



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on November 28, 2017

## Church of Sweden Embracing “Gender Neutral” Worship

The Church of Sweden, an Evangelical Lutheran church with 6.1 million members, has updated its 31-year-old service book, and among the changes in the manual for weekly worship in the denomination’s churches is a recommendation that clergy opt for gender-neutral language when referring to God, while refraining from the use of the term “Lord” and the pronoun “He.”

Archbishop Antje Jackelén, the head of the Church of Sweden and the nation’s first female archbishop, said that the “gender-inclusive” language, which will begin in May 2018, has been discussed in the denomination for more than 30 years.

“Theologically, for instance, we know that God is beyond our gender determinations — God is not human,” she told Sweden’s TT news agency.

Explaining the changes, a spokeswoman for the denomination, Sofija Pedersen Videke, said that in the updated service book “we talk about Jesus Christ, but in a few places we have changed it to say ‘God’ instead of ‘he.’ We have some prayer options that are more gender-neutral than others.”

Under the new recommendations, ministers will still be free to open services as they always have, “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,” but are being urged to employ the more gender-neutral “in the name of God and the Holy Trinity.”

One of the denomination’s pastors, Sofia Camnerin of Sweden’s Equmenia Church, defended the shift to “inclusive language,” explaining that it “is based on an awareness of different types of discrimination and inequality in our society.” She added that “referring to God as ‘Lord’ consolidates [gender] hierarchies and the subordination of women in a white, Western feminist context. Liberation theologians, along with feminist and postcolonial theologians, have been crucial in identifying how legitimizing hierarchies leads to violence and subordination.”

However, there has been plenty of criticism of the changes in both clerical and academic circles. Christer Pahlmblad, an associate theology professor at Sweden’s Lund University, warned that the move would undermine “the doctrine of the Trinity and the community with the other Christian churches.” He added: “It really isn’t smart if the Church of Sweden becomes known as a church that does not respect the common theology heritage.”

And Church of Sweden minister Helena Edlund criticized denominational officials over their “total unwillingness to listen to criticism.” Addressing the new gender inclusive language, she warned of the potential failure of the church “to notice the small changes and then gradually over time we find ourselves looking at drastic changes we never would have accepted if they were put to us immediately.”

She added that “is it unlikely, for example, that in five years we will be praying, ‘Our Mother Who is in Heaven’ in our churches? A few years ago, this was called an impossibility, but the church handbook





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proposal makes it possible.”

*Photo of Uppsala Cathedral, headquarters of the Church of Sweden*



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