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# *Everyone Welcome*

**Accessible church for all**



**Dr Louise Gosbell**

on behalf of the Social Issues Committee  
of the Anglican Church, Diocese of Sydney

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Original literary work prepared by Dr Louise Gosbell in 2021 on behalf of the Social Issues Committee of the Sydney Diocese of the Anglican Church. With assistance from the Reverend Bec Baines.

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For further information contact:

Diocesan Secretary

Sydney Diocesan Services  
PO Box Q190  
QVB POST OFFICE NSW 1230

Email [diocesansecretary@sydney.anglican.asn.au](mailto:diocesansecretary@sydney.anglican.asn.au)

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# Welcome to the Accessibility Guidelines for the Sydney Diocese of the Anglican Church

In Australia, over four million people live with some form of disability. That is one in five Australians.<sup>1</sup> A further 2.65 million Australians provide unpaid care to a family member with disability or ageing family members.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare* estimates that the average Australian will spend almost 20 years of his or her life with some form of disability, whether that is a physical disability, a mental health condition, or the loss of sensory functioning in advanced years.<sup>3</sup> These statistics indicate that disability is not only common but an inevitable part of the present world.

In response to the significant number of people with disability present in our country and our Diocese, in 2009, the Synod of the Sydney Diocese passed Resolution 34/09 regarding ‘people affected by disability.’ This resolution stated that Synod:

- recognises that for people with disabilities, their families and carers, daily life can be practically, financially, socially and emotionally more difficult than it is for most people,
- notes that there are many obstacles for people with disabilities, their families and

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1 Australian Network of Disability. “Disability Statistics.” 2020. <https://www.and.org.au/pages/disability-statistics.html>.

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings 2018.” <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>

3 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, “People with Disability in Australia” (Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019), 2.

carers, which prevent them hearing the gospel and sharing in Christian fellowship, which we have not always considered,

- requests that all parishes and organisations in the Sydney Diocese of the Anglican Church develop and implement a plan to remove those obstacles that currently prevent people affected by disability from hearing the gospel and sharing in Christian fellowship, and
- requests Sydney Anglicans and the Diocese in particular to continue to advocate for Government policy that promotes the wellbeing and interests of people with disabilities and their families and carers.

Since passing this motion in 2009, many parishes in the Sydney Diocese have made significant steps towards building church communities that are welcoming and accommodating for people with disability and their families. Some parishes have focused their efforts on greater inclusion in their children's and youth programs. This has included training 'buddy' leaders to work alongside children and youth on the Autism Spectrum or training leaders in Auslan or Key Word Signing (forms of sign language) to better accommodate children and youth with developmental delays or who are hard of hearing.

Other parishes have made modifications to the physical layout of their premises to ensure greater access for people who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices such as canes and walkers. Some parishes have considered the way they communicate information to their parishioners. They have begun providing large-print options of all print documents and have installed hearing loops for people who use hearing aids. Others have begun their own Jesus Club ministries, and created Bible-teaching programs that cater to the needs of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Despite this significant progress, many congregations still struggle with knowing where to start or what sort of accommodations to make in order to create more inclusive communities for people with disability and their families.

These guidelines are designed to help parishes within the Diocese (and beyond) to eliminate the barriers that prevent people with disability from participating in the full life of the church. These guidelines are not exhaustive, but aim to serve as an introduction to some of the obstacles that prevent access to church for people with disability, as well as offer guidance on ways to overcome some of these obstacles. The guidelines also provide an extensive resource list of books, websites, and other publications that are available to help further educate parishes on the experiences of people with disability.

We are fortunate in Australia to have initiatives such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which helps provide people with disability with funding for a range of social

services, and opens up greater opportunities for community involvement. However, as vital as these community connections are, they do not provide opportunities for people with disability and their families to come into contact with the good news of the gospel that is preached in churches across our Diocese. Neither can paid support workers and therapists provide people with disability and their families with the meaningful relationships available to people when they belong to a Christian community. Our parishes can have a vital role in mitigating the isolation and marginalisation experienced by many people with disability across Sydney.<sup>4</sup> Our parishes have a vital part to play in the lives of people with disability and their families in sharing the Good News of the gospel, offering friendship, community and support and, in turn, our church communities will be enriched through the knowledge, experiences and gifts that people with disability can provide to our parishes.

The church has an opportunity to offer life and hope through Jesus Christ in a world that is so often negative and hurtful for people with disability and their families. Victorian Anglican minister and academic Dr Michael Bird has written:

In an age where, in many parts of the world, the disabled are gradually being pushed towards euthanasia as the preferred option to eliminate their emotional and economic ‘burden’ upon others, the church must resist the secular cultures of death and advocate for the vulnerable with the full weight of its testimony, advocacy, pastoral ministry, and love-in-action.<sup>5</sup>

Here is our opportunity, ahead of the outcome of the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* (Disability Royal Commission), to demonstrate our commitment to the care, support, and acceptance of people with disability into our parishes.

While it is our hope that these guidelines will provide you with a helpful toolbox for working towards greater inclusion of people with disability in your parish, it is important to recognise that inclusion cannot happen with a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. While checklists and surveys are useful ways to set goals and measure change, inclusion must be person-focused. For this reason, the most profound and long-term changes will be made in dialogue with the people

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4 Australian Government, “Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia.” National Disability Strategy Consultation report prepared by the National People with Disabilities and Carer Council. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009. [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2012/nds\\_report.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/nds_report.pdf)

5 Michael Bird, “The Imago Dei and Human Disability.” *Patheos* September 13, 2018. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/euangelion/2018/09/the-imago-dei-and-human-disability/>

with disability and their families in your parishes. They are your best source of information for working out what is going well and what can be improved in your parish with respect to disability access. These guidelines offer you a starting point, but the real journey towards greater inclusion of people with disability and their families in your parish begins with you and the members of your parish.

We pray God's richest blessings for you and your parish as you seek to make changes in your parishes in order to make everyone welcome, and church accessible for all.

Dr. Louise Gosbell,  
on behalf of the Social Issues Committee

## CHAPTER 1

# What is disability?

According to the Australian Network on Disability, ‘a disability is any condition that restricts a person’s mental, sensory or mobility functions. [Disability] may be caused by accident, trauma, genetics or disease. A disability may be temporary or permanent, total or partial, lifelong or acquired, visible or invisible.’ And it may have minimal or substantial impact on a person’s abilities.’<sup>6</sup>

The Australian *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (outlined in more detail below) defines disability as broadly as possible. The breadth of impairments and medical conditions covered by the Disability Discrimination Act are as follows:

- Physical – affects a person’s mobility or dexterity
- Intellectual – affects a person’s abilities to learn
- Mental illness – affects a person’s thinking processes
- Sensory – affects a person’s ability to hear or see
- Neurological – affects the person’s brain and central nervous system
- Learning disability
- Physical disfigurement
- Immunological – the presence of organisms causing disease in the body<sup>7</sup>

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6 Australian Network of Disability, “Disability Statistics.” 2020. <https://www.and.org.au/pages/disability-statistics.html>.

7 Australian Government, “Disability Discrimination Act 1992 Fact Sheet.” <https://www.dese.gov.au/download/2335/fact-sheet-1-disability-discrimination-act-1992/19608/document/pdf>

# Disability Discrimination Act

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) was an act passed by the Australian Parliament in 1992 to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. The objectives of the DDA (Section 23) focus on the provision of equitable, independent and dignified access to services and facilities for people with mobility, sensory, and cognitive disabilities. The DDA covers existing premises, including heritage buildings, those under construction, and future premises. It extends beyond the building itself to include outdoor spaces as well as the furniture, fittings, and practices provided within premises.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission:

Discrimination happens when a person is treated less fairly than a person without a disability. It also happens when someone is treated less fairly because they are a relative, friend, carer, co-worker or associate of a person with a disability.<sup>8</sup>

The DDA protects people with disability against discrimination in a range of areas including employment, education, accommodation, accessing or using services (e.g., transport, communication, medical, etc.), as well as accessing public spaces such as parks, government offices, restaurants, hotels, shopping centres, and places of worships such as churches. This means, parishes are not exempt from adhering to the requirements of the DDA.

Discrimination can be direct. This arises where a person with a disability is treated less favourably, or not given the same opportunities as a person without the disability in a similar situation (for example, when a person is refused entry because they have an assistance dog).

Discrimination can also be indirect. This arises when conditions or requirements are in place that appear to treat everyone the same, but in fact have the effect of disadvantaging some people because of their disability. For example, requiring access to a building by stairs which will have the effect of preventing entry by a person in a wheelchair.

Parishes within the Diocese are obliged by the DDA to make 'reasonable adjustments' to church buildings and grounds to ensure equal access for people with disability up to the point that those adjustments would cause 'unjustifiable hardship' for the Parish. Unjustifiable hardship will include considerations such as the nature of any benefit or detriment likely

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8 Sev Ozdowski, "Disability Discrimination Developments." Australian Human Rights Commission, 2004. <https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/speeches/disability-discrimination-developments>

to be experienced, technical limitations and the estimated costs of the work. The bar to demonstrate unjustifiable hardship is general fairly high.

The Australian Building Codes Board has developed the *Disability (Access to Premises) Standards* and the *Building Code of Australia* which sets out specific accessibility requirements in respect to public buildings. This applies to new buildings, new building work and where there is a change in use to an existing building. Compliance with the Standard is deemed to satisfy the access requirements in the DDA. See the Standard in *Appendix 1: The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Building Code of Australia (BCA)*.

