings, hymns, and prayers, the bulletins did not include a Eucharistic prayer.

Holy Trinity’s website did have a subsection of resources written by their members which included “Marilyn’s Eucharistic Prayer.” This was the only Eucharistic prayer I could find. This Prayer seemed to fall into a similar trap that “inclusive” Eucharistic Prayers in the Episcopal Church do. References to God were changed to non-gendered terms and images, with one big exception.

During the words of institution, Jesus was referred to as “he” freely. When the only pronoun heard for God is masculine, you can have the most beautiful imagery for God in the world, but hearers and pray-ers will not be moved beyond traditional notions of God as male. If God is to be seen and worshiped, as the fully-gendered deity that God is, it is essential that the pronouns used for God are inclusive. If the only gender God is

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<sup>64</sup> <https://holytrinity.to/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Advent-4-December-23-2018-.pdf>  
January 26, 2023.

given is male, God remains male even with limited male references. In a parish that seems so eager to include everyone, they missed a huge opportunity.

Overall, I found Holy Trinity to be a hard example to lift up to other Anglicans as a way to go forward in truly inclusive liturgy. By including so many non-Biblical readings, they would distance many liturgists from being able to hear and embrace a fully-gendered God. The liturgists would get too hung up on which writers and theologians were used and how the service should only contain biblical readings. They would only end up moving those who were already moved.

## Chapter Seven

### Fully gendered inclusive Liturgies

What is needed for liturgy to be fully gender inclusive and embrace the Divine feminine part of God? First what I am not suggesting is to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The Anglican liturgy is beautiful and many parts do not need any adjustments. However, there are two major aspects of language that need to be addressed: first, gendered terms/names; secondly, pronouns.

Gendered names for God are some of the most obvious areas where God is described as masculine. The most frequently used in liturgy is “Father.” This term for God presents numerous questions about the nature of God. Naming God to be a parent can be beneficial for some and a stumbling block for others. For the sake of this project I do not feel it necessary to deconstruct the downfalls of God being seen as a parent.

It is much more essential that liturgy which includes “father” also includes the feminine term “mother.” Each traditional parental role comes with its own downfalls and stereotypes. Using each term in liturgy, at times would be emotionally difficult for people who do not have a good relationship with one of their parents or who have same gendered parents who do not fit in the traditional roles.

Eliminating both “mother” and “father” and replacing with “parent” does not solve these issues. Every person experiencing liturgy will hear in these terms their own experience with those who have parented them over the years. In order to create liturgy that embraces God as fully gendered, it is necessary to add the feminine rather than just

eliminate the masculine. Neutering “mother” and “father” to “parent” makes God less personable and further draws God away from being fully gendered.

The biggest obstacle I have found among those who claim to be creating “inclusive” liturgy is pronouns. Pronouns matter, both for individuals who are claiming their gender expression and for how we refer to God. When the only pronoun used in liturgy is “he,” you can have the most beautifully inclusive terms for God, but God will be heard to be male. This is true in the collects that Steven Shakespeare wrote and in the “inclusive” liturgies authorized to be used by various church bodies.

Writing and praying to God with the most poetic of non-gendered language and then recalling Jesus by repeatedly using “he/him” does nothing to present a fully gendered God to those who are part of the liturgy of worship. “But Jesus presented as a man” will be argued every time. Yes, Jesus presented as a man, but he did not put emphasis on his male parts as defining who he was. The truth is that if the Trinity is presented as two neutered parts and one male part it will not be accurately representing the feminine part of who God is, for example “Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit.” At the same time the Trinity is not two men and a bird, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” The Trinity in its glory is a grand attempt at trying to express God working in different ways all at the same time. I am not trying to dismantle Jesus’ key part in the Trinity, only to say that how it is expressed in relation to other parts of the Trinity can prevent God from being seen in full genderedness.

So, what do we do about Jesus being referred to as “he” in liturgy? I suggest that we consider two possible alternatives. First, if Jesus must be “he” exclusively, one of the other parts of the Trinity should be referred to just as often as “she.” Historically it is

easiest to do this with the Holy Spirit, given its Hebrew and Greek roots are expressed as female. The key with doing this liturgical change well is to equally apply both male and female pronouns. One “she” does not counteract ten instances of “he.”

The other option with pronouns is to refer to Jesus as “they.” This can easily be explained as God being the image of male and female in Genesis or close to the royal “we.” God in Jesus is greater than just a man, and in turn deserves to have a pronoun that more closely encompasses the full genderedness of God.

The second argument for using “they” for Jesus is most easily heard by younger generations or those on the LGBTQ spectrum. Jesus was comfortable and regularly part of both male and female places in society. If Jesus was alive today, he could easily express as a more gender-inclusive “they.”

One category of liturgical names for God that I find myself as an American most ambivalent about is terms of royalty. This is easily explained by my limited exposure to these offices in society. Other than Hawaii, the United States does not have a long relationship with having royalty. The case is easy to make that if one calls God “King” in liturgy, the liturgy should also use the term “Queen.”

I believe the question becomes more of one’s context on whether those are colonial terms or one of one’s own cultural heritage. For many lands that were taken over by royal governments, calling God royalty would be seen as equivalent to also using “slaveholder” or “oppressor.” However, in places like Hawaii where the monarchy was overthrown by United States businessmen, calling God “King” or “Queen” would impart great respect and love. The same could be said about the lessor, “Lord” and “Lady.” As long as they are equally used, they express God’s full genderedness, with the



caveat that whether they are used at all should be locally decided based on the history of royalty in that land.

