



DIOCESE OF
BATH & WELLS

Changing Lives, Changing Churches for Changing Communities



**OPEN
TO ALL**

**A Commitment
to a Church
where all
can belong**

OPEN TO ALL:

A commitment to a Church where
all can belong

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1. Introduction

Open hearts, open minds, open Church?



The Church has long talked about the importance of welcoming and including people with disabilities. Even before recent anti-discrimination legislation enshrined in law the requirement to remove barriers for people with disabilities, the Church recognised that it could not be complete without the full participation of those who may be considered “disabled”.

The Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at its gathering in Nairobi in 1975 put it most eloquently:

“The Church cannot exemplify ‘the full humanity revealed in Christ’, bear witness to the interdependence of humankind, or achieve unity in diversity if it continues to acquiesce in the social isolation of disabled persons and to deny them full participation in its life.”

Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975, ed. David M. Paton

Indeed, we all like to think that we are welcoming and inclusive, and that our churches are places where everyone feels welcome, but there are many personal accounts which do not seem to support this hope. Often despite our best intentions some people, and especially those with disabilities, may feel excluded or unwanted. Approximately 20% of the population of the UK are disabled; if the Church reflects the community in which it is set then disabled people would constitute the same percentage within congregations. Are they there?

Our Commitment

Since the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) came fully into force in 2004, many churches have worked hard to review the accessibility of their buildings and activities, and many have made adaptations to improve their access and facilities for people with disabilities. We now have the Equality Act, which reinforces and extends this legislation.

This guide seeks to consolidate this work in the diocese of Bath and Wells, both to assist those who are just in the early stages, and to encourage those who have already done a lot of work.

We need to recognise that the process of improving our buildings and our own attitudes to include people with disabilities in our churches is an ongoing one, and one which is always under review. It is not something which can ever be ticked off the list, because there is always more that can be done.

Diverse Needs

Although the term “people with disabilities” is used throughout this document as a useful shorthand, it needs to be understood very broadly. “People with disabilities” are all very different, all very individual. People with the same impairment will have widely differing needs and views. For example, not all Deaf people have the same communication support needs; not all blind people can read Braille, not all people with a learning disability regard themselves as “disabled”.



We need to recognise the complexity of disability, and that there are diverse views and different responses amongst those with personal experience of disability. Until recently there seemed to be a clear dichotomy between the medical and social models of disability, and many people with disabilities were – and are – clear in their rejection of the medical model. This model focuses on the individual and sees a person’s impairment or disability as their problem, to be alleviated by aids and adaptations, but basically something which they have to put up with, recognising their limitations. The social model, by contrast, sees society as having responsibility for organising or creating an environment which allows people with impairment to function and to have the same access to education, employment, health services, housing, transport, leisure facilities, worship or spiritual exploration and family life as other people. With the social model, the view is that society disables me, or creates disability, especially in the area of the built environment.

In recent years, however, the experience of many people living with impairment has led some to suggest that the truth of the matter is more complex than this simple dichotomy.

As Tom Shakespeare writes:

“Disability results from the interplay of individual and contextual factors. In other words, people are disabled by society and by their bodies. This approach bridges the political gulf between the medical and social models of disability...”

Disability Rights and Wrongs, 2006

We need to respect the experience of those with disabilities, to hear their stories and give validity to their personal accounts. This can only happen by building relationships with people and getting to know them as individuals. In any work we may be considering to improve access to church buildings and activities, it is essential to involve people with disabilities, in order to ensure that the changes will be useful and appropriate. The slogan “Nothing about us without us” is a good one to remember, and abide by.

Beyond the legislation



The DDA has helped us focus on making our buildings and activities accessible so that people with disabilities can enter in and be part of what is happening. Perhaps the next stage that we are being challenged to move on to is to understand the contribution which people with disabilities can, and indeed do, make to the life of the church – to realise that they may have roles in leadership and ministry, and are not only to be seen as people who have particular access needs.

This contribution may be from the perspective of someone's life and faith in relation to a particular condition or disability; or it could be as a person in their own right, regardless of their disability. Many disabled people have pointed out that they do not wish to be considered a special case when they come to church; indeed, that they long to come in and join in in the same way as everyone else, without being singled out and made a fuss of. Only when people with disabilities are fully represented in our churches, and feeling that they belong, will we understand the contribution which they are able to make, and only then will our churches be able to benefit from their gifts and insights, and be the richer for it.

For most people with disabilities, the greatest barrier to inclusion in the life of the local church is the lack of understanding of the people around them. Wrong attitudes are rarely intended, but they can in themselves be disabling. A positive and welcoming attitude can overcome many or all of the physical barriers that may exist within a church. Nevertheless, positive attitudes should be reflected in positive action, and certainly attitudes without action will not be enough to meet the legal requirements of the Equality Act.



