



In search of a genderless God

An ongoing personal investigation into the male -female partnership

By Bridie Boyd



It’s often hard to admit our own hypocrisies. I have failed often enough. My most recent blunder was when I suggested a friend might wish to eat less sugar while I was starting on my second cupcake

within five minutes! It’s the old adage of the pot calling the kettle black.

The church, too, can be hypocritical. On the one hand, we champion equal rights, fairness, and justice. On the other, we adhere to traditional biases, outdated practices and, in my opinion, a sometimes undetected gender imbalance in the way we do leadership.

Are you brave and honest enough to do a stocktake of your church or faith-based group?

+How many women are on your morning tea, flowers, cleaning or crèche roster? How many men?

+At your vestry meetings, who usually makes the cups of tea or starts to clean up?

+If you have a men’s meeting such as a Men’s Breakfast, who caters for this? Do your men ever cater for, or provide crèche facilities for any of your women’s meetings?

+When was the last time you heard a sermon or talked about the female attributes of God? (Yes they are there, and they are biblical!)

A look into many of the

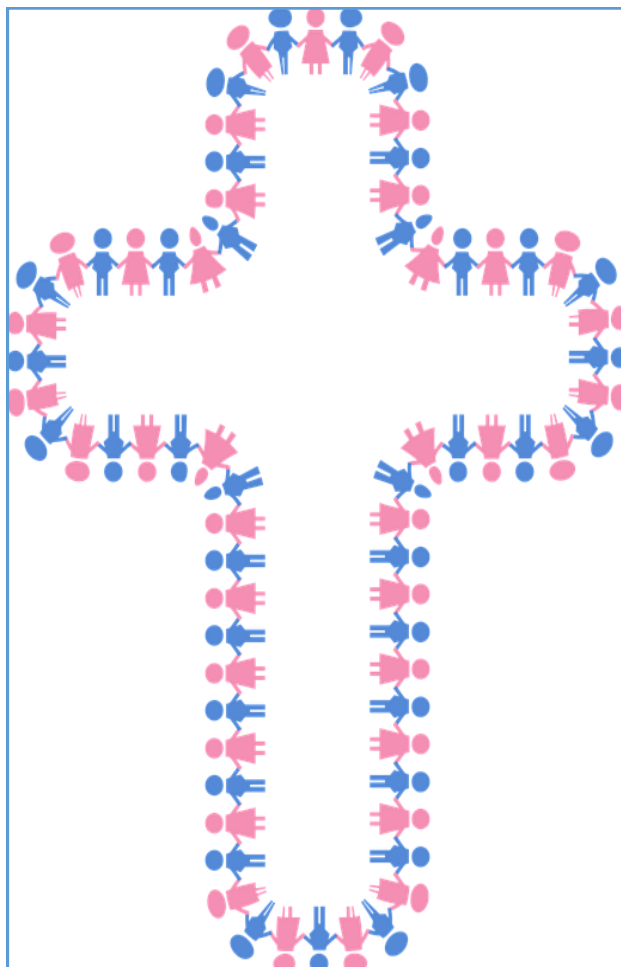
churches I have personal experience with tells me we are not doing particularly well at treating men and women equally in the day to day running of the church.

So, we know and accept that both genders, male and female, were created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). So it stands to reason that God has both male and female attributes. But the language we use to describe God is often skewed towards the masculine: God the Father. And I get that. The male image is one of strength, power and authority. And these aspects of God are important.

But even when we talk about God as love or God’s compassion (attributes we often think of as feminine today), we still call him Father (think of the Prodigal Son). But aren’t the attributes of love and compassion also feminine aspects? We hardly ever hear about the times when Jesus wept (Luke 19:41, John 11:35, Matt 26:38, Heb 5:7) and

wanted to gather his people like a hen gathers her chicks (Matt 23: 37). Why do we hardly ever see a reference to Mother God? And if we do, is it fully accepted or is it seen as “feminist language” and a little bit fringe?

With this in mind, I decided to do some digging into the experiences of women in the church. I am in the process of interviewing women, both clergy and lay, about their experiences and also delve into how they understand the feminine in God. Interviews have included a nurse and new mother, a Bishop, a chaplain, a Franciscan Nobliate and teacher, a student, and a priest. Every single interview to date has been both fascinating and a little worrying.





My thesis is that the feminine aspects of God do not weaken the image, nor alter God fundamentally. (God is the same yesterday, today and forever – yay!). Talking about God using feminine language is not apostasy. The Bible portrays God as having both masculine and feminine attributes and neither are portrayed as 'better'. Well, that's my opinion and I am happy to share it.

So, as I am investigating some new ways to work these ideas out in practise, I am getting the ball rolling by advocating for the inclusion of female language within the liturgy. I'm not trying to be modern for the sake of it, I'm attempting to be biblical. I'm not trying to set women above men or alienate men, but to include women and the female experience for everyone in a meaningful way.

What does this look like and how can we start to use inclusive language in our Sunday worship? On the next page is a version of the Lord's Prayer, from our prayer book, that is more inclusive in its language. Perhaps you could experiment using it? But even something as simple as beginning our prayers with this alternative is a start:

"Holy God, Mother and Father to us all, giver of life, comforter, carer and protector..."

So have an honest think about how you view God, mull over any subtle bias in your church, and think about how you might start to use more inclusive language in support of a balanced image of God.

This opinion piece was written by Bridie Boyd. Bridie is a youth worker and advocate for inclusive church here in Christchurch. If you are interested in this topic, check out her Youtube interviews, called "Women & God" with various different interviewees such as the Reverends Herles-Mooar and Riley, and our previous Bishop.

Bridie is continuing to interview and investigate aspects of the feminine divine.

If you would like more information, want to talk about your experiences, or do an interview, get in touch on boyd.bridie@gmail.com

Alternative version of the Lord's Prayer

A New Zealand Prayer Book / He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa page 181

Eternal Spirit Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,

Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all.

Loving God, in whom is heaven.

The hallowing of your name echoes through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the earth!

**Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.**

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen

