

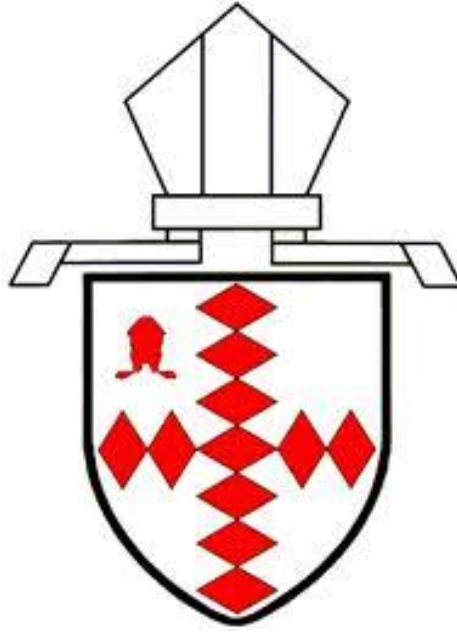
***'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10)***

***'In Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Greek.***

***There is no difference between male and female.***

***You are all the same in Christ Jesus.'***

**(Gal 3:28)**



## **Southwark Diocese**

The Church of England serving the people of  
South London and East Surrey

### **'All One in Christ'**

***The Biblical Imperative –***

***A parish resource pack on disability***

***As children of God, we have a new dignity and God calls us to fullness of life.***  
*(Introduction to the Common Worship Rite of Baptism 2006)*

## **Introduction.**

There are many reasons why we need to look at making our church buildings, our services and our church fellowship accessible to all people regardless of disability. This paper is for benefit of those who have a leadership responsibility on matters regarding disability and includes a series of short Bible reflections that explore the issue from a number of different angles, legal and social as well as theological. The paper's purpose is to help to ask the right questions regarding the church and disability and support those with little experience of engaging with people who have disabilities. The hope is that through working through this paper parishes will see the potential of including people with a disability more centrally in the life of the church as a missionary opportunity not just a response to new legislation.

## **The Biblical Imperative**

### **What is written in the Law?**

#### **The parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37**

Both the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) of 1995 (further amended in 2005) and the Equality Act of 2010 have made it illegal to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of disability within the UK.

*“Failure or refusal to provide a service that is offered to other people to a disabled person is discrimination unless it can be justified”<sup>1</sup>*

Places of worship are included as specific examples of the everyday services to which people with disabilities should be able to expect access. We are asked to make 'reasonable adjustments' so that members of the congregation who have disabilities and visitors can access our churches and our churches offer the same possibilities open to all other members of the congregation. **'Reasonable adjustments' means that account is taken of financial resources and practical considerations of the service provider** so that, for example, a small church on a housing estate would not be expected to be able to make as many adjustments as a wealthy civic church.

Obviously the law should be obeyed, but as Christians do we only do what the law requires? Jesus posed his challenge to the lawyer in the Gospel of Luke (10:26) before telling the parable of the Good Samaritan in which he suggests that our call to love our neighbour goes far beyond what the law requires. What this means for us is that as Christians, the DDA becomes a tool to enable us to further fulfill our call to love and serve our neighbour. It is not just our buildings but also our attitudes that

<sup>1</sup> Definition from the DDA website: [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Everydaylifeandaccess/Everydayaccess/DG\\_4018353](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Everydaylifeandaccess/Everydayaccess/DG_4018353)

can throw up barriers that make it difficult for people with disabilities to access all that Christ offers through the church. Examining our attitude to our neighbour who has a disability costs nothing and can make all the difference between people with disabilities feeling rejected, not just by the church but by the God the church represents; or a person with disabilities feeling welcomed and loved and valued as God values them.

## **The Body of Christ**

### **1 Corinthians 12**

What part of the body of Christ are people with disabilities? Historically people with disabilities have been seen as being served by the church as the body of Christ rather than as members of the body with their own spiritual gifts to offer. To see people with disabilities as fully part of the body requires a shift in our perception of what disability is.

We all have 'models' in our head that frame the way we see other people, especially those who are different to us. When it comes to people with disabilities there are two main models in operation.

The first, called the 'medical model' sees disability as the problem of an individual, a deviation from what is normal. This model suggests that if an individual cannot access something they shouldn't expect the same life as 'normal' people. This model makes access into a luxury to be implemented if we have enough time and money, and potentially people with disabilities into helpless objects who should be grateful for whatever they get.

The second model is called the 'social model' which suggests that there is a difference between 'impairment' - the part of the individual that doesn't work properly, and 'disability' - the barriers imposed by a society set up for the non-disabled majority. In this model access is about the whole community taking responsibility for making sure all are included as a matter of justice.