2. Only 2 minutes to spare?

Then read this section



- ◆ People with disabilities should be able to access our churches, not just as members of the congregation, but as people who may contribute to leadership too.
- ◆ We all agree that we want to include people with disabilities fully in the life of the Church, and now we are required by law to ensure that we do not discriminate against people with disabilities. The Equality Act applies to churches, as “service providers”, and sometimes also as employers, and they are required to comply with this legislation.
- ◆ The legislation gives us a very broad definition of the term disability: “a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on an individual’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”
- ◆ Wheelchair-users are about 7.5% of all “disabled” people.
- ◆ There are many “hidden” disabilities: for example, dyslexia, epilepsy, arthritis and other conditions which cause significant levels of pain, diabetes, mental health problems, autism spectrum conditions.
- ◆ “People with disabilities” are all different, all individual, and even people with the same impairment have differing needs and experiences.
- ◆ The Equality Act is anticipatory – it is not sufficient to wait until someone with a particular need turns up in church – we should be thinking how our welcome, worship, teaching and other activities can include everyone.
- ◆ The Equality Act requires us to make “reasonable adjustments” to features which could be barriers to people with disabilities. “Reasonable” is not defined in law, but it is recognised, for example, that a small rural church with a small congregation may well be less able to provide certain facilities than a large church or cathedral with more resources.

- ◆ However, there is much that can be done at little or no cost to improve our welcome and accessibility for people with disabilities.
- ◆ Listed buildings or those of special historic interest are not exempt from the Equality Act.
- ◆ There are a great many resources available to guide us in this process – key ones are listed in section 7 of this guide, and access audits may also be available.
- ◆ Few churches will have all that this guide suggests: some will have hardly any. But we can all improve on what we do have, and right attitudes matter most.



3. The Equality Act

About people, not buildings



Over the last ten to fifteen years we have become very familiar with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which was fully implemented in 2004. This has now been superseded by the Equality Act of 2010. The Act protects anyone who has or who has had a disability.

The Equality Act extends all previous equality law, aiming to make it more consistent, clear and easy to follow. Responsibilities under the DDA remain the same, but the new Act extends some and introduces some new ones, such as provisions on direct discrimination, discrimination arising from disability, harassment and indirect discrimination.

The DDA was quite radical in that it gave us a very broad definition of disability, and this has been retained by the new law. Disability is defined as:

“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on an individual’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

This includes the many “hidden” disabilities, for example epilepsy, arthritis, deafness, dyslexia, diabetes, autism (to some extent), and also many different conditions which cause significant levels of pain. So clearly we need to broaden our thinking from “disability equals wheelchair”.

There is a good summary of the Equality Act as it relates to disability in the Government Equalities Office booklet ***Equality Act 2010: What do I need to know? Disability Quick Start Guide***, available through www.gov.uk.

Focus on People

Although the disability discrimination laws often tend to lead to a focus on buildings, it is worth remembering that the first priority of this legislation is to eliminate discrimination against disabled people. Discrimination can happen in all sorts of ways – as well as the more obvious ones of bullying, harassment and even abuse, discrimination can take the form of low expectations, prejudice or deliberate or unintended exclusion.

As well as outlawing all forms of discrimination against people with disabilities, and those associated with them, the law requires all “service providers” (shops, restaurants, theatres, post offices, museums, places of worship, etc.) to make reasonable adjustments to services and physical features of premises etc. which would make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to access the service provided. This duty is also a continuous one, and so churches should review any changes they have made at regular intervals.

This requirement is also an anticipatory duty, i.e. service providers must anticipate the needs of people with disabilities and accommodate them in appropriate ways. So it is not sufficient just to think in terms of those people who come to our churches now: we should also be thinking of those people in our communities who may wish to come, and those we wish to invite. It could be argued that this is a good way of thinking anyway, and in line with the Gospel. It may also be helpful to consider the notion that most of us are only temporarily “able-bodied” or not disabled – many of us will in the future have reduced mobility, or hearing, or eyesight, and so on.



Undertaking an Audit

The best way for churches to respond to this legislation, if they have not already done so, is to carry out an access audit or survey of all their buildings and activities, to note what is already in place and what could be improved upon. In this process it is vital to include as many people with disabilities as possible, in order to receive expert advice and to avoid making well-meaning but unhelpful mistakes.

The process of carrying out an audit is in itself a good opportunity to share ideas about how things could be done in a more inclusive way, and will often bring to light new and creative ideas. Inevitably it will also highlight improvements which cannot be afforded now, and so it is useful to identify those items which could be achieved immediately with little or no cost, those which should be achievable in the medium term, and those which will require longer-term planning and fundraising. It is often surprising how much can be done at little or no cost, to improve access for disabled people.

Help with access audits may be available through the diocese, and there are also various sources of useful checklist-style resources to help you carry out your own audit. (See the Resources section on p 20).



