# Inclusive Language to Use in Inreach, Outreach, and Communication

*This document was created as part of an open day of developing resources for Quakers on January 14, 2017. Please send edits and suggestions to improve this to lisa@neym.org*

<u>Why use inclusive language:</u>
Inclusive language communicates understanding of identity, power, and a commitment to create spaces that are more respectful and encompassing of everyone. Inclusive language is a way to begin the internal transformation of letting go of learned behaviors of separation and discrimination. Language is constantly changing and shifting; some suggestions on this document may soon be outdated. Listening keenly to how people talk about themselves and their identities is a critical part of keeping our language inclusive.

This is not about right or wrong, or being "politically correct," but about the intention to truly include, about listening and learning, and about transformation. We will get it wrong, we will offend, we will make mistakes *and* we can work to make amends, learn, and keep going. We know we need everybody and we want to welcome to everybody.

**Keep it person-centered:** Place the person first and the identifier second. For example: people with disabilities, instead of "the disabled"; someone who uses a wheelchair, instead of "wheelchair-bound"; people who are homeless instead of "the homeless"; a person with special needs or learning differences, instead of "SPED" or "Special needs person," etc.

**Focus on roles:** This means releasing ourselves from historical patterns and assumptions about who does what. For example: parents and caregivers, instead of mothers and fathers; firefighter, instead of firemen, etc.

**Expand what common language tends to narrow:** Many of us live outside the narrow binary of male and female. In addition to inviting people to share their pronouns, our language should reflect the expansive nature of gender identities and experiences. For example: siblings, instead

of "brothers and sisters"; friends or people, instead of "ladies and gentlemen"; children, instead of "boys and girls." Additionally, families come in all different configurations and are created in many different ways. What is the goal of your event or communication? How can your language include all? For example, instead of a "new baby-welcoming" offer a "new child-welcoming," including children who have joined the meeting through adoption, marriage, fostering, or other ways becoming family.

**Keep different facets of identity separate**: Often race and ethnicity get lumped together when in reality ethnicity holds specific culture and nuance within a larger racial group (or not). Similarly, gender identity (cisgender or transgender or gender queer, or more) are different from sexual orientation (straight, lesbian, etc.), but often get confused or lumped together. Be clear what you are talking about.

**Respect how people choose to identify themselves:** When we are unsure about how someone identifies (and there is a concrete reason we need to know), ask permission to ask about identity: "May I ask what pronouns you use?" Use the language and terms that people use. For example, someone may identify as "white" while another person who shares heritage with them might identify as "European American."

**Consciousness about which identities are getting normed:** Quakers tend to "norm" the identities that are most present in our communities. This can make those who don't share those identities—be it age, race, or class—feel excluded and marginalized. Pay attention to which identities are taken for granted, named as majority, or called out in patronizing ways (i.e., "It is so great to hear from the Young Friends").

**Accessibility of language:** We have many acronyms to refer to organizations and the culture and beliefs of different Quaker spaces. Similarly, we use words that have one meaning in standard English and another within Quaker-speak. Make sure that acronyms are written out in full, with links if in electronic documents, or explained so that those new to Friends understand what is being said and meant.

**Move language out of the binary:** In a consensus-based faith, binary language often has little use. Phrases like "most of us are ___" neither includes nor works to build consensus. Similarly, language that creates categorical extremes—never, always, we all, etc.—is rarely accurate.

**Solicit feedback:** Create ways for people to easily give feedback about language and inclusion issues. This could be a comment box, anonymous evaluations, invitations to talk with organizers, or more. Gladly accept the feedback and then seek to incorporate it. This page has a list of websites that have more information about how to talk about identity inclusively.