## CHAPTER 2

# Theological foundations for disability-inclusive ministry

The Christian church has a long history of caring for the poor, the sick, and the marginalised. Inspired by Jesus' care and compassion, the earliest Christians offered shelter and hospitality to people who had been shunned and rejected by others in their society. The early Christians were known for their insistence on the value and dignity of all human life, a belief deeply rooted in the Bible's depiction of human beings as the unique bearers of God's image (Gen. 1:26-27). For this reason, the stories of the early church are filled with accounts of Christians working to preserve and nurture the lives of those considered without value in the Roman Empire – the exposed infant, the person with mental illness, the frail and elderly, widows, orphans, and many others. It is part of our doctrine, as well as the history of Christianity, that Christians are people who love, accept, and welcome all people.

This commitment to care for and include the marginalised members of society is not something relegated to church history but continues to be a concern for the church today. Synod Resolution 34/09 expressed a renewed commitment to the care and inclusion of one such marginalised group of people – those with disability and their families. Synod Resolution 34/09 sought to acknowledge some of the challenges faced by people with disability and their families, and to respond with the vision that parishes within the Diocese would be able to help make a difference in the lives of families living with disability. For example, Synod Resolution 34/09 addressed the challenges of families in accessing goods and services that are often taken for granted by able-bodied people. The Resolution also acknowledged that as result of this, 'daily life can be practically, financially, socially and

emotionally more difficult than it is for most people.<sup>9</sup> These barriers to inclusion and participation are not just experienced by people in broader society but can also be an issue for people with disability attempting to access faith communities. Christian churches need to continue to be beacons of hope and life in a dying world that needs to know the love and forgiveness of Jesus. This means that we must recognise the ways we have failed to include people with disability and their families in our past. It also means being willing to remove the obstacles currently preventing people with disability and their families from participating in the full life of our church communities today.

The following section briefly outlines some theological principles for a concerted effort to welcome and include people with disability and their families into our parishes.

## All people are created in God's image

Although direct references to humans being created in the image of God are limited in Scripture, it is generally recognised that the concept is fundamental to our understanding of the role and value of all people.<sup>10</sup> The Scriptures are clear that human beings are still those 'made in God's image' even after the fall, and that this ought to shape our conduct towards one another (Gen. 9:6; Jas 3:9). This means that our value as human beings cannot be measured by our physical or intellectual abilities or lack thereof, but is something given with our membership of the human species. All human beings bear witness to the Creator God and ought to be viewed first and foremost in that light, as those given unique dignity within the created order.

## All people need salvation

The Book of Genesis records the far-reaching effects of human sin and its impact on our relationship with God, our relationship with others, and our relationship with all of creation. There is no human solution to the problem of sin; the only solution is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, people have the ability to repent of their sins and be brought back into restored relationship with God. The New Testament makes

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9 Resolution 34/09 of the Sydney Diocese.

10 e.g., Gen. 1:26-28; Gen. 5:1-3; Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; 2 Cor. 3:18.

it clear that this message is for all people, as Christ died for all (2 Cor. 5:14-15; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9).

The message of salvation is not limited to those who are able-bodied, but to all people, irrespective of physical or intellectual abilities or disabilities. However, the *Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization* estimates that only 5-10% of the global population of people with disability are reached with the gospel, which makes people with disability ‘one of the largest unreached – some say under-reached – or hidden people groups in the world.’<sup>11</sup> Part of our task in response to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20) should be ensuring that the gospel is also brought to people living with disability and their families.

## All people have the capacity for relationship with God

God created human beings to live in relationship with him, with others, and with the created world. While sin fractured and distorted our capacity for all of these relationships, God’s act of love through Jesus restores them. Through this restoration, human beings are able once again to have a relationship with God as we are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, formed into the likeness of Jesus. It is God who is the active agent in his relationship with humanity, and he is not reliant on or deterred by the abilities or disabilities of human beings. For this reason, disability is no barrier to a human being’s relationship with God. Faith is not reliant on a person’s cognisance. Rather, it is wholly reliant on the abundant grace and mercy of God poured out in Jesus. Therefore, it is the role of the church to continue to share the gospel with all people, including people with disability and their families, and to help break down the barriers that currently prevent this good news from reaching this ‘unreached’ people group.

In Exodus 3-4, God calls Moses to lead the people of God out of slavery in Egypt. Uncertain about this calling, Moses responds to God saying, ‘Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue’ (Exod. 4:10). In reply, God says to Moses, ‘Who gave human beings their

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11 Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, “Hidden and Forgotten People: Ministry Among People with Disabilities,” Lausanne Occasional Paper 35; Orlando: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005, 3-4. [https://www.lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/LOP35B\\_IG6B.pdf](https://www.lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/LOP35B_IG6B.pdf)

mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say' (Exod. 4:11-12). Neither Moses' fear or uncertainty nor his ineloquent speech are a hindrance to God's ability to work through Moses to bring about his purposes.

## All believers are members of the body of Christ and have a role to play

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul discusses at length the metaphor of the body of Christ. According to Paul, the body of Christ, the church, is composed of many different members with diverse gifts, all of which have a particular role to play. Paul emphasises that despite the diversity of all its different members, the body of Christ is a place of unity. In addition, Paul also emphasises the vulnerability and interdependence of all the members of the body of Christ, who are not only reliant on God but on one another to fulfil God's plans and purposes.

The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. (1 Cor 12: 21-22)

In this body, no one should think higher or lower of themselves than they ought, but should recognise that God has placed all the members of the body where he wishes them to be.

But God has put the body together...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. (1 Cor 12: 24b-26)

While the world we live in may measure value and worth by outward appearance or on the basis of things that we do and achieve in this world, it is not so with the body of Christ. In this body all believers have a role to play and can contribute their gifts in service to God to bring about his purposes. These gifts are distributed by the Spirit for the 'common good' of the body (1 Cor. 12:4,7). Irrespective of a person's physical or intellectual abilities or disabilities, those who are in Christ are gifted by the Spirit and have something valuable to contribute to the community of faith.

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## CHAPTER 3

# Characteristics of a disability-inclusive parish

If asked, most church leaders would affirm that they want their parishes to be places of welcome and inclusion for people with disability and their families. However, knowing what steps to take to facilitate this inclusion might not be immediately apparent.

This part of the guidelines will set out some practical steps parishes can take to ensure they are working towards the goals of Synod Resolution 34/09 of ‘removing those obstacles that currently prevent people affected by disability from hearing the gospel and sharing in Christian fellowship.’ We encourage churches to do this in two steps: first, by reflecting on the extent to which your parish is already including people with disability; second, by following the seven practical steps towards the full and active participation of people with disability in the life of the church.

In order to make steps towards greater inclusion in your parish, it is helpful first to reflect on how well your parish is currently doing in welcoming and including people with disability and their families. It is helpful for church leaders to ask of themselves: To what extent are the following indicators evident in our congregations?<sup>12</sup>

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12 E. Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Providers, Families, and Congregations* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2007), 28-29.

## The presence of people with disability

Inclusion begins with presence. It is difficult for parishes to say *we are inclusive of people with disability* if there is no one with a disability within the parish. Current statistics indicate that almost 1 in 5 Australians have a disability. It may be useful to ask whether that number is reflected amongst the people in your parish and those who attend your church. If not, it is important to ask why this might be the case.

## Accessibility

Accessibility in relation to people with disability refers to the extent to which all people are able to enter or use buildings or resources. This includes our programs, methods of communication, and our attitudes towards people with disability.

Once people with disability are present in your services, are they able to access all the public spaces on the church grounds? Are they able to participate in your church's programs, including Sunday services but also mid-week programs? Can people with disability access youth group, Bible study groups, church retreats, and communal meals? Belonging to a church community means being able to be a part of the life of the church beyond just Sunday services.

## Hospitality

Although it is important for people to be able to have physical access into church buildings, what makes people feel like they truly belong in a particular church community is their relationship with others. While it is easy to focus our attention on how we greet people at the church door, in order to help people to feel like valuable members of our parishes our hospitality must extend beyond this. Hospitality must also include opportunities to build relationships over shared meals and shared lives. Being present at Sunday services does not necessarily mean that a person feels like a valued and contributing member of the church community. While people with a disability might be present in your church on Sundays, are they extended the same kind of opportunities to journey together with others as other members of the parish?

## A sense of shared lives

A welcoming congregation will allow people with and without disability to serve alongside one another in ministry rather than separating people with disability into specialist disability ministries, for example, by running separate programs for children with disabilities away from the rest of the children's program. Through opening up opportunities for people with disability to be on parish rosters, people with and without disability can work together and learn from each other, and be built up in their faith together in service to God. To what extent can people with and without disability serve alongside one another in ministries in your parish?

You might answer all of these questions with a resounding yes. This is wonderful news! But, do all the members of your parish feel likewise? As part of the next step, you will be encouraged to communicate with the people with disability and their families within your parish to learn from their perceptions of inclusion and participation in the parish.

On the other hand, your answers to these questions might reveal that your parish still has some learning and growing to do on its journey towards inclusion. However, the benefit of this reflection is that it gives you a starting point and a way to measure growth and development as your parish moves towards greater inclusion. Having a realistic understanding of how your parish is currently measuring up in terms of including people with disability is an important first step towards making changes that will be effective and long-lasting.



## CHAPTER 4

# Seven steps a church can take to make everyone welcome

### STEP 1

## Create an inclusion committee or discussion group

A good way to make inclusion a priority in your parish is to form a disability inclusion committee or discussion group. Ideally this group would be set up by, and report to, the parish council. This group of people in your parish could perform a number of different functions, including overseeing the needs of particular parishioners with disability and their families as well as developing ideas and plans to facilitate greater inclusion in the future. It is vital to recruit people with disability, as well as people who are family members or carers to people with disability to be a key part of the committee. If you have a large number of people in your parish who would be interested in participating, it may be useful to create a core committee as well as an additional advisory group who could share their knowledge and experience with the core committee.