I offer here two revised versions of the authorized inclusive language Eucharist services using the above guidelines. One is designed to highlight the divine feminine part of God. The second seeks to embrace a full-gendered God.

## The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two

### Embracing the Divine Feminine God

### The Word of God

*A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.*

*The people standing, the Celebrant says*

Blessed be God: most holy, glorious, and undivided Trinity.

*or*

Blessed be God: Mother, Child, and Spirit.

*People*           And blessed be God's reign, now and for ever. Amen.

*In place of the above, from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost*

*Celebrant*       Alleluia. Christ is risen.

*People*           Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.

*In Lent and on other penitential occasions*

*Celebrant*       Blessed be God who forgives all our sins.

*People*           God's mercy endures for ever.

*The Celebrant may say*

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known,  
and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our  
hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may  
perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name;  
through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*When appointed, the following hymn or some other song of praise is  
sung or said, all standing*

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to her people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly Queen,  
almighty God and Mother,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Mother,  
 Lord God, Lamb of God,  
 you take away the sin of the world:  
     have mercy on us;  
 you are seated at the right hand of the Mother:  
     receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
 you alone are the Lord,  
 you alone are the Most High,  
     Jesus Christ,  
     with the Holy Spirit,  
     in the glory of God the Mother. Amen.

### The Collect of the Day

*The Celebrant says to the people*

God be with you.      *or*      The Lord be with you.

*People*              And also with you.

*Celebrant*        Let us pray.

*The Celebrant says the Collect.*

*People*              Amen.

### The Lessons

*The people sit. One or two Lessons, as appointed, are read,  
 the Reader first saying*

A Reading (Lesson) from \_\_\_\_\_.

*A citation giving chapter and verse may be added.*

*After each Reading, the Reader may say*

The Word of the Lord.

*or*

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

*or*

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

*People* Thanks be to God.

*or the Reader may say* Here ends the Reading (Epistle).

*Silence may follow*

*A psalm, hymn, or anthem may follow each Reading.*

*Then, all standing, the Deacon or a Priest reads the Gospel, first saying*

The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ  
according to \_\_\_\_\_.

*People* Glory to you, Lord Christ.

*After the Gospel, the Reader says*

The Gospel of our Savior.

*People* Praise to you, Lord Christ.

## The Sermon

*On Sundays and other Major Feasts there follows, all standing*

## The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Child of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God, begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through the Creator all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and Mary  
and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again

in accordance with the Scriptures;  
 they ascended into heaven  
 and is seated at the right hand of the Mother .  
 They will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
 and Their kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
 who proceeds from the Mother ,  
 who with the Mother and the Child is worshiped and glorified,  
 who has spoken through the prophets.  
 We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
 We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
 We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
 and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## The Prayers of the People

*Prayer is offered with intercession for*

*The Universal Church, its members, and its mission*

*The Nation and all in authority*

*The welfare of the world*

*The concerns of the local community*

*Those who suffer and those in any trouble*

*The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)*

*See the forms beginning on Book of Common Prayer, page 383, and the additional rubrics concerning the Prayers of the People found in Enriching Our Worship 1, pages 54-55.*

*If there is no celebration of the Communion, or if a priest is not available, the service is concluded as indicated in the Additional Directions of the Book of Common Prayer.*

## Confession of Sin

*A Confession of Sin is said here if it has not been said earlier. On occasion, the Confession may be omitted.*

*One of the sentences from the Penitential Order in Book of Common Prayer, page 351 or Enriching Our Worship 1 may be said.*

*The Deacon or Celebrant says*

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

*Silence may be kept.*

*Minister and People*

Most merciful God,  
 we confess that we have sinned against you  
 in thought, word, and deed,  
 by what we have done,  
 and by what we have left undone.  
 We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
 we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
 We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.  
 For the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ,  
 have mercy on us and forgive us;  
 that we may delight in your will,  
 and walk in your ways,  
 to the glory of your Name. Amen.

*The Bishop when present, or the Priest, stands and says*

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins  
 through the grace of Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all  
 goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in  
 eternal life. Amen.

## The Peace

*All stand. The Celebrant says to the People*

The peace of Christ be always with you.

*People* And also with you.

*Then the Ministers and People may greet one another in the  
 name of Jesus Christ.*

## The Holy Communion

*The Celebrant may begin the Offertory with one of the sentences provided in the Book of Common Prayer, page 376 or with some other sentence of Scripture.*

*During the Offertory, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.*

*Representatives of the congregation bring the people's offerings of bread and wine, and money or other gifts, to the deacon or celebrant. The people stand while the offerings are presented and placed on the Altar.*

## The Great Thanksgiving

*Alternative forms will be found on page 10 and following.*

### *Eucharistic Prayer A*

*The people remain standing. The Celebrant, whether bishop or priest, faces them and sings or says*

The Lord be with you. *or* God be with you.

*People* And also with you.

*Celebrant* Lift up your hearts.

*People* We lift them to the Lord.

*Celebrant* Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*People* It is right to give our thanks and praise.

*Then, facing the Holy Table, the Celebrant proceeds*

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, mothering God, Creator of heaven and earth.

*Here a Proper Preface is sung or said on all Sundays, and on other occasions as appointed.*

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

*Celebrant 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.

*The people stand or kneel.*

*Then the Celebrant continues*

Holy and gracious God: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Child, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and maker of all.

Jesus stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

*At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing wine to be consecrated.*

On the night they was handed over to suffering and death, our Savior Jesus Christ took bread; and when they had given thanks to you, they broke it, and gave it to their disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper Jesus took the cup of wine; and when they had given thanks, they gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

*Celebrant and People*

Christ has died.  
 Christ is risen.  
 Christ will come again.