4. Physical Access

Buildings that include

Churches should be places where all God's people can feel welcome and at home. In shaping our buildings, our concern must be not just for the ninety-nine who can find their way in, but for the one who cannot. Too often people with mobility impairment or visual impairment are prevented from entering by steps, narrow doorways, broken paths, or even just by poor signage. Our churches should not be buildings which exclude or discriminate against people but liberating places where all can enter (and leave) freely, safely and with thanksgiving.

Disabled people should also be able to enter our churches independently, if they choose to do so. Whilst we may think it is kind to offer help to someone in a wheelchair, for example, this may not be appreciated if the person concerned is used to, and prefers, being independent. Attempts to help to wheel a chair user can also be risky for both parties, and help should only be given where it is clearly requested.

Getting to church



Consideration needs to be given to how people get to church. People with disabilities, including those with mental health needs, are among the poorest in our society, and not everyone has a car. Public transport may not be available, especially on a Sunday, but where there is a bus or train service, could the details be added to the church website, if there is one? Many people who drive themselves to church are willing to give lifts to others in their area, if they know about the need. For those with disabilities who drive to church, "disabled" car parking is essential. Parking spaces nearest the church entrance should be clearly reserved and marked out, with the correct space and signage. If your church is in a built-up area where there is little or no parking, it may be possible to negotiate a roadside disabled parking space with your local council.

Finding the church



Thought needs to be given to the way people approach church buildings: from road signs and notice boards to signage at entrances. If the church has more than one door, is it clear which is the main entrance? People with anxiety conditions or with visual impairment may not get into the building if not. Or, if your church has a level access entrance which is not the main entrance (not ideal but better than none at all) it should be clearly signed as such.

Within the church



Once in the building, it should be possible for everyone to move around safely and comfortably. Ideally disabled people should have the same choice as everyone else as to where they would like to sit for a service of worship. All too often wheelchair users are restricted to being at the very back of the church, where they may well feel cut off; or at the very front of the church, where they may feel exposed. Sometimes people with hearing impairment find that the hearing loop only works in certain areas, and people with visual impairment may find that the areas which are light enough for them are very limited.

These are just some very basic examples of issues that should be considered. It is not possible for this guide to detail all the aspects of the physical access to churches that should be considered. As mentioned above, an access audit should be carried out, with findings and recommendations recorded and regularly reviewed, so that accessibility becomes part of the thinking of those responsible for the church building.

Help is at hand



If you are making, or considering, alterations to your church, you will know that it is necessary to consult the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) in the very early stages. It is also useful to have an understanding of the relevant British Standards and Building Regulations, and your architect and builder should also be familiar with these.

The relevant British Standard (currently **BS 8300:2009 +A1:2010 Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people: Code of practice**) sets out good practice standards based on ergonomic research. It explains how architectural design and the built environment can help disabled people to make the most of their surroundings.

The relevant part of the **Building Regulations - Approved Document Part M: Access to and Use of Buildings (2013)** – is intended to provide guidance for some of the more common building situations. However, it should be noted that there may be other ways of achieving compliance with the law, and so these are recommendations only. Part M can be downloaded free of charge at: www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads.

Note that this document suggests that when buildings of historic importance are being considered for improved access for people with disabilities, the views of local access groups should be taken into account, in arriving at an appropriate balance between conservation and accessibility.

In addition to the above, there are three key resources which give all the necessary detail when considering changes to buildings to improve access (full details in the Resources section on p22):

- ◆ **Widening the eye of the needle: access to church buildings for people with disabilities. John Penton. 3rd edition 2008.**
- ◆ **Easy access to historic buildings. English Heritage. 2012**
(Can be downloaded from www.english-heritage.org.uk)
- ◆ **Come in! Through the Roof.**

These three publications give all the necessary detail for understanding the regulations and specifications when planning changes to a church building.



5. Communication

Making the Word flesh



St John speaks of the Word made flesh, and central to our Christian faith is the relationship with the Living Word, Jesus Christ. Yet from an experience of church worship it might be tempting to conclude that Christianity is really about the spoken or written word and our ability to understand it. All too often worship becomes an encounter with a book rather than the Creator, the Living Word.

Central to the Reformation which gave birth to the Anglican tradition is the emphasis that the people should be in attendance and understand what is going on in a service of worship. The rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer make clear the minister's responsibility to ensure that the service can be heard and understood by everyone present. But if the spoken word cannot be heard, the written word cannot be seen or read, or the language used cannot be comprehended, then how can there be understanding? An over-emphasis on the word (written or spoken) becomes exclusive and excluding, a little like being involved in a conversation in a foreign country where you don't understand a word of the language.

Communication is also difficult when it is restricted to any one particular style, be that very literal or metaphorical, pictorial or text, printed or on-screen. We all have different learning styles and process information and ideas in different ways. Many people with Asperger's syndrome, for example, tend to take things literally and may also think in pictures more than words, so metaphorical images will be difficult. Some people will benefit from very simple language, but we do not wish to make simplistic the mysterious nature of God, the complexities of faith and belief, and the message of the Gospel.