It is recommended that the church leadership designate an individual person as the chairperson of the accessibility committee. In the case of smaller parishes where a whole committee may not be possible, the leadership could invite a parishioner to become an accessibility officer for the parish to stand in place of a full committee.

The role of this committee would be to:

- give feedback to the parish leadership on issues of accessibility and any potential barriers to inclusion in the parish;
- discuss the needs of particular members of the parish with disability in dialogue with members with disability;
- identify and brainstorm solutions for creating greater inclusion and accessibility;
- create short and long-term goals to work towards greater inclusion and accessibility;
- nominate a particular person on the committee to be the contact person for anyone in the parish who has questions about matters of disability or accessibility;
- meet regularly to measure development and adjust the short and long-term plan accordingly;
- actively seek out people with disability in your parish and invite them to participate in ministries and church rosters;
- coordinate accessibility training for all applicable staff and volunteers.

## STEP 2

### Assess the current situation

One of the earliest tasks of the inclusion committee would be to gather information about the current accessibility of the church, as well as finding out more about the particular needs of the people with disability who are already present in your parish. This information can be gathered through two processes.

#### A congregational survey

The reality is that you will not be able to understand the accessibility needs of your congregations by simply looking around at those present in Sunday services. Who is absent due to chronic illness or depression? How many people have invisible disabilities you may not be aware of, such as anxiety, sensory disability or Autism? Are there people with disability in your parish who would like to serve at church but don't yet have the opportunity to do so?

A congregational survey will give you information about the number of people with

disability already in your parish and the kinds of disabilities represented. It will also give you information about how well your parish is caring for people with disability and highlight areas of growth and development. In addition, it will also help you identify people with disability in your parish who might be interested in serving in the church in ways you may not have considered previously.

A sample copy of a congregational survey is located in Appendix 2: Congregational survey in the back of these guidelines. The survey is in 12-point font and can be photocopied and distributed to parishioners. Alternatively, you can download the survey from <https://www.sds.asn.au/church-resources-disability-inclusion> in 12-point font size as well as in large print (18-point font size). The survey is available as a PDF as well as a Microsoft Word document, so that you can edit the survey to tailor it to the needs of your particular parish.

Please remember, in order to be able to reach all members of your parish, it is best to use a combination of paper and digital surveys. If you only circulate paper surveys, you will likely miss people who are absent on a particular day or someone who is unable to read or write. However, if you only circulate the survey in a digital format, you will not be able to hear from those who unable to use or do not have access to digital technologies.

It is also helpful to ensure parishioners know that they can ask another person to help them answer the survey if they require it.

The material of the survey is sensitive information. You should explain the purpose of the survey upfront, including how the personal information will be used and disclosed, and only use and disclose the information for those purposes. You should store the information securely and destroy it once you no longer have a need to retain it.

## **Accessibility Appraisal Form**

In addition to the congregational survey, it is recommended that parishes also undergo an accessibility appraisal that measures the physical accessibility of your church buildings, grounds, and car park. In order to receive the most accurate information about your parish's accessibility, parishes should consult with a professional access consultant who can undertake a complete accessibility audit of your parish grounds and buildings. Contact information for access consultants is available through the Association of Consultants in Access Australia ([www.access.asn.au](http://www.access.asn.au)).

In preparation for a visit from an access consultant, it may be useful to use *Appendix 3: Accessibility appraisal form* in these guidelines, which contains a simplified accessibility

appraisal checklist. This checklist does not provide the details that an access consultant provides; however, it will be a good starting point for thinking about potential modifications that might be required for your church buildings and grounds. Any appraisal of the church grounds should seek to include the participation of people with disability and their families from within your parish.

As with the congregational survey, a copy of the accessibility appraisal form is located in Appendix 3 in the back of these guidelines. The survey is in 12-point font and can be photocopied and distributed to parishioners. Alternatively, you can download the survey from <https://www.sds.asn.au/church-resources-disability-inclusion> in 12-point font size as well as in large print (18-point font size). The survey is available as a PDF as well as a Microsoft Word document, so that you can edit the survey to tailor it to the needs of your particular parish.

## STEP 3

### Working out solutions

The congregational survey and the accessibility appraisal will both yield useful information and provide a starting point for thinking about improving accessibility in your parish. Perhaps people might note the uneven ground outside the church doors or that the PowerPoint slides used to display the song lyrics are too ‘busy’ and difficult to read. Perhaps members of your parish might share that they have always wanted to participate in a Bible study group or read the Bible during services but haven’t been able to do so because of the lack of physical accessibility. Your newly-formed inclusion committee, under the guidance of the church leadership, will be able to help isolate the most significant barriers that come to light through the survey and appraisal, and begin to plan ways to eliminate those barriers. Some barriers can be eliminated quickly and easily, for example, by providing large print bulletins for parishioners with low vision. Other barriers, however, will take longer to address, for example, building a ramp into the main church building.

Part 3 of these guidelines provides additional information on the elimination of barriers and offers possible solutions to some issues. We also hope to add more information about accessibility on the Sydney Anglicans website.

## STEP 4

# Communicating the vision to the parish & beyond

If changes are to be made to eliminate barriers to participation for people with disability, this vision must be communicated clearly to your parishioners. This process can begin with finding parishioners interested in being involved in the inclusion committee. It would then be the role of the inclusion committee, in consultation with church leadership, to keep the parish informed on progress and future plans.

It is also helpful to consider ways your parish can advise your local community about your parish's commitment to accessibility. This can be done in numerous ways but most importantly through including accessibility information on your parish website, including any of the accessible features of your parish, such as accessible toilets, accessible parking, the presence of a hearing loop, and so on. (Please note: in the past, the terms 'disabled toilets' and 'disabled parking' were used. However, the current terminology is 'accessible toilets' and 'accessible parking'). For further ideas on information to include on your website, see *Appendix 4: Accessible Websites*.



Parishes can also ensure that there is adequate signage on the church grounds and buildings that are visible from a distance. This signage could include the location of the accessible parking and the accessible entrance to the church. Accessible parking and toilets should be marked clearly with the Universal Symbol of Accessibility (pictured left).

Appropriate accessibility signage can be purchased online. Downloadable versions of disability access symbols can also be found for signage for hearing loops, sign language interpreters, large print handouts, captioning, and Braille.

## STEP 5

# Setting priorities and goals for eliminating barriers

The next role of the inclusion committee would be to set the short and long-term goals for the parish in eliminating barriers to inclusion. Helpful questions to consider during this process might include:

- Which changes can be made immediately, and which will take time to implement?
- Which changes are affordable now, and which will require longer to budget for?
- Which changes will benefit the greatest number of people?
- Which changes will be the simplest to achieve?
- Is it possible to raise funds or apply for grants to complete additional projects in the future?

## STEP 6

# Implementation

The next role of the inclusion committee would be to start implementing the plans for change. During this process, it is helpful to determine how the goals will be met and who on the committee will oversee each of the required changes. Questions that are helpful to ask during this process might include:

- Who is going to carry out or take responsibility for the work being done?
- By what date is it to be completed?
- Who will maintain communication with parishioners and especially people with disability and their family and carers?
- If major building alterations are required, what provision has been made to ensure that services continue safely?
- What arrangements have been made to review the on-going progress? How regularly will the committee meet to assess progress?

## STEP 7

# Review and evaluate

It is the next task of the inclusion committee to ensure they review and evaluate progress on a regular basis, for example, once every year.

Questions and issues to be considered in the review and evaluation stage might be:

- What progress has been made since the formation of the committee or since the last review?
- What tasks are still outstanding?
- What are the next tasks or items to be addressed by the committee?
- How successful has the implementation been to date?
- Do we need to involve new members in the inclusion committee?

It may also be helpful to write a report to the Senior Minister (if he is not on the inclusion committee) to inform him of progress to date, successes to date, and the next steps moving forward.

# Safe Ministry Requirements

The Sydney Diocese aims to ensure all people who come to our gatherings are safe. As such, anyone undertaking ministry to children (those under 18 years of age) must have the following:

## A Working With Children Clearance (WWCC)

In NSW it is a legislative requirement that anyone 18 years of age or over obtains a Working With Children Clearance (WWCC) if they work with children or have a role in an organisation that provides services to children (e.g. a parish where there are children) and they have direct and face to face contact with children in that role that is not merely incidental. Some specific exemptions apply. If the role involves personal care for a child with a disability, even a close relative will need a WWCC. For more information on the WWCC process and requirements, go to:

<https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/working-with-children-check>

## Current Safe Ministry training accreditation

It is a requirement of the Diocese that accredited Safe Ministry training be completed prior to a person undertaking ministry to children, and then updated every 3 years. This includes leaders 13-17 years of age, commonly referred to as *Junior Leaders*. The training program focusses on the principles for safe ministry practices in various ministries and encourages leaders working with vulnerable people to consider how to apply these principles to their context.

While training is not a requirement for ministry to adults, it is helpful for all parishioners, and especially those participating in a parish's inclusion committee, to also complete Safe Ministry training. For more information on the training program, go to [www.safeministry.training](http://www.safeministry.training).

## A Safe Ministry Check for Volunteers or equivalent

All employees and volunteers who undertake ministry to children must complete a Safe Ministry Check as part of a Safe Ministry Assessment for their role. This involves completing a written questionnaire and the provision of references. The Assessment is for the purposes of determining the person's suitability for ministry to children.

## Code of Conduct

The Diocesan Code of Conduct, *Faithfulness in Service* sets out the standards of conduct required for church workers (including volunteers) in their interactions with each other and with vulnerable members of the parish – including children. All volunteers who undertake ministry to children are subject to the children's ministry standards in the Code. A copy of the Code should also be given to ministry participants and their families/carers to ensure transparency and accountability in any interactions between church workers and parishioners.