*The Celebrant continues*

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, Almighty Mother, in



this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Child, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in Christ. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Savior. By Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty God, now and for ever. *AMEN.*

And now, as our Savior  
Christ has taught us,  
we are bold to say,

As our Savior Christ  
has taught us,  
we now pray,

*People and Celebrant*

Our Mother, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Mother in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.

## The Breaking of the Bread

*The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread.*

*A period of silence is kept.*

*Then may be sung or said*

[Alleluia.] Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;  
Therefore let us keep the feast. [Alleluia.]

*In Lent, Alleluia is omitted, and may be omitted at other times except during Easter Season.*

*In place of, or in addition to, the preceding, some other suitable anthem may be used.*

*Facing the people, the Celebrant says the following Invitation or similar words.*

The Gifts of God for the People of God.

*and may add* Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on them in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

*The ministers receive the Sacrament in both kinds, and then immediately deliver it to the people.*

*The Bread and the Cup are given to the communicants with these words*

The Body (Blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life. [*Amen.*]

*or with these words*

The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven. [*Amen.*]  
The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation. [*Amen.*]

*During the ministration of Communion, hymns, psalms, or anthems may be sung.*

*When necessary, the Celebrant consecrates additional bread and wine, using the provided form on page 408 of the Book of Common Prayer.*

*After Communion, the Celebrant says*

Let us pray.

*Celebrant and People*

Eternal God,  
you have graciously accepted us as living members  
of our Savior Jesus Christ,  
and you have fed us with spiritual food

in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.  
 Send us now into the world in peace,  
 and grant us strength and courage  
 to love and serve you  
 with gladness and singleness of heart;  
 through Christ our Savior. Amen.

*or the following*

Almighty and everliving God,  
 we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food  
 of the most precious Body and Blood  
 of your Child our Savior Jesus Christ;  
 and for assuring us in these holy mysteries  
 that we are living members of the Body of Christ,  
 and heirs of your eternal kingdom.  
 And now, send us out  
 to do the work you have given us to do,  
 to love and serve you  
 as faithful witnesses of Christ our Savior.  
 To them, to you, and to the Holy Spirit,  
 be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

*The Bishop when present, or the Priest, may bless the people.*

### **Trinitarian Blessings to consider using**

May the blessing of our mothering God  
 grant you the creativity to face each day,  
 the courage to never give up,  
 and the love to see yourself as you are, a child of God. Amen

May you know the embracing womb-love of our Mother God,  
 the grace of our Savior,  
 and the power of our Creator. Amen.

*The Deacon, or the Celebrant, dismisses them with these words*

	Let us go forth in the name of Christ.
<i>People</i>	Thanks be to God.

*or this*

<i>Deacon</i>	Go in peace to love and serve Jesus Christ our Savior.
<i>People</i>	Thanks be to God.

*or this*

*Deacon* Let us go forth into the world,  
rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.  
*People* Thanks be to God.

*or this*

*Deacon* Let us bless the Lord.  
*People* Thanks be to God.

*From the Easter Vigil through the Day of Pentecost "Alleluia, alleluia"*  
*May be added to any of the dismissals.*

*The people respond* Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.

## The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two

Inclusive of the full genderedness of God

### The Word of God

*A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.*

*The people standing, the Celebrant says*

Blessed be God: Created, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

*or*

Blessed be God: Holy Parent, Child, and Spirit.

*People*           And blessed be God's reign, now and for ever. Amen.

*In place of the above, from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost\*

*Celebrant*       Alleluia. Christ is risen.

*People*           Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.

*In Lent and on other penitential occasions*

*Celebrant*       Blessed be God who forgives all our sins.

*People*           God's mercy endures for ever.

*The Celebrant may say*

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known,  
and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our  
hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may  
perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name;  
through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*The rubrics of the Prayer Book (p. 356) provide that when appointed,  
the Gloria in excelsis or "some other song of praise" may be used.*

*Supplemental canticles (Enriching our Worship 1, pp. 25-41)  
or canticles from the Book of Common Prayer (pp. 85-96) are  
among the appropriate alternatives.*

*On other occasions the following is used*

Holy God,  
 Holy and Mighty,  
 Holy Immortal One,  
 Have mercy upon us.

### The Collect of the Day

*The Celebrant says to the people*

God be with you.     *or*     The Lord be with you.

*People*           And also with you.

*Celebrant*       Let us pray.

*The Celebrant says the Collect.*

*People*           Amen.

### The Lessons

*The people sit. One or two Lessons, as appointed, are read, the Reader first saying*

A Reading (Lesson) from \_\_\_\_\_.

*A citation giving chapter and verse may be added.*

*After each Reading, the Reader may say*

The Word of the Lord.

*or*

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

*or*

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

*People*           Thanks be to God.

*or the Reader may say* Here ends the Reading (Epistle).

*Silence may follow*

*A psalm, hymn, or anthem may follow each Reading.*

*Then, all standing, the Deacon or a Priest reads the Gospel, first saying*

The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ  
 according to \_\_\_\_\_.

*People*            Glory to you, Lord Christ.

*After the Gospel, the Reader says*

The Gospel of our Savior.

*People*            Praise to you, Lord Christ.

## The Sermon

*On Sundays and other Major Feasts there follows, all standing*

## The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,  
     the Creator, the Almighty,  
     maker of heaven and earth,  
     of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
     the only Child of God,  
     eternally begotten of the Mother,  
     God from God, Light from Light,  
     true God from true God, begotten, not made,  
     of one Being with the Father;  
     through the Creator all things were made.  
     For us and for our salvation  
     they came down from heaven,  
     was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and Mary  
     and became truly human.