Hearing



In considering how we communicate with people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, the key thing to recognise is that this "group" of people use a wide range of communication support. For example, many Deaf people, particularly those who have been Deaf from birth or early years, may well use British Sign Language (BSL): but by no means all deaf people do. Some may communicate in Sign Supported English (SSE) whilst others may rely on a combination of lip reading, hearing aids and even their own particular signs and symbols.

The use of the capital 'D' to denote Deaf people indicates those who consider themselves to be a part of the Deaf community, with its own culture and language (BSL). They may well look on being deaf as a positive thing, not as a disability at

all, and may be opposed to research attempts to prevent or cure deafness. In most dioceses, as here in Bath and Wells, the Christian Deaf community has its own church gatherings, facilitated and supported by a chaplain.

Pam Grottick is the Chaplain among Deaf people for the diocese of Bath and Wells. She is a lay chaplain, working part-time in this role, and is also a Reader in her home benefice. As Chaplain, Pam has responsibility for the pastoral and spiritual care of people who are profoundly Deaf, hard-of-hearing or deafened (and anywhere in between!) Occasionally she is involved with people who are deaf and blind.

In the spiritual care of deaf people and in order “to communicate the Christian Gospel”, Pam co-ordinates monthly services at 3.00 pm on Sundays in Weston-super-Mare (2nd Sunday), Bridgwater (3rd Sunday) and Bath (4th Sunday), working with a team who have sign language skills. Anyone is welcome to attend any of these services, whether Deaf, hearing impaired, or hearing and with an interest in worshipping with Deaf people.

Pam and her team always ensure that all these services are accessible for hearing people as well as Deaf or deafened people, by using signing, voiceover, the loop system and overhead projection on screen. Pam also leads Bible study courses, Lent courses and an annual Away Day for Deaf Church members, and is keen to promote lay ministry of Deaf people.



Pam may also be able to assist other parish clergy by leading or interpreting for occasional offices where Deaf people are in attendance, and interpretation is required. She has also been involved in preparing deaf adults for baptism. In a pastoral capacity, Pam is available to offer personal support to deaf people in need or distress; this involves visiting deaf people at home, in hospital, Hospice or a Home, following up requests to visit where concerns have been expressed, plus bereavement visiting and support. This happens if Pam is involved in planning and taking a funeral or interpreting for deaf people present, i.e. family and friends.

Furthermore, Pam’s chaplaincy work includes promoting Deaf Awareness amongst hearing churches, church groups and secular organisations. Pam is always pleased to hear from people who may benefit from her ministry, and can be contacted at:

9 Chestnut Close
Baltonsborough
Glastonbury BA6 8PH.
Tel / fax: 01458 851401
Mobile: 07715 832034
e-mail: pamg@wpci.org.uk

Hearing loops

Many people who are Deaf or have hearing impairment, and who use a hearing aid, will benefit from the use of an induction (hearing) loop in church. These do need to be tested regularly, and people made aware if reception is better in some areas of the building than others. Most importantly, everyone who is speaking during the course of services, meetings etc. needs to understand that they should use the microphone which links with the hearing loop, as well as speaking clearly and projecting their voice.

Lighting



Lighting levels in churches play a key part in communication. Many people who do not consider themselves to have any hearing impairment rely to some extent on lip reading, and being able to see the person who is speaking. Lighting needs to be even and people who are speaking, reading etc. need to be well lit from in front, not from behind or above. Although there are usually particular reasons why the sermon is preached, or the intercessions led, for example, from particular places in a church, it is worth checking that everyone who needs to can see clearly those who are speaking. Sometimes even small adjustments can be helpful.

Seeing



Obviously good lighting is also a key factor for people with visual impairment, including those who are blind. The vast majority of people who are registered blind have some residual vision, and good, strong lighting will help them in moving around the church safely, and feeling better able to participate in worship. It is particularly important to ensure that areas of steps or changes of level are well lit, and all steps should be marked with contrasting colour or material on both horizontal and vertical planes.

In giving consideration to the printed and on-screen materials which are used in church activities, it is vital that all are checked against clear print guidelines. For any printed materials, such as notice sheets, orders of service, parish magazines, meeting reports etc. the **minimum** font size is 12 point, where a clear sans serif font is used (such as Arial, Franklin Gothic, Verdana or Lucida Sans.) Certain serif fonts such as Lucida Fax or Times New Roman are also acceptable, depending on the size; but complex or script-style fonts are generally best avoided. Print should be clear and sharp, in a strong dark colour (ideally black) on a white or very pale coloured background. Paper should be matt and of sufficient quality that print does not show through to the other side. Where photos or pictures are used, captions should be printed above or below, not on top of the picture. Any deviation from these guidelines will compromise the accessibility of materials, and so they will reach fewer people.