The 'medical model' can potentially make people with disabilities feel like a burden, like second class citizens. The 'social model' is experienced as profoundly liberating and encourages people with disabilities to see themselves as children of God equal to anyone else.

Paul's vision of the body of Christ underpins this social model. It is a vision of a church where all members have their place, their part to play and where all members work together. It is a vision where 'the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable' (verse 22) are to be treated with honour and respect. If we do not do this, the whole body suffers.

## **All one in Christ**

### **Galatians 3:26-28**

If we needed any more justification for adopting the social model, it can be found in Paul's letter to the Galatians. In verses 27 and 28 Paul triumphantly asserts that all who have been baptized are clothed with Christ and that is the only criteria that matters before God. There are no distinctions based on race or gender or indeed denomination, social background, disability or age.

This passage also reminds us to be careful in the words we use to and about other people. 'Jew' or 'Greek' could be used to insult and divide as well as describe others. In the same way we label someone as deaf and treat them as stupid or assume someone with mental health problems will be violent. Often we mean well, but still ask the carer not the disabled person if they want sugar, or make assumptions about what someone can or can't do. In Christ we are people first and disabled second so our terminology needs to reflect that fact. We are people with disabilities not the disabled, we are wheelchair users not wheelchair bound, we are deaf without speech not deaf and dumb, and we have learning difficulties not mental handicaps. Each of us will have our preferred way of describing ourselves.

All are one in Christ; let our ways of thinking and speaking reflect that fact.

## **The Kingdom of God**

### **Revelation 7:9-12, Luke 14:12-24**

When Jesus first appeared he said he came to proclaim the Kingdom of God (Mark 1: 15). Two passages make clear what the Kingdom of God means for the church and disabled people:

Revelation 7:9 where at the culmination of history all nations, tribes, people, languages stand equally before the throne, in front of the Lamb, worshipping God together.

Luke 14: 12-24 is the parable of the Great Feast where Jesus specifically mentions people with disabilities as being invited to the table.

As church communities we have a unique opportunity to model this inclusiveness in the everyday life of our churches by proactively being accessible and inviting and welcoming people of all kinds. Wouldn't it be great if when someone asks us 'what is this Kingdom of God you talk about?' we could reply by pointing to our church and saying 'come in and see for yourself'.

## **Our Response to the Biblical Imperative that we are 'All One in Christ'.**

### **Introduction**

Churches take action to try and become more accessible to and more inclusive of people with disabilities for a variety of reasons. Whatever our reasons, this section attempts to outline a process which we can follow, including practical action we may take to help us take the desire to be accessible and inclusive to the next stage, whilst holding fast to our duty of care in putting into practice the recommendations of the 2010 Equality Act. At every stage of the process we may call on the skills and experience of those within our diocese who live with disabilities, and those who work with and for those who live with disabilities, for advice to meet our specific situation.

The process towards an accessible and inclusive church comes under three headings; **access, attitude and awareness**.

Access is the one people immediately think of in terms of welcoming people with disabilities; it includes making adaptations to the church building so that all can enter, see and hear regardless of their particular need. Some of these adaptations are very quick and simple and cost very little, others are more complex and may be a long term project.

Also important – and costing nothing – is Attitude. Attitude is how we think about people with disabilities, the language we use to talk to them and about them, and how we relate to them when we meet them.

The final section is about Awareness. No church can make sufficient adaptations to be able to meet the needs of every possible person who might come through the door. A church that is aware is a church that can spot needs as they arise and have some idea how to meet them in the short and long term. A church that is aware knows where its shortcomings are and as a result keeps them on the agenda for improvement.

By working through this process, your church may become a place that people with disabilities can not only access, but where they can feel welcomed and included as part of God's people.

### **Access**

- The first step in the process is an accessibility audit.
- It is important that the whole PCC is aware of and supports this process as they will be responsible for implementing it.
- The audit may be requested by the PCC at any time. If there is a complaint from a disabled person against the church, an audit may be offered as part of dealing with the complaint. (for complaints procedure see section 11 )

- The diocesan disability advisor is available to offer advice and if necessary visit the church and church hall looking for areas that would prove a barrier to full participation by someone with a disability.
- The result of the audit will be a report including a list of proposed improvements, some of which may be quick and easy to do; others may be more expensive and thus long term.
- The church may be encouraged not only to provide access, but to advertise their provision so that someone arriving in a wheelchair knows how to get attention of the person who can put out the portable ramp for example, or someone who needs large print copies knows where to find them, or someone with coeliac disease knows who to ask to make sure a gluten free wafer is available at communion.