For our sake They were crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
     They suffered death and was buried.  
     On the third day they rose again  
     in accordance with the Scriptures;  
     they ascended into heaven  
     and is seated at the right hand of the Creator .  
     They will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
     and Their kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
 who proceeds from the Mother,  
 who with the Father and the Child is worshiped and glorified,  
 who has spoken through the prophets.  
 We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
 We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
 We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
 and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## The Prayers of the People

*Prayer is offered with intercession for*

*The Universal Church, its members, and its mission*

*The Nation and all in authority*

*The welfare of the world*

*The concerns of the local community*

*Those who suffer and those in any trouble*

*The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)*

*See the forms beginning on Book of Common Prayer, page 383, and the additional rubrics concerning the Prayers of the People found in Enriching Our Worship 1, pages 54-55.*

*If there is no celebration of the Communion, or if a priest is not available, the service is concluded as indicated in the Additional Directions of the Book of Common Prayer.*

## Confession of Sin

*A Confession of Sin is said here if it has not been said earlier. On occasion, the Confession may be omitted.*

*One of the sentences from the Penitential Order in Book of Common Prayer, page 351 or Enriching Our Worship 1 may be said.*

*The Deacon or Celebrant says*

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

*Silence may be kept.*

*Minister and People*

Most merciful God,  
 we confess that we have sinned against you  
 in thought, word, and deed,  
 by what we have done,



and by what we have left undone.  
 We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
 we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
 We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.  
 For the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ,  
 have mercy on us and forgive us;  
 that we may delight in your will,  
 and walk in your ways,  
 to the glory of your Name. Amen.

*The Bishop when present, or the Priest, stands and says*

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins  
 through the grace of Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all  
 goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in  
 eternal life. Amen.

## The Peace

*All stand. The Celebrant says to the People*

The peace of Christ be always with you.

*People* And also with you.

*Then the Ministers and People may greet one another in the  
 name of Jesus Christ.*

## The Holy Communion

*The Celebrant may begin the Offertory with one of the sentences  
 provided in the Book of Common Prayer, page 376  
 or with some other sentence of Scripture.*

*During the Offertory, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.*

*Representatives of the congregation bring the people's offerings of bread  
 and wine, and money or other gifts, to the deacon or celebrant. The  
 people stand while the offerings are presented and placed on the Altar.*

## The Great Thanksgiving

*Alternative forms will be found on page 10 and following.*

*Eucharistic Prayer A*

*The people remain standing. The Celebrant, whether bishop or priest,*

*faces them and sings or says*

God be with you.

*People* And also with you.

*Celebrant* Lift up your hearts.

*People* We lift them to our God.

*Celebrant* Let us give thanks to God.

*People* It is right to give our thanks and praise.

*Then, facing the Holy Table, the Celebrant proceeds*

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, mothering God, Creator of heaven and earth.

*Here a Proper Preface is sung or said on all Sundays, and on other occasions as appointed.*

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

*Celebrant 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.

*The people stand or kneel.*

*Then the Celebrant continues*

Holy and gracious God: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Child, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the Creator and maker of all.

Jesus stretched out arms upon the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

*At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing wine to be consecrated.*

On the night they was handed over to suffering and death, our Savior Jesus Christ took bread; and when they had given thanks to you, they broke it, and gave it to their disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper Jesus took the cup of wine; and when they had given thanks, they gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

*Celebrant and People*

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

*The Celebrant continues*

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, Almighty God, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Child, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in Christ. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Savior. By Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty God, now and for ever. *AMEN.*

And now, as our Savior  
Christ has taught us,  
we are bold to say,

As our Savior Christ  
has taught us,  
we now pray

*People and Celebrant*

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Mother in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.

## The Breaking of the Bread

*The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread.*

*A period of silence is kept.*

*Then may be sung or said*

[Alleluia.] Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;  
Therefore let us keep the feast. [Alleluia.]

*In Lent, Alleluia is omitted, and may be omitted at other times except during Easter Season.*

*In place of, or in addition to, the preceding, some other suitable anthem may be used.*

*Facing the people, the Celebrant says the following Invitation or similar words.*

### The Gifts of God for the People of God.

*and may add* Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on them in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

*The ministers receive the Sacrament in both kinds, and then immediately deliver it to the people.*

*The Bread and the Cup are given to the communicants with these words*

The Body (Blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life. [*Amen.*]

*or with these words*

The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven. [*Amen.*]  
The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation. [*Amen.*]

*During the ministration of Communion, hymns, psalms, or anthems may be sung.*

*When necessary, the Celebrant consecrates additional bread and wine, using the provided form on page 408 of the Book of Common Prayer.*

*After Communion, the Celebrant says* Let us pray.

*Celebrant and People*

Eternal God,  
you have graciously accepted us as living members  
of our Savior Jesus Christ,  
and you have fed us with spiritual food  
in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.  
Send us now into the world in peace,  
and grant us strength and courage  
to love and serve you  
with gladness and singleness of heart;  
through Christ our Savior. Amen.

*or the following*

Almighty and everliving God,  
we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food  
of the most precious Body and Blood  
of your Child our Savior Jesus Christ;  
and for assuring us in these holy mysteries  
that we are living members of the Body of Christ,  
and heirs of your eternal kingdom.  
And now, send us out  
to do the work you have given us to do,  
to love and serve you  
as faithful witnesses of Christ our Savior.  
To them, to you, and to the Holy Spirit,  
be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

*The Bishop when present, or the Priest, may bless the people.*

May God the Father bless you with wisdom and strength,  
May God the Son bless you with grace and mercy  
May God the Spirit Mother bless you with hope and love  
Amen.