Large print copies of written materials can be very helpful to considerable numbers of people, including many who do not consider themselves to be partially sighted. For large print, 18-point font is used, and some large print copies of all printed materials should be routinely offered at all services and events.

If you need to be convinced that clear print is important, see the “Make it Clear: the View from the Pew” guide to accessible publications, from the Disability and Jesus team. (See Resources section on p 20.)

.....and Understanding

Much of the language which we use in church - in meetings and homegroups as well as in our worship - contains specialist vocabulary, phrases and concepts which may be a barrier to people who have not learnt their meaning, or been brought up to be familiar with them. This applies in particular to people with learning difficulties or learning disabilities, who may find it more challenging to understand the language they hear in church.

Please note that it is not being suggested here that the mysteries of the Gospel and the complexities of Christian theology should be “explained away” by simple or simplistic language, or that the beauty of many prayers, Bible passages or hymns should be reduced. However, the message of the Gospel can be conveyed in simple, accessible language where this is helpful to people.

Although there are a few resources available for including people with learning disabilities (the key one being the recent report from the Church of England *Opening the Doors: ministry with people with learning disabilities and people on the autistic spectrum*) there is no “off the peg” template or model for this area of work. Perhaps more than any other area of preparing worship or teaching materials, this is one where we are required to be imaginative, innovative and responsive to those in our local community. It is only by trying out ideas – and not being anxious about making mistakes, but learning from them – together with people with learning disabilities, their families, friends and carers, that we shall find out what works and what does not.



We also do well to remember that just because someone may not be able to intellectualise or talk about their experience of God and their understanding of faith, it does not mean that this experience and understanding are not significant, developed and profound. Because we rely so heavily on language to express our sense of the mystery of the divine, we can sometimes tend to oversimplify or make simplistic the worship and teaching which we offer to those with learning disabilities. The challenge for the Church is to find ways other than words only to express and explore the experience of God in our daily lives; and to do this without oversimplifying or belittling the experience of the divine mystery.

At the heart of this are the relationships which we have with those with learning disabilities who come to our churches, and this can perhaps be more challenging, but ultimately more rewarding, than re-writing a worship service in accessible language.

If you want to find out how accessible documents such as minutes of meetings, reports or articles are, you may like to try out the Flesch Reading Ease test. This is a fairly crude test of readability, based on the length of sentences and the number of syllables in the words used in a document, but even so can be useful. With the Flesch Reading Ease test, an overall score is given between 0 and 100, which then corresponds to different degrees of academic attainment. For example, the score for this document is 41.3, whereas the score for the Easy Read version of the document is 78.6. See www.readability-score.com.



6. Checklists

Things to keep in mind

Here are four checklists for use when planning special services or events. They do not cover every detail of what you will need to think about, but they highlight some of the main issues and will help you to think of other items which may be needed. If you are able to start to plan well ahead and also to include people with disabilities in the process, you will have a good chance of organising an inclusive, accessible event for all to enjoy.

Planning a special service

- ◆ **Car Parking:** Do you have designated car parking spaces for those with mobility problems? If not, are you able to create designated parking close to the church or venue entrance, for this particular service?
- ◆ **Level Access:** Is there level, safe access into the building? If not, can you facilitate this by means of a portaramp? (not a homemade one unless it complies with regulations.) If the service is after dark, is the entrance well-lit?
- ◆ **Seating:** Do you have spaces for wheelchairs amongst the main seating areas? If possible please try to avoid this either being at the very front or back. Please note that people with physical impairment or pain often prefer chairs with arms.
- ◆ **Levels & Steps:** In considering the choreography of the service have you considered how any steps or changes in level may cause problems for those with mobility problems or visual impairment (congregation and/or clergy)? Is there a way the layout of the service can be changed to avoid the need for going up steps/changes of level? If not, are changes of level clearly marked with contrasting colour? Can an individual be positioned to offer assistance at steps (e.g. when individuals are going to and from receiving communion)?
- ◆ **Hearing Loop:** Does the church have a hearing loop? If so, have you checked that it is working properly? Please make sure that it is turned on for the service and that the PA system is in use and that all those leading (or reading) any part of the service have access to a microphone.
- ◆ **Interpreter:** Have you enquired whether a British Sign Language interpreter or other communication support may be needed? Seating arrangements will need to take into account those who need to see the interpreter, and all materials for the service (order of service, sermon, prayers etc.) will need to

be sent to the interpreter well in advance, so that s/he can prepare. The Diocesan Chaplain among Deaf people (see p 13) may be able to offer help and advice for baptisms, weddings and funerals.