## **Attitude**

Of the three parts of this section, attitude is the hardest to explain and assess, but the easiest to meet. No expenditure or alterations to buildings are required for a church to have a positive attitude towards disabled people and the smallest congregation can have a good attitude.

So what is good attitude?

- A good attitude sees the person first and the disability second.
- A good attitude is one that consults with people with disabilities wherever possible over what their needs are and how they can be met. This can mean asking a person with visual impairment how they prefer to be guided, or asking a wheelchair user whether they need help. It can involve asking a person with hearing impairment what their preferred communication method is or asking someone with dyslexia how their reading can be facilitated. Only if communication with the person with disabilities is impossible should carers or helpers be asked for their advice.
- A church with a good attitude as a matter of course would consult with people with disabilities before making adaptations to the church. This ensures, for example, that ramps and toilets actually are useable by those in a wheelchair (you can't assume that architects will get dimensions and practicalities right) and large print service sheets are actually readable by those who need them (with appropriate fonts and text sizes and colour of paper.)
- A church with a good attitude as a matter of course would recognise the gifts of people with disabilities and seek where possible to involve them in every part of the life of the church, including the leadership.

- A good attitude means being sensitive about the language used in talking about people with disabilities (for example not using words and phrases such as 'the disabled,' handicapped, 'deaf and dumb,' spastic, 'mentally subnormal.')
- The terms that most people are happy with can be found throughout this pack. If in doubt, you can always ask a person with disabilities how they choose to describe themselves.
- A good attitude should as a matter of course respect the dignity and human rights of each and every member of the congregation; each seen as an essential part of what it means to be a Christian church and not an added on luxury.

### **Awareness**

Awareness involves the ability to proactively pick up on the needs of individual people with disabilities and strive to meet them, or at least plan to meet them.

Three things that can facilitate awareness are:

- Appointing a member of the PCC to be responsible for issues relating to disability and sending them on disability awareness training. This person may then become a resource for the congregation and a contact person for any issues that come up. They should not be expected to do all the work in making the church accessible and welcoming, that is still the responsibility of the PCC and the church as a whole.
- Encouraging all members of the congregation to reflect on issues of disability and difference e.g. through sermons (perhaps with a guest preacher who has personal experience of disability) or bible studies as well as good examples set by church leaders.
- Adopting a disability-equality policy and making sure it is implemented in every activity provided by the church. A model disability equality policy can be found below.

### **A Model Disability - Equality Policy**

We are committed to becoming a parish which includes all people and which is committed to inclusion and social justice. Thus:

- We will make sure our parish is welcoming, helpful, sensitive and vigorous in breaking down those barriers, which in the past have excluded people with a disability.

- We will seek the opinion of members with a disability and where appropriate their carers on issues affecting the congregational life and outreach of our parish community.
- In our involvement with other denominations, neighbourhood groups, statutory agencies and voluntary organisations we will aim to listen to and work alongside organisations working for and with people with disabilities.
- We will undertake an audit to identify those barriers, which prevent people with disabilities from: Being included and feeling welcomed at our worship, committees, schools, social events and groups. Gaining physical access to our buildings, where possible and moving about once they are inside.
- We will seek to offer appropriate pastoral, practical and prayerful support to people with disabilities and their families.
- We will monitor our performance and seek advice from the Diocese, relevant statutory and voluntary organisations, and those agencies and self help groups, which are working for and with people with disabilities.

We will pray, work and reflect on our commitment to inclusion and social justice at all levels within the life of our parish, its committees, organisations, schools and groups.

## **Types of Disability**

### **Permanent Wheelchair Users**

A wheelchair, like a shoe or a car, is a mobility aid that enables a person to get around.

Try to talk of 'wheelchair users' and avoid talking about 'wheelchair bound'.

If you want to differentiate between people who remain in a chair against those who just use it to get from place to place, use the term 'permanent' or 'essential' wheelchair user.

When talking to a wheelchair user, try to ensure that your eyes are at the same level as his/hers, perhaps by squatting or sitting down. Don't lean on the wheelchair - it is part of the user's personal space. In addition some wheelchairs are sophisticated so leaning on them could damage them or you might accidentally start the motor on a motorised chair!

Do not grab the back of someone's wheelchair to push him/her along even if you think the person is struggling. If you are concerned, ask if help is needed. Many wheelchair users can get around under their own power and prefer to!



People can do almost anything in a wheelchair including sailing, climbing, using escalators and dancing. Some want to, others do not - remember people are individuals.

People may choose not to use a wheelchair for a variety of reasons. Having one discreetly available for use if it is needed, because distances are greater than anticipated for example, can be helpful.

Practically a wheelchair kept inside the church could be a boon when any member or visitor has broken a leg or had certain operations!