*The Deacon, or the Celebrant, dismisses them with these words*

*People*                    Let us go forth in the name of Christ.  
                                  Thanks be to God.

*or this*

*Deacon*                    Go in peace to love and serve Jesus Christ our Savior.  
*People*                    Thanks be to God.

*or this*

*Deacon*                    Let us go forth into the world,  
                                  rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.  
*People*                    Thanks be to God.

*or this*

*Deacon*                    Let us bless the Lord.  
*People*                    Thanks be to God.

*From the Easter Vigil through the Day of Pentecost "Alleluia, alleluia"*  
*May be added to any of the dismissals.*

*The people respond*     Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.

## Conclusion

The oppression of women in Christianity is drawn from limited readings and translations of the Bible. “Scripture has been used as a bludgeon throughout history as verses are plucked from their context and used to oppress and marginalize countless groups of people.”<sup>65</sup> Images of God as a woman are ignored or translated as neutered. We continue to allow Latin translations of female terms in Greek and Hebrew to dominate our view of God and in turn how we worship and view God in worship.

“As the study of inclusive language leads us around the spiral from metaphorical and generic issues about naming God, to the language of scripture and creed, and on to the spoken word of the church today, we find ourselves called to interact with God, creation, and the Word.”<sup>66</sup>

Until we can create truly inclusive language that expresses the full genderedness of God, women will never be seen as the image of God. We need to recognize the continuing liturgical, theological, and societal damage we do when we choose neutered terms for God.

Today, I find myself leading worship in a much more traditional part of the world. Half of the churches in town do not believe that women should be teaching or preaching, much less that they are fully made in the image of God. This plays out regularly in our local ministerial organizations where male leaders often do not want to fully engage with clergywomen of other churches.

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<sup>65</sup> Clarkson, 29.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 48.



Recently, a new woman worship leader/church planter and I were invited to record a discussion for the local cable TV station discussing women and ordination for International Women's Day. I was able to share that I grew up with a clergywoman in the pulpit and behind the altar, but, that even despite this, I faced hostilities to being able to speak for God even today.

This fellow female church leader shared how, until the last decade, she had attended a local church which proclaimed that only men could be clergy. Despite her rather new revelation that women were called to proclaim the Gospel, she wrote on her blog, "We are not made to adequately represent Jesus or identify with each other from one gender alone. God stamped His full image on both male and female."<sup>67</sup> Without recognizing women as the full image of God, we are not able to fully worship God.

The Episcopal Church needs to recognize and readjust our liturgy to embrace and worship the full genderedness of God. A non-gendered version only serves to further oppress and present women as less than the image of God. I believe fear is a major factor in continuing to make decisions that reinforce God as non-female. The other factor, in my view, is complacency. From far and wide, church leaders say, "Haven't we done enough to be inclusive?" To which I reply, "Absolutely not!"

We as an Episcopal Church continue to pat ourselves on the back for having women as priests and bishops. We post "inclusive" liturgies to appease those calling for change. However, the reality is that we continue to oppress all women and reinforce their second-class status, as long as we do not worship God as female.

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<sup>67</sup> Arndt, Michele, <https://michelearndt.substack.com/p/pastoring-and-leading-with-men> February 16, 2023.

The good news (and it is, in fact, “Gospel” good news, as I have argued) is that we do not have to completely reinvent the wheel. Many denominations have begun this process ahead of us. The United Church of Christ has reworked their hymnal. “The language revisions in *The New Century Hymnal* were undertaken so that, as much as is humanly possible, all people would feel fully included as members of the Body of Christ, The Church.”<sup>68</sup> In this process the United Church of Christ has worked to balance “the gendered metaphors and similes for God.”<sup>69</sup> By acknowledging the hurt and harm caused by traditional English words used in hymns, they are working to create a worship environment that sees the image of God in women, among other oppressed groups.

With the worship changes necessitated by the covid-19 pandemic such as recorded worship and preaching, the examples of preaching about a fully-gendered God are available widely on the internet. The Rev. Dr. Angela Yarber, a Baptist clergywoman and scholar, has written about her experience and scholarship in *The Gendered Pulpit: Sex, Body, and Desire in Preaching and Worship*. “When a preacher utilizes inclusive language, she recognizes the history of oppression embodied in gendered language for humanity and God.”<sup>70</sup> Yarber provides personal experience and scholarship to help preachers proclaim, among other things, the female image of God.

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<sup>68</sup> Clyde, Arthur G. “The language of the New Century Hymnal” in *The New Century Hymnal Companion: A guide to the Hymns*, ed. Kristen L. Forman. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1998, 25.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>70</sup> Yarber, Angela M. *The Gendered Pulpit: Sex, Body, and Desire in Preaching and Worship*. Cleveland, TN: Parson’s Porch Books, 2013, 37.

The personal advice and experiences of a variety of clergywomen who use female terms and imagery for God give us courage and possible roadmaps for more congregations to embrace the worship of a fully-gendered God. Preaching and teaching how female images of God have been excluded from modern biblical translations will help congregations open their minds to the idea of a fully gendered God. Showing congregations how troubles in translation have eliminated the use of female pronouns for God in scholarship will help bridge the liturgical leap parishes need to take to begin this process. Finally, these brave women present some easy transitions to use in worship to begin to embrace female language for God.