- ◆ **Lighting:** If you are considering using different lighting levels (or candlelight) during the service, have you considered how this may affect those who rely on lip reading or those with visual impairments? Is there a way this can be re-considered to avoid excluding some from participating?
- ◆ **Clear Print:** Do the orders of service you will be using comply with clear print guidelines? i.e. **minimum** 12-point of a clear sans serif font (such as this one) on white or pale coloured matt paper, with good layout and sharp reproduction.
- ◆ **Large Print:** Do you have large print (as above but 18-point font) copies of orders of service and hymnbooks, if used? How will you make it clear that these are available?
- ◆ **Projectors:** If you project words and images onto a screen, they should have clear layout, as above (no text on top of images etc.) and there should also be printed copies available for those who prefer them or who cannot see the screens. Also for interpreters, if present, who often cannot see the screens. When showing films / visuals with voiceover, it is ideal if subtitles are available.



Choosing a venue (*for study days, special events etc.*)

- ◆ **Location:** Is the venue easy to find and well signed? Are the map and directions to the venue and instructions for parking clear and offered in both pictorial / map form and text?
- ◆ **Parking:** Are there designated car parking spaces for those with mobility problems?
- ◆ **Signage:** Is the route to the building well signed? And to the room / hall being used?
- ◆ **Level Access:** Is there level, safe access into the building? If not, can this be facilitated by means of a portable ramp? (not a homemade one unless it complies with regulations).
- ◆ **Wheelchairs:** Do wheelchair users have the same entrance as others? If not is the alternative route well signposted? In the rooms used are there

spaces for wheelchairs amongst the main seating areas? If possible please try to avoid this being either at the very front or back.

- ◆ **Seating:** Does the seating provide good support for people with mobility and posture problems? Please note people with physical impairment or pain often prefer chairs with arms.
- ◆ **Toilets:** Is there an accessible toilet within reasonable distance?
- ◆ **Levels & Steps:** Do the activities of the event require people to move around or move to different rooms or areas (e.g. for workshops)? If so, how will this affect people with mobility impairment? Is there a way the programme can be changed to avoid the need for going up steps/changes of level? If not, are changes of level clearly marked with contrasting colour? Is there a handrail beside any steps? (e.g. in lecture theatres)
- ◆ **Refreshments:** How and where are refreshments served? How will this affect people with mobility impairment? Are there tables and chairs for those who may need them?
- ◆ **Hearing Loop:** Does the venue – and all the rooms being used - have a hearing loop? If so, have you checked that it is working properly? Please make sure that it will be turned on for the event and that the PA system will be in use and that all those speaking (including from the floor) will have access to a microphone.
- ◆ **Acoustics:** Are the acoustics good or is the room echoey?
- ◆ **Lighting:** Are there good lighting levels in the room? This is important for those who rely on lip reading and those with visual impairment. Please also ensure that there are no flickering lights.



Planning the programme

- ◆ **In advance:** Agendas and pre-publicity should include a clear map and written directions on how to find the venue; also details of the special facilities available, including location of disabled parking, the ease of access to and within the building and the availability of an accessible toilet and hearing loop.

- ◆ **Particular needs:** Pre-publicity, booking forms etc. should include a statement of the facilities available, and a line such as “If you have particular access needs, please let us know by (date) so that we can do our best to meet them.” Where food or refreshments are being offered, a similar question should be posed about dietary requirements. And indicate that the written information is available in large print and other formats. Do not advertise facilities that may not be available – it is better to be honest than have to disappoint people on arrival!
- ◆ **Interpreter:** If communication support is required for Deaf people, please remember, BSL interpreters will need copies of speeches and presentations in advance. Please also remember that the interpreter will need a break after 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the nature of the talk or presentation. If it is an all day event it will be necessary to book two interpreters.
- ◆ **Powerpoint:** In designing powerpoint presentations please ensure that these follow clear print guidelines, ensuring clear font, large font sizes and good contrasting colours. To assist those with visual impairments, printed copies of the powerpoint presentation should be available before as well as after the presentation and large print copies of these need to be available. If the presentation includes pictures, these should be described for any people with visual impairment. If the audience includes Deaf people who are using an interpreter, you will need to allow time for the Deaf person to read the slides as well as “listening to” the spoken presentation.
- ◆ **Lip-reading:** Please make sure all main speakers are well lit, avoiding shadow on their faces to assist those depending on lip-reading.
- ◆ **Lighting:** Be aware of turning lights out for any audio-visual presentations. Make sure anyone speaking to the presentation can still be seen and that those needing to following a printed handout instead can still see.
- ◆ **Sound:** Please ensure all speakers use the microphones provided including during question and answer sessions, and ensure that the hearing loop, if available, is on and working. Ask people at the beginning of the event if they can hear, and check the sound levels.
- ◆ **Printed material:** Please ensure that all publicity, programmes and handouts comply with clear print guidelines and are also available in large print format.
- ◆ **Levels & Steps:** If the event involves people breaking into smaller groups in other rooms, please make sure that helpers are on hand to assist at any point in the venue where there are changes of level and/or ensure those who wish can be allocated to the more accessible rooms.