Many people with walking difficulties prefer a few steps to a ramp; the steps should have a hand rail. All hand rails should be designed so that there is no danger of the end of the rail catching in clothing or bag straps.

### **People who are blind or visually impaired**

Only a very small percentage of blind people have no sight.

Make sure you do not make assumptions about the extent of a person's impairment. One person who may have a guide dog might use a Braille note taker, while others will read large print and write their own notes.

When you first meet a blind person, introduce yourself. If you don't know the person's name, touch them on the arm, so that they know that you are talking to them. When you are going, say so. Do not leave them talking to open space.

Take professional advice on the lighting, as well planned and appropriate lighting helps people who are visually impaired.

Remember, people who are visually impaired may not pick up body language.

If someone has a guide dog remember that it is a working animal and should not be petted or shown particular attention. Remember, however, that it too has needs such as for water and toilet facilities.

### **When offering assistance to a blind person:**

Allow him/her to take your arm.

Guide rather than push or pull the person.

Advise on approaching steps (whether they go up or down) and other obstacles as they occur.

To help them sit down place his/her hand on the back of the chair.

Explain any changes, even if minor or temporary, in the layout of the building to people who are visually impaired (e.g., a crib at Christmas placed in what might have been a large open area would cause an obstacle).

### **Access for people who are d/Deaf, Deaf/Blind or Hard of Hearing**

*(Big D" Deaf people tend to identify themselves as culturally deaf, and have a strong deaf identity. The Big D Deaf may have attended schools for the deaf, while the small d tend to have attended mainstream schools and/or never attended a school for the deaf.)*

Attitude is all important. Good access for anyone with impaired hearing means remembering week in and week out what adaptations need to be made so we can understand what is being said. Access isn't just about Church services either; we need access to all aspects of church life and fellowship.

There are wide variations in the communication needs of d/Deaf and hard of hearing people. A person with impaired hearing may use a hearing aid and/or lip-read and/or use sign language. If they use sign language they may or may not speak and/or read and write English. The first thing to do when a d/Deaf or hard of hearing person comes into the church is to find out from them how they prefer to communicate and what areas of church life they find difficult to access.

Specific adaptations for each mode of communication are detailed on further pages, but there are some things that all churches could do at all times.

Install a loop system and ensure it is switched on and working. Make sure all speakers use a microphone. Put up signs on doors to say there is a loop system available.

Ensure hymn numbers, page numbers and Bible references are written up somewhere and not just announced. Even better print all service information out on one sheet along with all notices!

Check with families if there are any sign language users or lip-readers expected at an occasional office/ special event. If there are, book an interpreter or lip-speaker from the diocesan sign language interpreting team.

Make sure the d/Deaf person does not sit alone at the front - someone sitting with them can make sure they have not missed any information.

### **Access for people with hearing impairments/hearing aid users**

If you are aware someone has a hearing impairment try and speak clearly, without exaggerated mouth movements and without shouting.

Be aware of background noise - ask people to turn the TV or radio down, take someone to a quiet(er) corner in church, make sure people talk one at a time in meetings.

Install a loop system in church and ask someone who wears a hearing aid to test it regularly. (Loops work with hearing aids to cut down background noise and reverberations).

Use the microphone which goes with the loop and make sure it is switched on and the batteries are working.

If possible, try and hold meetings in a room with a loop - which may mean the church. It is possible to buy/borrow portable loops that will cover a meeting room.

Many loop systems do not cover the sanctuary, so if Readers or clergy or anyone else leading worship wears a hearing aid you may need to think about where they sit for sermons and prayers and other unscripted parts of the service.

People with a hearing impairment may also be helped by the aids to lip reading. (See below)

### **Access for profoundly deaf people/ lip-readers**

If you are speaking to someone who is lip-reading, speak clearly without exaggerated mouth movements or shouting.

Keep trying - rephrase sentences, write down key words - show the person with the hearing impairment that they are worth the effort.

If all else fails, suggest using paper and pen. Keep cups, hands, pens, papers, books away from your face.

It may be that if you wear a beard or moustache or have hair over your face and you regularly talk to someone who lip-reads, you may need to think about trimming it around the mouth.

Do not stand or sit with your back to a window or light source which will put your face in shadow.

Think about where people speak from in church, try and see if microphones or lecterns block the view of a person's mouth. Remember short and tall speakers will change the view! If the church is being reordered, please consider the lighting.

In a candlelit service, think about how a person lip-reading might see the speakers face.

Provide as much as possible that is written down (lip-reading is much easier with context to help follow). For example: Provide pew Bibles with a note of the day's readings (it is usually impossible to hear the full book, chapter and verse when it is read out) or sheets with readings on.