In our Episcopal liturgy we need not sacrifice the beauty of our prayers and liturgies, the continuity of our ancient and revered Prayer Book traditions, to recognize our need to eliminate our oppressive language. Our beautiful and meaningful liturgy can be retained with seemingly small changes to language and imagery. We can begin to make small adjustments of faith to create a worshipping community whose prayers reflect what its theology proclaims: Women are the image of God! We worship a God that fully embraces all of our genderedness!

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## Appendix

**Thank you So much for being willing to share your experience with using feminine language for God in worship! Here is a brief survey to help in my DMIN research paper in Women in Religious Leadership through Drew University in Madison, NJ. Please let me know if you have any questions.**

**Heather**

**Questions to ask Parishes that include both feminine and masculine terms for God**

Name of Parish

Denomination

Location

Clergy person

When did your parish start using feminine terms for God?

Do you make regular use of both masculine and feminine terms for God in your worship services? If not, when do you choose to use them?

Were you leading your parish when you started using feminine terms for God?

If yes, what sparked your desire to refer to God with feminine language?

How did parishioners respond at first to using feminine terms for God?

How do parishioners feel now about worshipping with this language?

How has your wider community responded to this expansive language?

How has your wider church leadership responded? (bishops, judicatory staff, etc.)

Has this expansion in worship language changed the spirituality of the parish?

What advice would you give to other churches considering incorporating broadened

language for God to include a fully gendered God?

Where in worship have you chosen to use feminine imagery for God? What, specific, language/words have you used?

Where in worship have you chosen to use traditional masculine language/words for God?

Would you be willing to share a copy of your worship service?

Is there anything else you would like to share about this topic that I have not asked?

**Note:** In the survey responses that follow, I have removed personal names, full church names, and exact locations in order to provide a level of confidentiality. Denominations and states/provinces have remained to give context to the responses.

**Parish A**

**Questions to ask Parishes that include both feminine and masculine terms for God**

Name of Parish – First Presbyterian Church

Denomination Presbyterian (USA)

Location NJ

Clergy person The Rev. Parish A

When did your parish start using feminine terms for God? 2010

Do you make regular use of both masculine and feminine terms for God in your worship services? If not, when do you choose to use them?

*Masculine, Feminine, Non-Binary. Gender-neutral.*

Were you leading your parish when you started using feminine terms for God?

*Yes*

If yes, what sparked your desire to refer to God with feminine language?

*I have done so most of my church life as I came of age as an adult when female theologians were beginning to write about this more (1980s). I think to do otherwise is idolatry*



How did parishioners respond at first to using feminine terms for God?

*Response was mixed. I began with the Benediction, "In the Name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Mother of us all." There were a few who questioned why "Mother." I explained that my perspective was that humans were created in God's image. To limit God to male is creating God in man's image and that this was not what we were supposed to do although the Church had done so since its inception. Younger people liked it. Some older people were receptive. Those who were not eased up when younger people began to use the language. Also, our relationship was built on mutual caring that extended outside of worship. They were happy with many aspects of worship that we began with my tenure and mostly accepted this change in language. I also interspersed sermons with explanations of the gendered language used to refer to the Holy Spirit in Hebrew or "Sophia," or "Mother God." This was not a "sermon series" but throughout the year where appropriate to educate without being too polemic. The gradual introduction of the concepts worked for this congregation. Non-binary is still something of a work in progress in terms of usage by individual congregants, but no negative feedback really.*

How do parishioners feel now about worshipping with this language?

*They have become accustomed to it and barely notice it anymore. Some still use only masculine language, but a few correct themselves when they do. I never correct anyone or draw attention to it one way or the other. Our corporate worship uses male/female/nonbinary with intention. How people express themselves in personal prayer or speaking about God is fine, although some have told me that has changed for them as well.*

How has your wider community responded to this expansive language?

*Most visitors have been delighted that we do it. We are a middle-of-the-road congregation, the church is politically purple, the wider community much the same. Visitors or guests seem to be surprised that we don't only use male images of God but no one has objected.*

How has your wider church leadership responded? (bishops, judicatory staff, etc.)

*Not really applicable – Presbyterian congregations are pretty much left on their own in these choices. But when we've hosted presbytery gatherings, our worship language is intentional and, if we are not planning the worship service, we ask those who are to be mindful of their language.*

Has this expansion in worship language changed the spirituality of the parish?

*Most changes have been subtle. A teenage girl told me that she was thinking of leaving the church because she's lesbian but that we used language that was inclusive helped her stay. She came out to the congregation while making her Confirmation Statement of Faith and was embraced. Others, especially women, have said that they now pray to Mother God. All of our changes have been gradual. There was no strategic plan to do this. It was introduced slowly (I rewrote Scripture where appropriate to use gender-neutral or female or nonbinary images), the Holy Spirit is now regularly referred to as "She" and the Trinity as "Holy Three in One," or "One in Community," or "One-They." Also, more and more of our congregation who have been guests in other worship spaces, tell me that the constant use of male language now seems jarring to them.*

What advice would you give to other churches considering incorporating broadened language for God to include a fully gendered God?

*Know your congregation. For mine, it worked NOT to discuss it but to introduce it gradually as a given. Focus on building strong spiritual relationships outside of worship – be present, build trust, show you love them, don't respond defensively to questions, offer education where appropriate, point out in Bible studies where feminine language is used or nonbinary would be more appropriate. For my congregation, this was less a goal to work toward than an expansion of how we understand God which is not only male/female/non-binary, but companion, leader, one who stands in solidarity with the oppressed, one who never gives up on the powerful. We weren't ever involved in a debate. We simply kept moving and growing in our understanding of God and how we understood how we understand God.*

Where in worship have you chosen to use feminine imagery for God? What, specific, language/words have you used?