If you have any concerns about the safety of a member of your church with disability (e.g., from their family, carers, group home, workplace, etc) or the safety of members in your church because of a person with disability with violent or inappropriate behaviour, please contact the Professional Standards Unit of the diocese for advice:

Ph: 1800 774 945

[abusereport@sydney.anglican.asn.au](mailto:abusereport@sydney.anglican.asn.au)

<https://safeministry.org.au/contact/>

If someone is in immediate danger, call Triple Zero (000).

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## CHAPTER 5

# How our attitudes welcome or distance those with disability

In order for churches to remove obstacles which restrict people with disability from full inclusion and participation in the life of the church, parishes must first be able to identify the barriers which might be posing a problem in your particular context. While it is easy to identify some of the physical barriers that limit access for people with disability (such as the absence of ramps to the main church building) other barriers can be more difficult to identify.

‘For families with disability, fear of not being accepted, fear of being singled out in inappropriate ways, or even fear of seeing people afraid of them – all these keep disabled adults and parents with disabled children away from churches.’<sup>13</sup>

The Australian Government’s *Shut Out* report on the experiences of Australians with disability highlights that physical barriers are an issue for some people with disability, but for many others the primary barriers to inclusion are ‘social and attitudinal. It is these barriers that have proved the most difficult to overcome.’<sup>14</sup> It is these attitudinal barriers that can also

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13 T. S. Beates, *Disability and the Gospel: How God Uses our Brokenness to Display His Grace* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 135.

14 Australian Government, ‘Shut Out,’ 52. <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/program-services/government-international/national-disability-strategy-shut-out-report#:~:text=The%20report%20%27Shut%20Out%3A%20The,NPWDACC%20on%205%20August%202009.&text=The%20report%20provides%20detail%20on,solutions%20offered%20by%20the%20submissions>.

be the ‘biggest roadblock’ to the inclusion of people with disability in church communities.<sup>15</sup> While physical barriers are easy to identify, they can be difficult and often expensive to modify. By contrast, attitudinal barriers require little in the way of financial investment; however, they can be much harder to identify and eliminate.

Attitudinal barriers to inclusion are, ‘behaviours, perceptions, and assumptions that discriminate against persons with disabilities. These barriers often emerge from a lack of understanding, which can lead people to ignore, to judge, or have misconceptions about a person with a disability.’<sup>16</sup> Unhelpful attitudes might include:

- assuming that people with disability are unable to participate in church in the same way as able-bodied members (e.g. assuming that because someone has an intellectual disability they are unable to learn about the Bible);
- assuming that people with disability are only recipients of ministry rather than being gifted contributors to the body of Christ, or contributors only in certain limited ways (e.g., assuming that a person in a wheelchair cannot, or would not want to, serve on the roster for praying or reading the Bible during Sunday services);
- assuming that the presence of people with disability in Sunday services or kids or youth programs will be disruptive to other congregants;
- assuming all people with disability are dissatisfied with their lives as a result of their disability;
- dismissing the possibility of making changes to accommodate people with disability on the grounds that it is too much work or not worth the effort for such a small number of people;
- being afraid to speak to a person with disability for fear of saying something wrong, or not knowing what to say;
- being unwilling to make accommodations in order to facilitate inclusion.

Nancy Lane writes about the experiences of people with disability in churches:

‘People with disabilities are not only physically excluded but we are psychologically and spiritually alienated from participation in the fullness of life in the faith community. The ramp may get you into a building but there is no point in being there if you are not

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15 P. Johnson, *The Church and People with Disabilities: Awareness, Accessibility, and Advocacy* (New York: United Methodist Women, 2014 [Kindle Edition]), Loc. 185.

16 Council of Ontario Universities, “Understanding Barriers to Accessibility,” 2013. <https://www.uottawa.ca/respect/sites/www.uottawa.ca.respect/files/accessibility-cou-understanding-barriers-2013-06.pdf>

welcome and included.’<sup>17</sup>

In a survey conducted in the USA of parents with children with developmental disability, only 32% of parents surveyed said that physical access was holding them back from participation in the church.<sup>18</sup> By comparison, 70% of respondents stated that congregation-wide disability awareness training would be of most benefit to them in feeling like they were being welcomed and included in their church community.<sup>19</sup> Closer to home, research done in the Canberra-Goulburn Diocese of the Anglican Church acknowledged the challenges of attitudinal barriers to inclusion. The research concluded that inclusion of people with disability primarily comes through ‘establishing intentional ministry opportunities for people living with disabilities so they can be involved and connected in the church.’<sup>20</sup>

The best remedy for reducing attitudinal barriers is familiarity, that is, simply getting to know the people with disability in your parish. This will give you the opportunity to find out people’s interests and gifts, the best ways for the church to serve people with disability, and how people with disability might like to serve in the parish. Rather than making assumptions about the abilities or interests of a person with disability, take the time to ask them directly. Be willing to be creative in overcoming barriers to inclusion, for example:

- think about ways you can still include parishioners who have limited mobility, for example, bringing a microphone down into the congregation for someone to do a prayer or Bible reading;
- for members with disability who are unable to attend Sunday services, assist them to record a Bible reading or prayer ahead of time and incorporate this into the Sunday service.

In 2020 and 2021, churches have had to learn to adapt to a range of new technologies as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While for many churches, this technology was a necessary short-term solution, the same technology has provided new means of inclusion

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17 N. Lane, ‘Resource Pack on Disability, Spirituality, and Healing,’ *Center on Human Policy*, Syracuse University, 1999. <https://thechp.syr.edu/resource-packet-on-disability-spirituality-and-healing/>

18 C. E. Taylor et al, *Welcoming People with Developmental Disabilities and their Families: A Practical Guide for Congregations* (Nashville: Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, 2014), 4, 17.

19 Taylor et al, *Welcoming People with Developmental Disabilities and their Families*, 4, 17.

20 L. Gosbell, ‘The Experiences of People Living with Disabilities in Three Urban Anglican Churches,’ in *Anglican Churches Engaging with People Living with Disabilities* (ed. M. Short; Sydney: Bush Church Aid Australia/CBM Australia, 2018), 183.

and participation for some vulnerable and marginal members of church communities. The challenge moving forward is how we can continue to use these technologies to serve and include church members with disability and other vulnerable people in our parishes.<sup>21</sup>

## Disability-friendly language

One of the easiest ways we can begin to make a difference to people's attitudes towards disability is by being careful with the language we use to describe people with disability and the experience of living with disability. Negative language about disability impacts the way people with disability feel and the way they are perceived in society and in the church. In a guide written to inform the Australian media about how to talk about disability, contributors with disabilities state:

'People with disability are often described in ways that are disempowering, discriminatory, degrading and offensive. Negative words such as "victim" or "sufferer" reinforce stereotypes that people with disability are unhappy about our lives, wish we were 'normal' and should be viewed as objects of pity.'<sup>22</sup>

When anyone is speaking from the pulpit, such as preachers, service leaders, or people leading in prayer, it is particularly important to use language that is positive rather than negative with respect to disability. For example, someone should be referred to as 'living with disability' rather than 'suffering from disability.' Church leaders have the opportunity to set the tone for the parish in terms of the inclusion of people with disability. This might include encouraging parishioners to 'stand if possible' or 'stand in body or spirit', to acknowledge that many older parishioners may not be able physically to stand up. This acknowledges that while there might be people in the service who would like to physically stand, they may be unable to do so due to their disability.

In Australia, there are various ways people talk about disability. Many people with disability prefer what is called person-first language especially when talking about the experiences of other people with disability (e.g., a person with disability). However, some people with

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21 L. Gosbell, "'For families living with disability, churches mustn't go 'back to normal' after COVID-19" ABC Religion and Ethics December 2020 <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/for-those-with-disability-church-must-not-go-back-to-normal/12948602>

22 People with Disability Australia, "What Do I Say? A Guide to Language about Disability," 2019, 1. [https://pwd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/PWDA\\_LanguageGuide\\_A5\\_WEB.pdf](https://pwd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/PWDA_LanguageGuide_A5_WEB.pdf)

disability prefer to describe themselves with identity-first language (e.g., disabled person). This issue is helpfully addressed by People With Disability Australia who state: “Both person-first and identity-first language are used in Australia to refer to people with disability, or disabled people. People with disability often have very strong preferences for either identity-first, or person-first language.” It is important for people without disability to respect the language choices of people with disability. But due to the complexity of disability, there are also people who cannot choose one set of vocabulary over another (for example, people with profound intellectual disabilities). What is important to ask people if they have a preference for language used, respect the language choices of those who are able to decide the language for themselves, and in all cases, irrespective of whether you use person-first or identity-first language, uphold the value, dignity and humanity of all people with disability.

Phrases which speak negatively about a person’s experience of their disability should be avoided, such as referring to a person as ‘wheelchair-bound,’ ‘suffering from autism,’ or ‘afflicted by mental illness.’ While some people with disability may use this type of language to describe their own particular situation, this is certainly not the case for all people with disability. For this reason, it is better to avoid any language which assumes an understanding of someone else’s experience of their disability.

Although many different words and phrases have been used to describe disability over the years, we should avoid redundant and out-dated language, such as words like ‘retarded,’ ‘mongoloid,’ ‘spastic,’ and ‘handicapped.’ Although Australians are renowned for shortening words, it is also important to avoid doing so in relation to disability. For this reason, avoid using abbreviations such as ‘downsie’ for a person with Down Syndrome or ‘wheelie’ for a person in a wheelchair.

Euphemisms likewise should be avoided when describing people or their disabilities. For example, avoid using labels such as ‘differently-abled,’ ‘handi-capable,’ or ‘physically-challenged.’