Ask intercessors to print out or photocopy an extra copy of their prayers for anyone who is lip-reading.

If possible, ask the preacher to do the same.

If there is drama provide an extra copy of the script. Make hymn numbers and page numbers visible, either on a sheet or on a board.

If you use a film clip, see if it is subtitled (many, but not all, DVD's now have subtitles). If not, provide some kind of summary so the pictures can be understood.

Sit with a person lip-reading so you can help them if they get confused with what is happening.

Provide written copies or posters of ALL notices.

Access for Deaf people/ sign language users

If you can't sign you will usually need a sign language interpreter or communicator to help.

Learn some BSL (most FE colleges have level 1 BSL available) which enables someone to have a basic conversation with a Deaf person and is usually free to people on benefits. (Some colleges have level 2 which is the minimum to be able to support someone in a church service and is also often free to those on benefits. Level 3 is the minimum to work as a communicator, and anyone wanting to qualify as an interpreter will need to go to college and study interpreting as well as improving their actual BSL.)

If you have an interpreter, speak at a normal pace, but allow gaps for interpreters to catch up. If you are leading anything with a response, allow the interpreter time to sign the call before cueing the congregation to respond.

If you are preparing worship and you know a sign language interpreter will be present, try and give them as much as possible of what will be said in writing in

advance - even if it's just rough notes - this will enable them to prepare their translation and think about how to sign any difficult or unknown words or concepts.

In meetings or group discussion allow a sign language user time to contribute - the interpreter will be slightly behind the conversation so it can be hard to find an appropriate moment to say something.

Think about where interpreters and BSL users will stand or sit. It is polite to ask the BSL user to decide where possible.

If you use visuals or objects (and they are great for BSL users) give people time to look at them or feel them - it is not possible to look at a screen and at the interpreter simultaneously.

Think about how the BSL user can contribute to the service - it is possible for BSL users to sign readings or prayers with the interpreter providing voice over for hearing people.

## **People with Learning Disabilities**

People with learning disabilities or difficulties have chosen not to be called 'mentally handicapped', so that term should not be used. They are also not 'stupid'.

Learning disabilities cover a wide range of conditions and consequently of abilities.

Even within a recognised condition people have very different experiences sometimes because of the opportunities and support each person may have had.

It must not be assumed that just because someone has a learning disability he/she lacks the capacity to enter into a valid contract.

Do not make assumptions about a person's ability in one area of life, based on his/her ability in another. For instance, a person's condition may mean they have no 'disability' in practical or physical matters, just in academic ones, or vice versa.

Because the written word may present barriers to people with learning disabilities, pictorial alternatives and simple text may be required. Avoid ambiguity or abstract concepts.

If someone has a learning disability you may need to give clear, simple instructions if these are needed. You may also need to confirm that the person understands what you mean.

If someone has difficulty understanding you, please be patient and be prepared to explain something more than once, perhaps in a different way.

Consider using short hymns or choruses that can be easily learnt or picked up.

Short, clear intercessions make it easier for people to follow.

Consider using dance, mime, drama and art as media for liturgical expression.

### **Specific Learning Disabilities - Dyslexia - Dyspraxia - Asperger Syndrome - Autism Spectrum**

The reason these four conditions have been especially chosen for comment is that they do not have any outward physical signs so very often children and adults with these conditions are misunderstood. Also there appears to be an increase in people with these conditions attending Churches.

#### **Dyslexia**

People are often perceived as bad spellers, but it can be far more.

People with Dyslexia can find it difficult to follow instructions because they may find it difficult to distinguish between left and right.

People with dyslexia may find it difficult to read a Bible with two columns on one page.

Different size print can help as well as different colour paper. Most of all ask, and try to be creative how you work with people.

#### **Dyspraxia**

This is a co-ordination difficulty which is sometimes combined with Dyslexia. People with Dyspraxia may knock things over, fall, and bump into things. The key is patience and allowing people to work at their own pace. Sometimes the more people try to quicken up the worse they get and more anxious they become.

#### **Asperger Syndrome**

People with Asperger Syndrome may experience significant difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication, alongside restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour and interests. It is helpful to remember to use their name when talking to someone with Asperger Syndrome so that they know you mean them if instructions are general in nature.

#### **Autistic Spectrum**

They may be diagnosed as Autistic or Aspergers Syndrome, or be described as being on the Autistic Spectrum.

There are many numbers of people diagnosed with this condition. The list below illustrates what they may find difficult. Each person is an individual so ask family/carers:

People with Autism tend to focus on one thing at a time. They will listen, but then find it difficult to look at the same time. They are not being rude.