*It's peppered throughout the service without any specific tie-in with a theme or topic. The different names/images are appropriate for almost any reference to God. Mother, Mama, Mother Hen, She, Sophia/Wisdom, Shaddai (occasionally and with specific references)*

Where in worship have you chosen to use traditional masculine language/words for God?

*It's not really that intentional. Our hymnal is not inclusive in divine language so we sing what we read. Most of the Scripture readings are still male in the divine language, but there are specific times when I change it to female and explain why. What is intentional is to worship with multiple images of masculine, feminine, non-binary, and gender neutral throughout the worship service. I don't want to fall into traps of "strong father God" "gentle mother God" "angry father God," "forgiving mother God." Language and imagery is problematic throughout the translation (NRSV) and the culture. The fullness of God is not only gender, but the parts of God that are reflected in humanity.*

Would you be willing to share a copy of your worship service?

*Yes – but I'm not sure it would reveal much in terms of language. But glad to do it.*

**Parish B****Questions to ask Parishes that include both feminine and masculine terms for God**

Name of Parish Moravian Fellowship

Denomination Moravian

Location NC

Clergy person The Rev. Parish B

Survey completed by The Rev. Parish B-parishioner

When did your parish start using feminine terms for God? Our parish began meeting during Covid in April 2020, so we met outside at picnic shelters. We have used feminine terms for God intermixed with other terms since our inception.

Do you make regular use of both masculine and feminine terms for God in your worship services? If not, when do you choose to use them? Yes!

Were you leading your parish when you started using feminine terms for God? No.

Though I'm Moravian Clergy, I attend (not lead) this parish. When I did serve on a parish staff (2008-2011 as the Associate Pastor) I occasionally used feminine language during worship leadership.

If yes, what sparked your desire to refer to God with feminine language?

Moravians have long referred to the Holy Spirit as female, so "She" language is not uncommon from my experience. I think there's more awareness for it now than when I was growing up, but it has never felt super controversial and I've never had negative

feedback. For Moravians, it's theological.

How did parishioners respond at first to using feminine terms for God? No reaction remembered.

How do parishioners feel now about worshipping with this language? No reaction. It's common and normal.

How has your wider community responded to this expansive language? We are still small and new, but within our church family, it's comfortable. For those outside the community, we are still just starting to connect and reach out, so I'm not aware of it coming up yet.

How has your wider church leadership responded? (bishops, judicatory staff, etc.)  
Feminine language is used by leadership as well. Our new Provincial President (Provincial Elders Conference President—top elected position) uses She language regularly. He's new and very justice-minded, so I haven't heard any issues yet.

Has this expansion in worship language changed the spirituality of the parish? No, since we're new and it's common.

What advice would you give to other churches considering incorporating broadened language for God to include a fully gendered God? Have historical, theological, and

scriptural basis to refer to if there are questions. Don't make a big deal of things—include it where it fits and don't force it. When it's not used (i.e. hymns), I often insert my own "She" where needed, or change He to God to gender-neutral it for my own singing.

Where in worship have you chosen to use feminine imagery for God? What, specific, language/words have you used? Prayers, benedictions, blessings, sermons—both with pronouns and with images of God as she (mother hen, etc)

Where in worship have you chosen to use traditional masculine language/words for God? Only where I must because it's written in the Book of Worship/hymnal/hymns and I'm leading. I try to stay gender neutral in terms where possible.

Would you be willing to share a copy of your worship service? (Currently they are not published, so I can't share recent ones. I have copies of old services from my time as associate I can scan if you'd like.)

Is there anything else you would like to share about this topic that I have not asked?

**Parish C****Questions to ask Parishes that include both feminine and masculine terms for God**

Name of Parish United Church of Christ

Denomination UCC

Location Washington

Clergy person The Rev. Parish C

When did your parish start using feminine terms for God?

I've been here for a year and regularly use them in rotation. However, I think the church has been using them for some time prior to my arrival - it didn't make any waves when I began using them.

Do you make regular use of both masculine and feminine terms for God in your worship services? If not, when do you choose to use them?

Yes, feminine and masculine and gender-neutral (they/them or non-gendered names).

Mostly, I tend toward non-gendered names. I use male pronouns and names very sparingly since they have been over-used in the past.

Were you leading your parish when you started using feminine terms for God?

No, I've always used them (since 14 or so)



If yes, what sparked your desire to refer to God with feminine language?

It has always felt more resonant to me, more fitting with the creator-ness of God to imagine God as a feminine presence - nurturing, motherly, loving, embracing.

How did parishioners respond at first to using feminine terms for God?

n/a, don't know

How do parishioners feel now about worshipping with this language?

They do not in general remark upon it - it's very usual to hear many names for God in any given worship service. I did have a precious moment with an 85 year old who came up to me after a service and told me that - because of the casual and comfortable way I referred to God with a female-gendered name ( I think it was Mother to us all), there was something about the...nonchalantness about the way I said it that allowed her to hear it in a different way, and in that moment her entire idea of who God was was transformed.

That was pretty neat :-)

How has your wider community responded to this expansive language?

I don't think they have any opportunity to hear it - we mostly use it in worship or internal documents (newsletters etc)

How has your wider church leadership responded? (bishops, judicatory staff, etc.)

We don't have those in the UCC :-) AND it's less common in our denomination, especially in the PNW, to hear exclusively male language that it would be to hear non-gendered language. For example, our former Conference President (closest thing we have to a Bishop) would greet us with, 'Siblings in Christ' rather than 'brothers and sisters in Christ'.