There are also many terms which we use in a colloquial way on a daily basis which can be hurtful for people living with disability, for example, referring to oneself or others as ‘crazy’ or ‘insane,’ which poorly represents the experiences of people living with mental health challenges. Labels like ‘tone deaf’ to describe a person who isn’t socially aware or using the word ‘blind’ to describe someone who is ignorant should also be avoided.

Jesus’ healing stories in the gospels can be complex narratives for many people with disability. The healing stories are important to our understanding of Jesus’ identity as Messiah, and are indicative of the hope and freedom from bondage available to all people in Jesus, especially in the future kingdom. However, physical healing may not be of the highest priority for all people living with disability today. Many people with disability live full and

productive lives as Christians without feeling their disabilities make them incomplete. While some people with disability may desire physical healing and seek out prayer from church leadership, this will not be the case for all people with disability. It is important then to be sensitive when preaching and teaching on the miracle stories, in order not to assume, for example, that every person with a disability has the same intense desire for healing as the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5).

Here is a helpful table summarised from the media guidelines from *People with Disability Australia's* website on language related to disability:<sup>23</sup>

	TERMS TO AVOID	RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVES
<b>When referring to people with disability in general</b>	Afflicted by... (e.g., afflicted by autism, afflicted by mental illness) Differently abled / handi-capable / handicapped Suffers from... (e.g., suffers from dementia, suffers from quadriplegia)	People with disability  Has / lives with disability  Has / lives with a chronic health condition
<b>When referring to someone who uses a wheelchair</b>	Confined to a wheelchair Wheelchair-bound	Wheelchair user Person who uses a wheelchair
<b>When referring to someone with an intellectual disability</b>	Intellectually challenged Mentally retarded Mentally disabled Simple Retarded	Person with a cognitive disability Person with an intellectual disability
<b>When referring to someone with a mental health condition</b>	Crazy Insane Mentally defective	Person with a mental health condition / mental illness / mental ill-health Person with depression / anxiety / bipolar etc.
<b>When referring to toilets, parking, etc., which is accessible for persons with disability</b>	Disabled toilets Disabled parking	Accessible toilets Accessible parking
<b>When referring to a person without a disability</b>	Normal person	Able-bodied person or non-disabled person

23 People with Disability Australia, "What Do I Say?" 17-21.

# Disability etiquette

Although the word 'etiquette' might seem like an unusual word to use, it serves as a useful reminder to use respectful language and behaviour when interacting with a person with a disability.

For people who are not used to interacting with a person with a disability, it is natural to worry about saying or doing the wrong thing. By following some general disability etiquette and taking the time to get to know a person with disability, you will soon find your discomfort and worries disappearing as you notice the person first before their disability. In each of the following sections, you will find some helpful tips on welcoming and including people with particular disabilities into your parish.

## CHAPTER 6

# How our communication invites or excludes those with disability

Communication between church leaders and members is an important aspect of living together as the people of God. Information is shared with parishioners through the presentation of notices during services, through printed materials and in digital form such as in emails and social media posts. But more importantly, the Word of God is also communicated to parishioners through the public reading of Scripture, the preaching of sermons, and prayers. However, barriers can exist which prevent these forms of communication reaching all intended recipients. Barriers in communication exist when people with disability are unable to access the same information given to non-disabled church members. If, for example, all the church's printed material is only available in standard size print (e.g., 12-point font size), some people with disability as well as many older parishioners are excluded from access to that information. If a church building is not fitted with an induction hearing loop system for people who wear hearing aids, then anything presented in the services – including the sermon – becomes inaccessible to anyone who is hard of hearing.

In order to reduce the possibility for communication barriers, it is helpful for parishes to provide key information in multiple formats for parishioners. This would include, for example, providing church bulletins and hymn sheets in large print format (at least 18-point font size) as well as in standard 12-point font size. Announcements about church events and meetings or other news should be shared through multiple means, for example, verbally as well as in print format as well as via email, text message, or communication apps such as *WhatsApp*. This ensures people who miss a Sunday service do not miss out on important news because

they have been absent. However, it also ensures people with low vision or intellectual disabilities who might struggle with printed information also have access to hearing the information shared verbally in the services.

It is also important to ensure that the parish communicates the specific accessibility features you do have available, such as physical access features like ramps and accessible parking, or communication resources such as a hearing loop and large print Bible. These could be communicated in various ways, including parish noticeboards and church websites. This lets people with disability and their families know that the church is prepared for people with disability to visit. It also highlights more broadly that your parish is committed to including people with disability. Phrases such as, 'All are welcome. Please call (insert phone number) so that we can provide accommodations for your participation', may be useful in event announcements and on your website.

In the following section are tips to help with limiting communication barriers for people with disability in our parishes.

## Eliminating auditory barriers

Currently in Australia, 1 in 6 people are affected by hearing loss. However, as people age, the likelihood of experiencing hearing loss increases, with 3 out of every 4 Australians over the age of 70 experiencing some hearing loss.<sup>24</sup> With our ageing population in Australia, hearing loss is projected to increase to 1 in every 4 people by the year 2050.<sup>25</sup> Given these statistics, it is important that our parishes are prepared to accommodate members who experience hearing loss.

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24 Access Economics, "Listen! Hear! The Economic Impact and Cost of Hearing Loss in Australia," 2006, 5. <https://hearnet.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ListenHearFinal.pdf>

25 Access Economics, "Listen! Hear! The Economic Impact and Cost of Hearing Loss in Australia," 2006, 5. <https://hearnet.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ListenHearFinal.pdf>

## Terminology

In Australia, there are a number of different words and phrases used to describe people with hearing loss. It is important to understand the differences between them.

- Deaf – The word *Deaf* (with a capitalised D) is used to describe people who have a significant hearing loss and who use Auslan (Australian Sign Language) as their primary form of communication. People who are Deaf are more likely to have been born deaf or become deaf early in life.
- deaf – The word *deaf* (with a small d) is a more general term used to describe the experience of hearing loss for people who *do not* use Auslan as their primary form of communication.
- hard of hearing – The phrase *hard of hearing* is the term that is used to describe people who have acquired a hearing loss in late childhood or adulthood, or who have a mild or moderate hearing loss. These people usually communicate using speech, lip-reading and residual hearing (often amplified by hearing aids). This is also referred to as *hearing impaired*.<sup>26</sup>

## Welcoming people who are Deaf and hard of hearing into our parishes

People’s experience of hearing loss varies depending on the extent of the hearing loss and at what point in their life they began experiencing this loss. Hearing loss can be congenital or can be acquired in one’s lifetime due to an accident, illness, or ageing.

While many churches in the Diocese do not have members who are Deaf and who use Auslan as their primary form of communication, all parishes would have members who experience hearing loss to some extent. For many people, hearing loss comes on slowly as they age and many are not immediately aware of the change in their ability to hear. For this reason, making accommodations in our parishes to better support people with hearing loss benefits not just those people who are aware of their hearing loss, but also the many others who may not yet realise their hearing has deteriorated, or who have not yet sought medical assistance. People with hearing loss may or may not have a hearing device, such as a hearing aid, a cochlear implant, brainstem implant or other hearing device.

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26 Deaf Australia “Terminology Policy” <https://deafaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Terminology-policy-approved-Nov-2010.pdf>, pp 1-2.

People’s hearing loss can impact their ability to participate in church in a number of ways. For those who are Deaf and use Auslan as their primary language of communication, most of the average Sunday service would be inaccessible. Many people who are Deaf require an Auslan interpreter. For other people who are hard of hearing, the installation of a hearing augmentation system like a hearing loop (discussed below) can make it easier to hear what happens during the service but the conversations which take place over morning tea might still be inaccessible. Large, noisy spaces like church auditoriums or halls make it difficult for people who are hard of hearing to pinpoint an individual’s voice in the midst of other competing sounds. Using face masks, while important for limiting the spread of COVID-19, can make communication harder for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing as they are unable to read lips.

## Tips for welcoming and including people who are Deaf or hard of hearing

### **In one-to-one and group conversations:**

Ensure your face and mouth can be seen clearly when speaking to a person who is Deaf or hard of hearing. Do not turn your body away as you are speaking as this makes it difficult for a person to read your lips.

Look directly at the person when you are speaking to them. Speak at a normal speed and do not make exaggerated lip movements.

If you are speaking to someone who is Deaf and using a sign language interpreter, talk directly to the person who is Deaf, not to the interpreter. While working, the interpreter is not a participant in the conversation, but a transmitter for the person who is Deaf.

To get a person’s attention, gently tap the Deaf or hard of hearing person on the arm or elbow and make sure they are looking at you before you speak.

If spoken communication or sign language is not working, try using a pen and paper to communicate or use a notes app on a smartphone to type messages back and forth.

Sometimes a person who is hard of hearing may ask you to locate yourself or request that you position yourself in a way that helps the person with hearing loss to hear you better or to lip read. If this happens, be hospitable and move yourself into an ideal position to best allow for communication to take place.

As noisy spaces can make it difficult for people who are hard of hearing to isolate a person’s voice, ask if the person who is hard of hearing would like to move to a quieter space to make it easier to have a conversation.

It is helpful to be aware that people who are Deaf or hard of hearing may find conversations fatiguing as they have to concentrate in order to try and hear and lip-read often in crowded, noisy church halls and auditoriums. Be patient and gracious in your communications and allow time for a person to understand you and respond to your conversation.

**During church services, events, meetings and communication:**

Install a hearing loop or another Hearing Augmentation System to assist people with hearing aids and cochlear implants to better hear the service (for more information on this, see below).

Ensure all the speakers and singers use microphones so the sound can be picked up by assistive technology (for more information on this see below).

Ensure the welcomers are familiar with the location of the hearing loop and the best place for people who are hard of hearing to sit during the service.

If possible, make printed versions of sermons and other spoken material available to someone who is Deaf or hard of hearing so they can more easily follow along with the content.