People with Autism tend to take things literally so if you say, 'take a seat' they may pick it up and walk off with it rather than sit down. Say what you really mean!

They have difficulty reading other people's emotions and responding.

Many do not like change. If there is change in a Service and this is not explained, they can find it upsetting.

For some people with Autism touch, the sense of smell, taste and hearing loud noises are difficult. This can be difficult for them in services, for example during the Peace. Discuss with them, or if that is not possible, their carers, ways around this.

The keys to dealing with these conditions are patience, understanding, recognising of peoples gifts and flexibility.

### **Others who get overlooked**

People with hidden impairments

It is not always possible to 'see' that a person has an impairment or condition. Be aware that some people may have needs that you will have to meet if asked.

However some people like to keep their impairment hidden because of embarrassment or the discrimination they fear they might experience.

People may need somewhere to rest or take things at a slower pace as they experience fatigue.

People may need somewhere private to take medication.

People may be adversely affected by some lighting, strobe lights, cameras with flashes or where lights are switched off for (say for a special service) if they suffer from night blindness for instance.

People with dyslexia may be embarrassed if asked to read in a service.

People may need regular refreshments or easy access to toilet facilities.

People who have an illness, which causes them to shake uncontrollably, may be anxious about receiving communion.

People who may have specific short-term needs after an operation or an illness. Older members of the congregation may be unwilling or embarrassed to admit that they have a specific need – be sensitive.

Many people have food allergies so consider this when arranging a buffet, etc.

Consider checking if anyone needs gluten free bread for communion.

Give clear instructions, do not assume that everyone comes every week and everyone knows what is happening. Surely we want new people to attend who may be unaware of our parish's *little ways!* (For example, if there is clapping or the use of drums or electronic musical equipment).

Remember parishioners who may have been away for some time (say having a major operation) may be surprised if you have made changes in their absences!

People with specific or temporary needs.

## **Inclusion**

Concerns for equality and access will benefit us all – we will all get old and a ramp, which seemed a waste of parish money, can become a boon. When thinking about inclusion remember:

**Parents and Toddlers:** a spacious toilet is useful for changing babies and toddlers. It also aids people who have been temporarily injured (broken limbs) or mothers in the final stages of pregnancy. Short rows of pews where wheelchairs can be placed can also be used for buggies or prams.

**Dietary requirements:** Consider those with special dietary needs. Obviously gluten-free bread at communion but also at parish functions. Fruit or fruit salad can be an option for dessert for diabetics. Consider vegetarians and those with allergies. Be aware of what the ingredients are when you have a parish meal as some people may have an allergy.

**Elderly people:** Often elderly members or those who have sustained injuries are unwilling or embarrassed to admit they need help. Try to be sensitive and vigilant.

**People of small or large stature:** This may affect the type of new furniture that you buy or seating that you have in the worship area.

**People who are emotionally distressed or unstable:** This can be difficult to spot but where you know someone has come following a bereavement or family tragedy then encourage a member of the congregation to sit with or near them. It is a balance between caring and smothering.

**People who need to take medication or injections:** Access to toilets should be considered. Privacy, access to drinking water and somewhere to take medicine would be a real asset.

**Getting in:** Doors should be easy to open for everyone (with a stick, with a pushchair, in a wheelchair or with a pulled muscle!).

**Do not make assumptions:** Explain any changes in the order of service so that everyone knows what will happen.



Advice regarding changes to buildings is provided in '*Southwark Diocese - An Access Appraisal of Church Buildings.*'

For further help contact in the first instance contact: Rev Tim Goode,  
0208 660 4015, [revtimgoode@gmail.com](mailto:revtimgoode@gmail.com)

## **Carers**

There is often confusion about who is a carer. In order to clarify the issue it is now usual to put them into two categories: **a) Family Carer, b) Paid Carer.**

### **Family Carer**

As the title suggests these are members of the family, often with whom the person with a disability lives, and gives help and support to that person.

Being a family carer is a unique and sometimes demanding position and the church needs to recognise this. For some people it means their children do not leave home, for others their marriage may change if disability sets in later, for children caring for a parent it can almost be role reversal. Churches need to be sensitive to carers as well as the person they care for.

### **Paid Carer**

These are staff members either employed by an agency, local authority or employed by the person with a disability to support and care for them. These staff can be employed to care for the person in their own home, living with their family or in a residential or nursing home.

Remember that the carer has a right to have their spiritual needs met.

When a 'Needs Assessment' is being undertaken be sure to have their spiritual needs included in that assessment. Experience shows that spiritual needs often comes under the heading of Race and Ethnicity, and may relate to special dietary requirements. If you are not asked about spiritual needs raise it yourself and have it inserted. Unless it is included do not sign the assessment document until it is included.