Planning for regular meetings (*such as PCC meetings, deanery synods, homegroups or prayer meetings*)

- ◆ **In advance:** Find out about particular needs of the members of the group, so that their requirements can be met as far as reasonably possible.
- ◆ **Venues:** Choose a venue which meets the particular requirements of the members of the group concerned. For example, if there is a wheelchair user on your deanery synod, ensure that the venues chosen for meetings are accessible for them, even if there has been a tradition of using all the churches in the deanery, including those not accessible, in the past.
- ◆ **Printed materials:** Provide papers in clear print for all, and in larger print if required by any members. If documents are sent out by e-mail, it may well be easier for people with visual impairment to access them online and enlarge or modify them to suit their particular requirements.
- ◆ **Heating:** Bear in mind that some disabled people feel the cold more than others, and ensure that heating levels are suitable for all to be comfortable.
- ◆ **Lighting:** Ensure good lighting levels for the meeting, as far as reasonably possible. This will help people with visual or hearing impairment. Bear in mind that a low lighting level is a barrier to many people.
- ◆ **Group prayers:** If any members of the group have any degree of hearing impairment, please suggest that people indicate when they are going to pray out loud, and ensure that there is good lighting for lip reading.
- ◆ **Speaking in meetings:** Please ensure that there is a clear “rule” of only one person speaking at a time, and that everyone can see the speaker. If this is not possible in a large meeting, remember to repeat the question, in Q & A sessions, for the benefit of all those who have not heard it. In smaller meetings where people with hearing impairment are present, it may be helpful to ask people to indicate when they are going to speak.
- ◆ **In general:** Be prepared to change traditional practices in order to meet the needs of everyone who wishes to participate in the group.



7. Resources

Organisations providing resources

Here are just a few of the many organisations which can offer information and resources relating to the issues contained in this guide. It is by no means a comprehensive list, but is a starting point which will lead on to other organisations and resources.

General

Church of England The website www.churchcare.co.uk has comprehensive information on the care of church buildings, and issues relating to disabled access.

Widening the eye of the needle: access to church buildings for people with disabilities. John Penton. Church House Publishing, 3rd edition 2008 is a comprehensive guide to all the physical aspects of buildings. Also includes an Access Audit Checklist.

Disability and Jesus is a user-led organisation promoting disability inclusion in the life of the Church. Many useful resources, including some good short films. www.disabilityandjesus.org.uk.

English Heritage is the leading advisory body on providing access to historic buildings in England, many of which are churches. They also work to promote accessibility and inclusion in educational work and volunteering.

Easy Access to Historic Buildings, 2012, contains useful information for churches and clear explanations of the relevant legislation. The document can be downloaded from the Publications and Resources section of the website: www.english-heritage.org.uk.

Livability is a leading Christian disability organisation, providing resources and services, including independent living accommodation. www.livability.org.uk.

Through the Roof works with people with disabilities in the UK and abroad to “transform lives through disabled people”. It produces many useful resources, notably ***Come in!, All welcome and Be a Roofbreaker!*** Also ***Removing Barriers***, a checklist-style questionnaire to assess accessibility of church buildings. www.throughtheroof.org.

Visual and Hearing impairment

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) for information and resources relating to hearing impairment and deafness.

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk.

Go! Sign aims to support Deaf Christians in their church experience and to bring the Gospel to Deaf people.

www.gosign.org.uk.

Open Ears is a Christian charity which supports people with hearing impairment.

www.openears.org.uk.

RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind) for information and resources for those who are blind or partially sighted.

www.rnib.org.uk.

Torch Trust for the Blind provides Christian resources and activities for blind and visually impaired people. The church pack “Foursight for the church” is very useful, and free of charge once you have registered on the website.

www.torchtrust.org.uk.



Learning Disability and Autism

Diocese of Oxford has produced the resource **Welcoming those with Autism and Asperger Syndrome in our churches and communities** which is a comprehensive guide to this area.

www.oxford.anglican.org/social-justice/just-care/welcoming-those-with-autism-and-asperger-syndrome-in-our-churches-and-communities.html.

Faith and Light is an ecumenical organisation for people with learning disabilities, their families and friends; offering regular meetings with prayer, fellowship and celebration.

www.faithandlight.org.

L’Arche, founded by Jean Vanier in 1964, is an international movement which builds faith-based communities all over the world: places of welcome where people are transformed by an experience of community, relationship, disability and difference.

www.larche.org.uk.

Prospects provides advice, training and resource materials to equip churches for effective ministry and outreach among people with learning disabilities. There are a number of groups in the diocese of Bath and Wells affiliated to Prospects.
www.prospects.org.uk.

The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities has carried out and published studies of the relationship between people with learning disabilities and faith.
www.learningdisabilities.org.uk.

The Kairos Forum seeks to highlight and respond to the spiritual and religious needs of people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities.
www.thekairosforum.com.



Children and Families

Care for the Family promotes strong family life and offers training and resources in all aspects of family life.
www.careforthefamily.org.uk.