Make the most of visual prompts such as images on PowerPoint slides to serve as visual cues for what will happen next in the service, for example, when the service leader announces, 'please stand so we can sing together,' include a matching image on a PowerPoint slide.

Ensure the use of captions on all videos played in church services and meetings as well as videos appearing on the parish's website and social media (for more information on captioning, see below).

Although a parish may not have members who are Deaf, a parish could invite a Deaf person and an interpreter to the parish to teach church members how to learn some basic Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Courses in Auslan are also available online through the Deaf Society.

Ensure the church building and grounds have adequate signage to indicate the location of all public spaces, for example, the toilets, kitchen, emergency exits, etc. It is also essential to include signage to show the best seating in the church for people wishing to use the hearing loop (if available).

Ensure the church has visual as well as auditory alarms (e.g., flashing lights that go off when a siren is raised) to ensure people who are Deaf and hard of hearing are also alerted to any emergencies.

## Hearing Augmentation Systems (HAS)

Hearing Augmentation Systems are listening devices that connect to an audio signal and assist people who are hard of hearing to hear better and with greater clarity. The Building Code of Australia requires that all venues (including churches) with built-in amplified systems also need to have effective HAS.

There are a number of different HAS available which include:

- Audio frequency induction loop systems, commonly called hearing loop systems;
- Systems requiring the use of receivers.

In order to determine the most effective HAS for your particular church building size and layout, it is best to consult with a technician who specialises in the installation of HAS. Some contacts are provided in the reference section at the back of these guidelines.

## Use of microphones for all up-front presenters

While many preachers are adept public speakers and have voices that can carry a substantial distance, it is always better to use a microphone for church services and public meetings. Sometimes a preacher or leader might ask ‘can everyone hear me?’ to determine whether they need to use a microphone when presenting. The problem with this question is that only those who are able to hear can answer the question. It is impossible for a person who is hard of hearing to express their need for amplified sound if they have not heard the person speaking from the front in the first place. Using a microphone not only ensures that those using HAS, e.g. hearing loops, are able to pick up the signal, but it also ensures better hearing for all participants. But as hearing loss happens slowly over many years for people over the age of 70, many people in our parishes would have undiagnosed hearing loss. While their hearing loss might not yet have reached the stage that it requires medical intervention, using a microphone ensures that all people present will have greater access to the speaker’s words.<sup>27</sup>

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27 E. A. Hewitt, “What You’re Saying when you say ‘I Don’t Need a Mic!’” Unitarian Universalist Association, 31 August 2017, <https://www.uua.org/worship/lab/what-youre-saying-when-you-say-i-dont-need-mic>.

Also remember that in meetings where people are receiving questions and comments from the audience, it is important to have a roving microphone to use for the audience. This ensures all questions and comments are also heard by people using hearing devices. Alternatively, if the church is not equipped with enough microphones to allow for this, the speaker can simply repeat the audience questions back for the benefit of those using assistive hearing technology as well as everyone else present who may not be able to hear the audience members' questions or comments.

## Captioning for videos

Captioning is the process of displaying film and video dialogue as a running text-based transcript, that is, 'captions' on the screen. Captions may also include descriptions of nonverbal sound, for example, 'sound of window smashing' or 'sound of car engine starting.'

Captions can be either open or closed. *Open captions* are always in view and cannot be turned off by the user, whereas *closed captions* can be turned on and off by the viewer.

It is recommended that all videos played within church services in the Diocese contain captions for the benefit of people who are Deaf and hard of hearing, as well as people from non-English speaking backgrounds. If captions are not already embedded in a file you wish to play in the service, it is important to add them before use in the service. There are a number of ways to create and include captions in videos:

- *Use YouTube's automatic transcription services* – You can upload your video to YouTube and allow YouTube's inbuilt transcription system to add captions to your video file. However, while this seems like the easiest option, this method is notorious for making captioning errors. For this reason, this process always requires some additional human editing to ensure the right words have been captioned and match the speed of the speech on the video.
- *Use your video editor's speech-to-text feature* – If you are recording or editing your own videos, most video editing software has some speech-to-text ability to add in captions (for example, Camtasia or EaseUS Video Editor). However, as with YouTube's captioning service, these automated captions will need to be checked for accuracy.
- *Caption your own videos* – If you are working with short videos, the best option may be simply captioning videos yourself using a free online program like Amara. This works fine if you have a short video (say, less than five minutes). But longer videos will become more difficult and will take far longer.
- *Send your video to a professional captioning service* – There are numerous companies

in Australia which offer professional captioning for videos. For a list of business contacts, see the reference section at the back of these guidelines.

For any videos that are shared on your church’s website, it is important to understand that the content of a parish’s website is strictly covered by the Disability Discrimination Act, which means that all elements of the website should be accessible. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that any videos which appear on the parish’s website or social media pages contain captioning to assist people who are Deaf or hard of hearing as well as those from non-English speaking backgrounds. For more information on the regulations of the DDA in relation to websites, see *Appendix 4: Accessible Websites*.

## Eliminating visual barriers

An *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare* report from 2017-2018 determined that 55% of Australians experienced some form of long-term vision disorder (including conditions corrected by glasses or contact lenses). This statistic increased to 93% in Australians over the age of 55.<sup>28</sup> Given these statistics, it is important that our parishes are prepared to accommodate our members who experience vision loss.

### Terminology

In Australia, a person is considered *blind* if they cannot see at 6 metres what people with 20/20 vision can see at 60 metres. This means that many people who are blind can see some objects, shapes, or light. As with hearing loss, vision loss also increases substantially in older age with the risk of eye disease increasing three-fold for each decade over the age of 30.<sup>29</sup>

A person is said to have *low vision* or a *vision impairment* when they have permanent vision loss that cannot be corrected with glasses and affects their daily functioning, but they are not classified as blind.

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28 AIHW, “Eye health,” Canberra: AIHW, 2019. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/eye-health/eye-health>

29 Access Economics, “Clear Focus: The Economic Impact and Cost of Vision Loss in Australia in 2009” (Canberra: Access Economics P/L, 2010).

As with hearing loss, people's experiences of vision loss also vary depending on the extent of the vision loss, the duration of the vision loss, and at what point in their life they first experienced the vision loss. One person may be able to perceive some shapes or movement while others may not. Some people may have peripheral vision, but not see what is in front of them. Some people may be able to read large print and move about without the use of a white cane or guide dog in many or all situations, while others may be more reliant on a carer for assistance. Some people may be able to utilise assistive technologies such as screen-reading technology which converts text-to-voice, or audio-publications on CD or in digital format, while others may find the technology difficult to navigate. It is important for us to understand the broad experiences of people with different forms of vision loss.

## **Welcoming people who are blind and vision impaired into our parishes**

There are many people in our parishes who are living with some form of vision impairment. As with the loss of hearing, a reduction in visual acuity may develop slowly. Older people may not always be aware of the extent to which their low vision impacts their ability to participate in church services. For these reasons, parishes can ensure they are doing their best to support and include people with low vision by making some small adjustments to physical spaces, providing access to large print materials, and by following some simple protocols for interacting.

Rev. Dr. John Hull was an Australian-born Presbyterian minister and lecturer in religious education in the U.K. Hull lost vision in one eye at the age of 17 and in the second eye at the age of 45. Hull wrote extensively about his experiences of being a Christian theologian coming to terms with his loss of vision. Hull suggests that, 'little things...can make worship much easier for blind people: announcing when you should sit or stand...and remembering to greet blind people.'<sup>30</sup>

Most people with low vision today use text-to-speech technology that converts printed words or digital words on a smartphone or computer into computer-generated speech. Many people with vision impairment access the Bible in this way. Others are able to use large print versions of the Bible depending on the extent of their impairment.

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30 T. H. MacMath, "Interview: John Hull, academic, theologian," 2013, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2013/17-may/features/interviews/interview-john-hull-academic-theologian>.

## Tips for welcoming and including people who are blind or vision impaired

### In one-to-one and group conversations:

Use a natural conversational volume and ordinary tone of voice when speaking to a person who is blind or vision impaired. There is no need to raise your voice to someone who is vision impaired.

When you start speaking to someone who is blind or has low vision, make sure you first announce your presence, so they know who is speaking to them (e.g., 'Hi Mac, it's Jan').

To get the attention of a person who is vision impaired, speak their name or gently touch their arm to get their attention.

Do not push or pull a person with low vision. If you are asked to help a person with low vision, ask them to hold on to your arm and let them walk slowly behind you. Offer verbal cues as to what is ahead when you approach steps, curbs, escalators, or doors, and be specific in your instructions. For example, rather than simply saying, 'there is a door coming up,' say, 'there is a door coming up in front you. It is about 5 metres away.'

Let a vision impaired person know when you are leaving. You do not want someone to experience the embarrassment of continuing to speak to you after you have walked away. Never leave a person who is blind or has low vision alone in the middle of a room without a way of knowing where they are or where they will need to move in order to leave the room they are in.

During a conversation with a person who is blind or has low vision, give verbal feedback to let them know you are listening. They may not be able to see the expression on your face so verbal responses are important.

If you are sitting with a person who is blind or who has low vision during a church service, event or meal, offer to describe the visual surroundings or anything that is displayed on a PowerPoint, or actions in a drama, etc.

Do not pat or distract a person's guide dog. A guide dog is working and needs to concentrate on their task.

Offer to help someone with who is blind or who has low vision if they need help getting food at morning tea or a buffet. But always ensure you first ask the person's permission. You could offer to hold their plate or to describe the variety of food available.

### In Church Services, Events, Meetings, and Communications:

Ensure the welcomers are trained in helping guide someone with low vision into the building and the best places to sit for lighting, seeing the preacher and musicians, as well as seeing information on the data projector etc.