Residential homes and nursing homes should also see that the spiritual needs of their residents are met. When assessing a home for your family member, be certain to ask how they will meet these needs. The home may have a regular service in their establishment and the clergy or church group may visit on a regular basis.

When you have decided on the best home to meet their needs, why not let the local church know that the person is moving into their parish. Your vicar may contact the new vicar for you and pass on any tips that will help.

The home may be delighted to have a local church group visit on a regular basis to take a service or to join in the activities of the home.

## **Issues to be considered by Carers and Parishes**

People with a disability have a right to have their spiritual needs met, wherever or with whomever they live. In the Christian Church this will usually be through their local church. Some churches organise special groups for people with a learning disability to help them understand and develop their faith and commitment.

For young children this will often be through Sunday school or church groups. It is usual for children and young people to be integrated into the age appropriate group. However, it may be that they have a friend who is a year younger and with whom they wish to stay. Talk it over with the leader of the group and also explain how they may best meet the person's needs. Be clear if they expect you to stay with your child until they are settled. As soon as they are settled leave them, as other parents have done. You may feel that you would want to attend to their personal needs so make this clear to the leader.

With adults, talk it through with the vicar or curate about the persons special needs so that all may feel comfortable in the service. Again, the person may join a group, so talk it through with the leader how their needs may best be catered for, including their personal care. Clarify whether the leader can cope alone without you being present or whether they are unable to offer the special support that your family member may need so that you may have to establish a circle of support for the person.

For clergy and leaders who are unsure of how to handle a situation talk your problem through with the family carer. Use sensitivity in this situation and remember, the last thing the family carer wants is to feel another rejection for the person they support.

## **Welcome for Children in Sunday School and Church**

Children with learning disabilities should be included in Sunday school or Junior Church and special arrangements made where appropriate to support them in that setting.

Adults and children with learning disabilities should be allowed to partake in parish ministries - people to welcome, servers, music ministry, etc. according to their gifts.

Children with a learning disability should be allowed/invited to join parish groups - Boys Brigade, Guides and Cubs/Scouts. Many national youth organisations now have disability officers to help and guide groups.

It is important that adults with learning disabilities are allowed to be adults within churches and not overgrown children.

Support should be available for parents of children with a learning disability who may need it at particular times and if clergy are unsure what to do, they should seek guidance.

## **Questions of inclusion and access**

### **Inclusion in Ministries and Parish Organisations**

Do we give an invitation and encouragement to parishioners who are wheelchair users to participate in leadership roles particularly if they never see any other disabled people exercising ministry?

Is choir practice held in an accessible space?

If we gather for coffee after the service is the serving area accessible/counter at a low level?

### **Car Park**

Are parking spaces available for wheelchair users and people using *walkers* (wheeled or otherwise)? For the latter the distance from the car to the entrance can be critical. Are they accessible to the entrance and clearly marked/sign posted?

### **Access to Church, Halls & Meeting Rooms**

Are all doors wide enough for wheelchairs to get through, easily opened with self-restraining catches?

Is the entrance ramped and lit?

Is the door the same door as used by other parishioners? This is particularly important for weddings and even more for funerals. If the chief mourner cannot go in the same way as the coffin it can be very distressing.

If access is achieved by ringing 'doorbell', is it reachable for a seated wheel chair user? Is it easy to see? Can this door be left open before services?

If there is an alternative entrance is it clearly signposted?

### **Within the Church**

Are some benches shorter (not always ones near the back!) so that wheelchair users can sit with their families/have a choice of where to sit? Practically this is also useful for parents with prams or buggies. Again being near the front can make it easier for children to feel involved.

Is there sufficient room for wheelchairs when receiving communion? Do steps with kneelers make it impossible for wheelchair users to approach the rail?

Is the sanctuary ramped with an adjustable lectern?

### **Questions on inclusion and access in Church**

Are Services, newsletters etc. available in large print, Braille or on tape? Remarkably few people with a visual impairment, even those with little or no sight, read Braille, and fewer still find it possible to follow a service in Braille. If a person wishes to have the service in Braille, it is sometimes better to read it on to tape and have them produce it themselves.

It is not usually suitable to buy a ready-produced Braille service, as they are hard to follow, particularly when most churches print their own variations. Listen to the particular person with a visual impairment - discover what they need and how they think it can be provided. It is often easier to take a few moments, perhaps after the service, to sit with a blind person and go through the newsletter.