Has this expansion in worship language changed the spirituality of the parish?

Yes, I believe so. Using many names for God helps us continually reckon with who we understand God to be, and see and name the sacred in the many around us.

What advice would you give to other churches considering incorporating broadened language for God to include a fully gendered God?

an easy first step is to simply replace the word 'God' for any pronouns for God. It's a bit awkward at first, but you get used to it. And what a relief that brings, and spaciousness, instead of hearing 'Him' and 'He' all the time to refer to the Divine. Then you can start using She for the Holy Spirit.

I honestly cannot imagine participating in a church where I only hear male-gendered language for God, I would find that suffocating and so alienating. Even where you might receive push back, think of the people who may for the first time hear themselves reflected and included in the language of imago dei.

Where in worship have you chosen to use feminine imagery for God? What, specific, language/words have you used?

Gosh, it's everywhere. In the prayers, in the sermon, in the offering, in the call to worship, in the benediction...

Some words include: Holy Mystery; Sacred One, Holy One; God of all; Loving Mother; Creator; Sovereign One; Loving Mother; Holy Father; God of the Darkness, the Divine, In this advent season, we pray together using the phrase 'In the still dark womb of God'; Womanist Theologian and Priest Rev Dr Wilda Gafney has a number of gorgeous names including Womb of Life, Source of All and more I'm looking forward to using.

Where in worship have you chosen to use traditional masculine language/words for God?

We use it the least, mostly because it exists so presently in our memories and in the traditional hymns and prayers we still sometimes use. But sometimes I will intentionally use a more masculine sounding name. I rarely intentionally use he/him pronouns.

Would you be willing to share a copy of your worship service?

sure.

Is there anything else you would like to share about this topic that I have not asked?

**Parish D****Questions to ask Parishes that include both feminine and masculine terms for God**

Name of Parish United Church

Denomination United Church of Canada

Location MB, Canada

Clergy person

Rev. Parish D

When did your parish start using feminine terms for God?

I've been here 4.5 years, and I know they occasionally used them before I arrived, but we started doing it more regularly about two years ago.

Do you make regular use of both masculine and feminine terms for God in your worship services? If not, when do you choose to use them?

I use an introductory line to the Lord's Prayer "Creator God, Our Loving Parent, Our Mother and..." And then we continue with "Our Father". This is said almost every Sunday. Besides this though, the use of other gendered terms for God happens less often. I tend to avoid using pronouns for God when I speak, although we have used he, she or they occasionally, including in hymns and choir anthems. I will often use scripture passages from The Inclusive Bible which uses gender neutral terms for God mostly, but which will use the feminine for the Holy Spirit.

Were you leading your parish when you started using feminine terms for God?

I have used feminine terms for God in my previous pastoral charge, but have expanded my use since being in this church.

If yes, what sparked your desire to refer to God with feminine language?

For a time during the pandemic, we worshipped along with our then- Moderator, and he introduced the Lord's Prayer with an intro that included Our Mother and Our Father... and I liked it because it added the feminine without interrupting the words that were familiar to everyone, and people could join in with me, or wait until Our Father, as they wished. I've adapted the intro line a couple times to include gender neutral parent language, and Creator in honour of the image used by our Indigenous kin.

Our choir director is also enthusiastic about the use of other terms, and so that has been helpful. She was the one that suggested the use of They as an appropriate pronoun for God, and changed the lyrics of one of our anthems to use They,

How did parishioners respond at first to using feminine terms for God?

There wasn't much at first that I remember. I did preach about a year or so ago about the use of different pronouns and images for God, and after the sermon, one of my elderly congregants got up and left! I visited him that week, and he wasn't mad, just "old and set in his ways". He was reassured that he himself didn't have to start calling God a woman.

How do parishioners feel now about worshipping with this language?

I have heard a couple times from people that like the intro phrase to the Lord's Prayer, and one woman asked me why we were doing it, and I explained it and she seemed to think it was interesting, but other than that, there hasn't been much talk about it that I've heard of.

How has your wider community responded to this expansive language?

They haven't as far as I know. I don't tend to use the intro phrase for services that I do outside of regular worship, i.e. - funerals and services at our local care home, because it takes a bit of explanation and it feels more appropriate to use the familiar language.

How has your wider church leadership responded? (bishops, judicatory staff, etc.)

They haven't, but there is widespread use of the feminine and gender neutral terms for God throughout the wider church, and I got the first idea from our Moderator!

Has this expansion in worship language changed the spirituality of the parish?

I'm not sure.

What advice would you give to other churches considering incorporating broadened language for God to include a fully gendered God?

I think it was useful for me to preach on using expanded language for God. In the sermon, I admitted the times I've felt uncomfortable with it, and why I felt I should challenge myself to use it more, and why I felt it was a faithful way to speak about God. It also helps to have a couple other key people on board!

Where in worship have you chosen to use feminine imagery for God? What, specific, language/words have you used?

Mostly the Lord's Prayer as I said above. Often images such as Mother, Mother Eagle, Mother Hen, etc. Holy Spirit as feminine, Woman Wisdom, have also been used at times.

Where in worship have you chosen to use traditional masculine language/words for God?

Mostly the Lord's Prayer as I said above. Occasionally I will keep language such as "Lord" of "King" in scripture or liturgy if it feels appropriate to use the familiar terms.

Would you be willing to share a copy of your worship service?

Sur, but I think the most you'll see is what I wrote above about the Lord's Prayer intro.

Is there anything else you would like to share about this topic that I have not asked?

No. Just a question- will this research paper be published- I'd love to read it. And also, just confirming you won't be using the names of the congregations?