Have large print versions of all service materials available, for example, newsletters or bulletins, song sheets, order of service sheets, and so on. Large print documents must be 18-point font size and use a sans serif font such as Arial, Verdana or Calibri. Left justify all paragraphs and use a minimum of 1.5 spacing between lines of text. For more information on making documents accessible, see *Appendix 5: Accessible documents & PowerPoint presentations*.

Ensure PowerPoint slides used in services use a minimum font size of 36 point and use a sans serif font such as Arial, Verdana or Calibri. No more than 6 lines of text should appear on a slide. Colours used should have a strong contrast for easier reading. For more information on accessible PowerPoint slides, see *Appendix 5: Accessible documents & PowerPoint presentations*.

Have some large print pew Bibles available. For more information and sample sizes for Bible print sizes, see *Appendix 5: Accessible documents & PowerPoint presentations*.

Ensure the main building spaces (especially where church services are held) have adequate lighting so that members are better able to read song sheets, see the preacher and musicians, etc.

Offer to sit in the service with someone who is blind or has low vision and describe the visual elements of the service (e.g., images on PowerPoint slides, the visual components of a drama performed in the service, etc).

Provide tactile warnings of stairs or change of gradient throughout your church premises for the benefit of people with low vision.

Have all presenters, speakers, and readers in a service or during a meeting introduce themselves for the benefit of those with low vision, as well as for visitors.

Encourage service leaders to use verbal instructions to mark changes in the service rather than just relying on visual cues. For example, 'if you are able, please stand with us to sing.'

Ensure any digital information provided to parishioners is accessible and can be used by people who rely on screen-reading technology to enlarge text or convert text to speech. Any images included in emails, church newsletters, and on the parish website should also include 'alt text.' Alt text – short for alternative text – is where text is provided as an alternative for images on websites or digital documents. Alt text provides a description of any images in a document for people who are unable to see. For more information on website accessibility and how to insert alt text, see *Appendix 4: Accessible Websites*.

Church buildings and grounds should all have adequate lighting for members with low vision to navigate spaces safely.

Church buildings and grounds should all have clear signage to direct members to main spaces, for example, bathrooms, hall, kitchen, etc.

If the church has a library of resources available for parishioners, include some items which are large print as well as audiobooks.

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## CHAPTER 7

# How our physical spaces open or close a church to those with disability

When people come to your church building for a gathering, what are their first impressions of your buildings and grounds? For someone who uses a wheelchair or motorised scooter, or a mobility aid such as a walking frame or crutches or a person pushing a stroller, a ramp into a church building is like a welcome mat showing the community that people with disabilities are welcome.<sup>31</sup> When a person who uses a wheelchair is required to use a separate entrance to everyone else that is ‘somewhere around the back,’ or, worse still, if there is no accessible entrance to the church at all, what message are we sending to our local communities about our desire to welcome and include people with disability into our churches?

While it is important to consider the external access to our church buildings, it is also important to consider accessibility inside our buildings. Once a person with a mobility impairment is inside the church, there can still be challenges to moving around easily inside the building or with finding a place to sit for the service. Often people with wheelchairs are put at the back or side of the church, ‘out of the way’ of others, without giving any consideration to whether they can hear or see properly from this location. Instead, it is helpful to have a number of rows made from shorter pews or with less chairs to better accommodate a person who uses a wheelchair. This also allows for people who are wheelchair users to be able to sit with their friends or family during the service.

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31 A. Cameron, “Who has the Disability,” *Sydney Anglicans* 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2009. [https://sydneyanglicans.net/news/connecting\\_with\\_those\\_shut\\_out\\_of\\_church](https://sydneyanglicans.net/news/connecting_with_those_shut_out_of_church)

# The Access to Premises Standards and the Building Code of Australia (BCA) and Access for Churches

When building work that requires a building application is proposed, the new work is required to comply with the Access to Premises Standards and the Building Code of Australia. All work should comply with the current design requirements of Australian Standards, in particular the AS1428 suite of standards, *Design for Access and Mobility*.

Under these standards, access for people with disability must be provided to and within buildings by means of an continuous accessible path of travel (without steps or thresholds):

- From the boundary at the point of entry from the road or footpath to the principal doorway at the entrance floor level; and
- From any accessible car parking space on the allotment (whether within or outside the building); and
- From any other building on the allotment to which access for people with disability is required;
- And through the principal public entrance.

Because a church is an assembly building (under Class 9b of the Access to Premises Standards and the BCA), there are specific requirements which must be met.

Firstly, where fixed seating is provided in an assembly building, wheelchair seating spaces must be provided in accordance with the following:

NUMBER OF FIXED SEATS IN A ROOM OR SPACE	NUMBER OF WHEELCHAIR SEATING SPACES	GROUPING AND LOCATION
Up to 150	3 spaces	1 single space; and 1 group of 2 spaces.

151-800	3 spaces; plus 1 additional space for each 50 seats or part thereof in excess of 150 seats.	Not less than 1 single space; and not less than 1 group of 2 spaces; and not more than 5 spaces in any other group. <sup>32</sup>
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In addition, wheelchair access (compliant with the Access to Premises Standards and the Building Code of Australia) must also be available:

- To and within all other areas normally used by the occupants, except that access need not be provided to tiers or platforms of seating areas that do not contain wheelchair seating spaces;
- The main entrance to the auditorium.

Other requirements under the Access to Premises Standards and the Building Code of Australia:

- The provision of statutory signage (including Braille and tactile information). This is required to direct people to the accessible entry to the accessible entry to the building, to accessible toilets, to the location of the hearing loop etc);
- Tactile ground surface indicators to provide hazard warning for people who are blind or have low vision, at steps and ramps;
- Handrails on stairs and ramps which are compliant with Australian Standards;
- Adequate lighting;
- Accessible furniture and seating;
- Accessible toilets and ambulant toilet cubicles;
- Accessible car parking spaces;
- Hearing Augmentation System (e.g. a hearing loop) where an amplification system is provided.

If a parish is planning on making any modifications to the physical layout of the internal or external features of the church, it is important to consult with an access consultant or an architect who is committed to including accessibility features which meet the standards

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32 “D3.9 Wheelchair seating spaces in Class 9b assembly buildings.” <https://ncc.abcb.gov.au/editions/2019-a1/ncc-2019-volume-one-amendment-1/section-d-access-and-egress/part-d3-access-people>.

of the Access to Premises Standards and the Building Code of Australia. In addition, it is also important to include people with disability and their family and carers as part of the discussions about physical modifications.

Sometimes Community Building Partnership Grants can be obtained from the NSW Government to assist with funding building works to make the site more accessible.

## Welcoming people with physical disabilities into our parishes

It is likely that you will already have people in your parish with a variety of mobility impairments. While some people's conditions require they use a wheelchair, motorised scooter or other mobility aid, other people's mobility impairments may not be as obvious. Some people who experience nerve damage or arthritis may have difficulty walking, standing or sitting for long periods, but do not use any kind of mobility aid. Other people may have muscle weakness or poor hand-eye coordination, which can make it difficult to hold a Bible or take notes during the service or open or close bathroom doors. Considerations about the physical layout of the church and grounds goes beyond the installation of external ramps, but must also consider elements such as:

- the type of seating available and its arrangement,
- the installation of handrails,
- eliminating variances in ground height (putting in small ramps),
- installing textured markers (tactile ground surface indicators) to indicate changes in flooring levels or textures,
- widening doorways, and
- installing kerb ramps<sup>33</sup>.

It is also helpful to remember that some people experience conditions that can vary in their

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<sup>33</sup> Kerb ramps are small ramps that are cut into the concrete to make a ramp from the road to the footpath. Kerb ramps can be made of plastic or rubber and installed where a built-in kerb ramp was not created). More specific information on each of these points is located in the accompanying Accessibility Appraisal Form in Appendix 3 and downloadable in both PDF and Word document as well as in large print format.

severity from day to day. Someone who uses a cane or walker one day may use a wheelchair on another day. It is also helpful to understand that what one person in a wheelchair may be able to do, another may not, for example, navigate narrow passageways, lean over to grab an item from the other side of the table, or pour their own tea and coffee. For this reason, it is always important to offer help but allow a person with disability to decline it if it isn't necessary.

## Tips for welcoming and including people who have physical disabilities or mobility impairments

### In one-to-one and group conversations:

If you are speaking to someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter and you will be talking for more than a few minutes, move to an area where you can sit down and talk face-to-face rather than making the person have to look up at you for the duration of the conversation

Do not move a person's wheelchair, crutches or walker out of their reach. Ask permission to move a mobility device if it is required to let someone past.

Do not lean on a person's wheelchair or assistive device.

Do not push a person in a wheelchair unless you are asked to help.

Always ask a wheelchair user if he or she would like assistance before you help, for example, making tea or coffee after church.

Do not make assumptions about what a person with a physical disability can or cannot do. Many people in wheelchairs participate in sport, drive cars, catch public transport, and live independently. Do not assume a person who uses a mobility device will not be able to attend a church event such a picnic or house party. Instead, talk to the person about what could be done to make the event more accessible and inclusive, so that they are able to participate.

Do not assume that someone with a physical disability also has an intellectual disability.

### In church services, events, meetings, and communications:

Ensure the main auditorium includes pew cuts (areas with shortened pews) or an area at the end of a row of chairs that has space for people who use mobility aids. Rather than attempting to keep all people with mobility devices together, create spaces that allow for a person with a mobility device to be able to sit with their family and friends in the congregation.

Ensure ushers and welcomers are trained in knowing the best seating locations for people with mobility devices.

In the main auditorium, as well as in the church hall, ensure you have some seats with armrests in order to help people with limited mobility or chronic pain more easily to raise or lower themselves out of and into a chair.