Contact a Family is an excellent source of information, advice and resources on family life with a disabled child, and gives information of a wide variety of disabilities.
www.cafamily.org.uk.

Mental Health

The **Mental Health Matters** section of the Church of England Ministry Division website www.mentalhealthmatters-cofe.org has a huge range of resources - worship and pastoral resources, books and downloads, projects, videos...

The **Mental Health Access Pack** is an online resource designed to help churches to support people struggling with mental health issues, and to discuss issues and share ideas around mental health.
www.mentalhealthaccesspack.org.



8. Further Reading

Exploring things further

The following books and authors are suggested for those who might wish to explore the issues of Open to All further. The list is a starting point only and in no sense attempts to be a complete bibliography.

Beauty & Brokenness: Compassion and the Kingdom of God

Martin Lloyd Williams, SPCK, 2007.

A thoughtful and thought-provoking discourse on the relationships between creation and humanity, disability and God, purpose and compassion.

Disability rights and wrongs

Tom Shakespeare. Routledge, 2006.

A challenging review of the traditional polarisation of the medical and social models of disability, this book puts forward an alternative account of disability which attempts to bridge the gulf between these two models.

Disability: the Inclusive Church Resource

John M. Hull and others. Darton, Longman & Todd, 2014.

Excellent, short introduction to disability theology and the case for inclusion. Includes stories of personal experience. Probably the best introduction to the subject.

Enabling Church: a Bible-based resource towards the full inclusion of disabled people

Gordon Temple and Lin Ball, SPCK, 2012.

A practical resource which could easily be used as a course; includes personal stories and questions for individual or group discussion.

Grain in winter: reflections for Saturday people

Donald Eadie. Epworth, 1999.

Meditations from the writer's experience of living with a chronic pain condition which forced him to retire early as Chairman of the Birmingham District of the Methodist Church.

In the beginning there was darkness: a blind person's conversations with the Bible

John M. Hull. SCM Press, 2001.

A fascinating and stimulating discussion of response to the Bible from the perspective of blindness.

Making a world of difference: Christian reflections on disability

Roy McCloughry & Wayne Morris. SPCK, 2002.

A clear but stimulating book to encourage people with little or no theological training to reflect on the implications of relating disability to the Christian faith.

Making Church Accessible to All: including disabled people in church life

Tony Phelps-Jones and others. BRF, 2013.

Clear guidance on practical ways of making teaching, worship and buildings accessible for people with a variety of impairments.

On sight and insight: a journey into the world of blindness

John M. Hull. Oneworld Publications, 1997.

A very personal account of one man's developing blindness, and the impact this has had on his daily life, family relationships, faith and spiritual life.

Opening the Doors: ministry with people with learning disabilities and people on the autistic spectrum

The Archbishops' Council. Church House Publishing, 2009.

A clear and practical guide for parishes and clergy to enable people with learning disabilities to be more fully included in the life and worship of the Church.

Special children, special needs: integrating children with disabilities and special needs into your church

Simon Bass. Church House Publishing, 2003.

Clear, simple and full of practical ideas.

Spirituality, values and mental health: jewels for the journey

Mary Ellen Coyte, Peter Gilbert and Vicky Nicholls (editors). Jessica Kingsley, 2007.

A collection of essays and poems exploring spirituality and faith in relation to mental health. Many valuable insights from people who have experienced mental distress, and perspectives on the way churches can be vital places of welcome, acceptance and understanding.

The Church among Deaf people

Church House Publishing, 1997.

An important report to General Synod about the place of Deaf people in the Church, and how their contribution can be enabled.

The disabled God: towards a liberatory theology of disability

Nancy L. Eiesland. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994.

A theological discussion of the nature of God in relation to disability; the disabled God who identifies with people with disabilities.

The Enabled Life: Christianity in a disabling world *Including a conversation with Jean Vanier.*

Roy McCloughry. SPCK, 2013.

Writing from personal experience of living with a hidden disability, the author puts the case for disabled people being at the heart of the Church and God's Kingdom.

Why are we here?: meeting the spiritual needs of people with learning disabilities

The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2002.

Study based on interviews with people with learning disabilities. Contains good accessible-language summaries, and challenges for the Church in including people with learning disabilities.

What Jesus did

Scripture Union, 2003.

Short and simple telling of the Gospel story, with pictures and picture language symbols

The many books and recordings of **Jean Vanier**, particularly **Becoming Human** (Paulist Press); **The Broken Body: journey into wholeness** (DLT) and **Be not afraid** (Gill & Macmillan).

The writings of **Henri Nouwen**, who was deeply influenced by the L'Arche communities in his later life, when he lived as part of one. In particular this is explored in **In the house of the Lord**; **Beyond the mirror**, and **Life signs**.



Acknowledgments

Open to All

has been written by Wendy Bryant for the Diocese of Bath & Wells.

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wendy.bryant@bathwells.anglican.org

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