Can the hymn numbers be seen? Black on yellow or black on white is clearest for people with visual impairment. As well as the hymn number being announced, its first line should be announced too to give time to those without access to a book, to remember the first verse. A Braille hymnbook, which can occupy many large volumes, is only of use if the numbers are found and marked beforehand. Perhaps a few moments could be taken to help do this before the service. Churches which insist on using overhead projectors and screens will have to think carefully about how they include those who cannot see such things.

### **In Church Halls**

Highlight the ends of corridors by painting the end wall a different colour.

Colour contrast floors, wall and furniture.

Avoid glare - use matt surfaces.

Mark glass doors with fluorescent or black tape.

Keep passageways clear of obstructions.

Highlight the edge of steps with contrasting tape.

Keep toilets clear (buckets, boxes of spare towels, toilet rolls, etc. should not be stored in the toilets as they use space and are a hazard).

Take care when handing out coffee.

## **Church Buildings – An Overview**

### **Widening the Eye of the Needle – Access to Church Buildings**

The report *Widening the Eye of the Needle – Access to Church Buildings for People with Disabilities* is recommended. It costs £16.99 and is produced by Church House Publishing. It has a detailed Disability Audit (which can be copied, pg14 of the publication) which parishes would be well advised to use (covering churches, open spaces and ancillary buildings).

It is vital to ask people with disabilities, who are members or users' of your facilities, their opinions. They may be happy to help with access audits and offer advice!

Issues regarding buildings must be discussed with the inspecting architect/surveyor. The Buildings Adviser for the Diocese is also very helpful. Altering church buildings to make them accessible for people with disabilities does not mean that you can avoid:

**Faculty Approval** (if in doubt ask and never make any alterations whatsoever without being certain).

**Planning Permission** (work that affects the appearance requires planning permission. Listed buildings have, for example, been refused permanent ramps, as this would affect the historic value of the church).

**Building Regulations** (You will need to liaise with the Diocese to ensure that you fulfil Part M of the 1992 Building Regulations. Again ask, never act without consulting the Diocesan authorities).

**Further Approval** (say where a church-yard is part of a conservation area).

The Quinquennial Inspections may encourage you to ensure that you are fulfilling the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. The PCC should ensure that they have understood their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Further details and guidance are available at [www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/open-sustainable/extended-and-additional-uses/welcoming-people/accessibility](http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/open-sustainable/extended-and-additional-uses/welcoming-people/accessibility).

The above factors may make it difficult for you to make alterations but you must be seen to have explored your legal duty to *remove, alter or provide reasonable means of avoiding physical features that make it impossible or difficult for people with disabilities to use its services* (in this instance it is us the Church!).

### **Advice in the Diocese on buildings and faculties**

The Archdeacons can be contacted via the appropriate Episcopal Area Office.

The Secretary of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) can be contacted at Trinity House.

The Diocese Buildings Advisers can be contacted at Trinity House

### **Complaints Procedure**

To be put into operation following a complaint to the diocese regarding facilities for people with a disability, relating to all buildings which are the responsibility of the P.C.C.

Preferably the complainant to register complaint with a diocesan worker (If the complaint is registered with another person it is their responsibility to inform one of the above as soon as possible).

A meeting will be arranged with the complainant by the Diocesan Secretary and the Diocesan Disability Adviser. The complainant will be asked if they want to make a formal or informal complaint.

Details of the complaint will be recorded.

A meeting will be arranged with the churchwardens and incumbent to bring the matter to their attention and their responsibilities in this area will be discussed with the Diocesan Secretary and the Diocesan Disability Adviser. This will be recorded.

Audit and disability awareness training will be offered to those involved.

#### **Procedure if formal complaint**

The Archdeacons will be notified immediately.

A visit will be arranged between the complainant, the churchwardens and incumbent together with the Diocesan Secretary and the Diocesan Disability Adviser, depending on the nature of the complaint, one to support the complainant and one to chair the meeting. A written record will be kept of this meeting.

If the situation is still unresolved then the Disability Rights Commission, via the Equality & Human Rights Commission, will be consulted.

Please note that failure to resolve a complaint satisfactorily at any level will be notified to the Archdeacons.

Diocesan Disability Advisor contact details: Rev Timothy Goode; tel 0208 660 4015; email [revtimgoode@gmail.com](mailto:revtimgoode@gmail.com)

## **Prayer for our Parishes**

*Heavenly Father, we ask your blessing on our churches.*

*May the doorways be wide enough to welcome all who need.*

*Your love and ours narrow enough to shut out evil and strife.*

*May the thresholds be smooth enough to present no stumbling blocks to children, nor barriers to those who are elderly and disabled.*

*May the doors be strong to turn back the tempter's power but open and inviting to those who are your guests.*

*May they be doorways to your eternal kingdom.*

*We ask this through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.*