For church events when people are seated for eating, make sure there is enough room between tables for a person in a wheelchair or walking frame to be able to navigate the space. Also ensure that there are tables available that someone in a wheelchair or using a mobility device could also use comfortably (e.g., the right height and shape for someone using a wheelchair).

If possible, build a ramp or install a portable ramp to create access to the stage or pulpit. This will ensure that people with physical disabilities have the same opportunity as others to go onto rosters for Bible reading, praying, or music.

Ensure that accessible toilets are not used as storage spaces. Also ensure that they are not frequented by able-bodied users but are kept free for people who require them.

If the parish has not yet been able to build an accessible front entrance, ensure there is large visible signage indicating the pathway to the alternative accessible entrance. As well as signage, have an usher or welcomer escort people with disability to the alternative accessible entrance if possible.

Arrange for some bible study groups to be held on the church grounds or in other accessible venues to accommodate people with mobility impairments.

All ramps should be installed properly – even portable ramps – to meet the Access to Premises Standards and the Building Code of Australia’s provisions for accessibility. This will ensure you do not have ramps which are uneven, too steep, or made of incorrect materials in line with Australian Standards AS48 part 1.

Consider providing online Bible Study groups available through Zoom or other streaming platforms to help people with mobility issues, compromised immune systems, or chronic pain, still be able to participate in weekly fellowship groups.

For more information and specific requirements on accessible toilets, parking, building restrictions etc, see *Appendix 1: The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Building Code of Australia (BCA)*.



St Michael's Anglican Cathedral, Wollongong

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## CHAPTER 8

# Including people with intellectual disabilities

According to the Australian Government's *Shut Out* report, people with intellectual disabilities often 'struggle for meaningful engagement with the community...(and) are among the most isolated groups (of people)' in Australia.<sup>34</sup> People with intellectual disabilities often have fewer social networks and less genuine friendships than people without intellectual disabilities. Instead, their main relationships are with family members, family friends, and people in paid relationships such as support workers.<sup>35</sup>

An intellectual disability, sometimes referred to as a cognitive disability or developmental disability, affects the way a person learns. 'The term intellectual disability is used to describe a reduced ability to understand and process new or complex information and to learn and apply new skills.'<sup>36</sup> It can impact both a person's ability to understand information (their receptive language skills) and the way they provide information (their expressive language skills). An intellectual disability can be associated with congenital conditions like Down Syndrome but intellectual impairments can also occur during one's lifetime through accident or illness.

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34 Australian Government, 'SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia,' 53.

35 Nathan J. Wilson et al, 'From Social Exclusion to Supported Inclusion: Adults with Intellectual Disability Discuss their Lived Experiences of a Structured Social Group,' *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities* 30 (2017): 848.

36 Council for Intellectual Disability, 'Communication Tips,' <https://cid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Communication-tips-council-intellectual-disability-may-2020.pdf>

An intellectual disability can affect a person in a range of different ways. Someone with an intellectual disability:

- may take longer to learn new things;
- may have difficulty reading and writing;
- may have difficulty with communication (either expressive or receptive communication);
- may find it difficult to understand complex information, especially abstract concepts;
- may have difficulty with planning or problem solving.

While people with intellectual disability make up 3% of the Australian population, we rarely see this number reflected in our parishes.<sup>37</sup>

As with other forms of disability, intellectual disability will look different for each person. A person with a mild intellectual disability may work full time, be able to drive a car, negotiate public transport, and live independently. In contrast, another person with an intellectual disability might not be quite so independent, and may require assistance with the tasks of daily living. Some people with an intellectual disability can communicate verbally, others may be non-verbal. Some people can read and write well, others cannot. As you get to know a person with an intellectual disability, you will gain a greater understanding of their skills and abilities, which will help you understand the best ways to communicate with them.

## Welcoming people with intellectual disabilities into our parishes

Erik Carter, author of *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* writes: ‘The potential for congregations to dispense grace, extend relationships, and affect the lives of people with developmental (intellectual) disabilities and their families is enormous, but these rich and deep reservoirs

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37 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, “Disability in Australia: Intellectual Disability,” <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/disability-in-australia-intellectual-disability/contents/summary>

of support remain largely untapped.<sup>38</sup> The church has great potential to make a difference in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. As a group of people who are so often forgotten, overlooked, and marginalised in society, the church has a great opportunity to welcome and include people with intellectual disabilities, and to provide natural social connections and genuine friendships.

Sadly, the faith of people with intellectual disabilities is often overlooked and underrated, and churches do not take the time to teach and disciple people with intellectual disabilities. For some Christians, an over-emphasis on cognitive abilities and intellectual capacity mean they might not see merit in providing such discipleship or teaching programs for people with intellectual disabilities. However, if all people are created by God to be in relationship with Him, then IQ and cognitive ability are no impediment to God's ability to work in and through all people.

In order to best include and serve adults with intellectual disabilities in your parish, it is helpful to gather some personal information about them with their permission (or the permission of the family or carers). Included in *Appendix 6: Collecting information from adults with intellectual disabilities and adults on the Autism Spectrum* is an information form designed to help you gather information from an adult parishioner with an intellectual disability or who is on the Autism Spectrum. It is advisable to gather this information in consultation with the person's family members or carers if possible. They will be your best source of information. If the person with intellectual disability does not attend your church with a family member or carer, you can offer to help them complete the form.

It would not be appropriate to give this form to a person on the first day they visit your church. It would only be appropriate to ask someone to complete this form if they were already or were planning on becoming a permanent member of your parish.

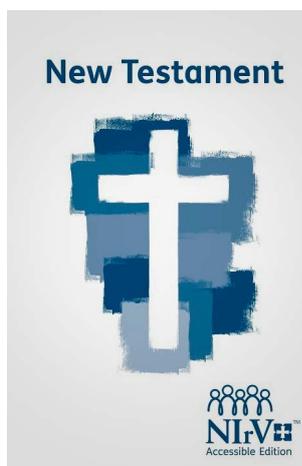
It should also be noted that it is not advisable to ask someone directly if they have an intellectual disability. If a person offers this information or it is provided by a family member or carer, only then would it be appropriate to ask them to complete the form on supporting an adult with an intellectual disability.

The form is available in standard 12-point font and in large print. It is also available as a Microsoft Word document so you can modify it for your own parish. The downloadable version is available in *Appendix 6: Collecting information from adults with intellectual*

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38 Eric W. Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2007), 119.

*disabilities and adults on the Autism Spectrum.*



A helpful Bible translation to use with people with intellectual disabilities is the NIV (New International Readers Version). In particular, there is a NIV Accessible New Testament with simple text, large print, and pictures, but which do not make it look like a child's Bible.

## Tips for welcoming and including people with intellectual disabilities

### **In one-to-one and group conversations:**

Speak directly to a person with an intellectual disability rather than speaking through their carer or support person.

It is better to overestimate rather than underestimate someone's intellectual ability. Speak to a person with an intellectual disability as you would anyone else and then you can modify your language if you find the person is having trouble understanding you.

Be patient in waiting for a response as sometimes it can take a little while for a person with an intellectual disability to process information and formulate a response.

Do not finish a word or sentence for someone who has slow speech or speech difficulties. Give them time to speak for themselves.

Treat adults as peers and do not patronise them or treat them like children. Respect their decisions.

A helpful question to ask to get to know someone with an intellectual disability is, 'what do you do during the week?' This question allows people to share about any paid or voluntary work as well as sharing their interests. Finding out a person's interests will give you a greater ability to talk with and learn about a person with an intellectual disability.

Be patient and flexible in your interactions with someone with an intellectual disability. They may be repetitive or have a very particular area of interest they like to talk about at length. Even when these aren't your own areas of interest, look at it as an opportunity to learn something new so you can share knowledge of the topic with this person with an intellectual disability.

Recognise that it can be difficult for someone with an intellectual disability to pick up on social cues, especially vague comments or non-verbal forms of communication. For this reason, someone with an intellectual disability may stand too close or speak louder than others in an enclosed space. It is important to be patient and understanding in these situations. It is also possible to give some direct guidance and instruction if this is done with care and respect. For example, if a person with an intellectual disability interrupts when you are in the middle of a conversation with someone else, it is possible to gently say, for instance, ‘I am just speaking with Max at the moment but I will be finished in 10 minutes and then I will come and find you to talk to you.’

### **In Church Services, Events, Meetings, and Communications:**

As much as possible, include people with intellectual disabilities in services and events with the rest of the congregation. Many people with intellectual disabilities will happily sit through a regular church service. However, if there are people who are keen to learn more about the Bible, it is possible to run a Bible study tailored specifically to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities during the sermon time.

Find ways to use the skills and abilities of people with intellectual disabilities in your parish. Someone with an intellectual disability might be willing and able to help set up and pack up chairs, serve food for morning tea, help with answering the telephones, be involved with welcoming or other tasks. As with all people, people with intellectual disabilities have different interests and abilities. Take the time to find out what a person is good at and what they enjoy doing as you would with anyone who would like to serve at church.

Provide opportunities for participation in congregational activities. Do not make assumptions about a person’s ability or desire to be involved. Include their family and carers in discussions and planning for participation.

Consider pairing a person with an intellectual disability with a buddy or faith partner to create a natural social connection, and opportunities for discipleship that align with the person’s gifts, abilities, and interests. (For more information on Buddy Systems or Faith Partners, see below).

People with intellectual disabilities are often very concrete learners and can struggle with abstract concepts. If you are teaching the Bible to people with intellectual disabilities, props, visuals, skits, and other tactile and sensory activities are often helpful.

If you are creating handouts for people with intellectual disability and learning difficulties, use a clear large print font, and include pictures of real people rather than emojis or cartoons, which can sometimes be confusing for people with an intellectual disability.

Consider launching your own Jesus Club program for adults with intellectual disabilities (see below).

## Buddy systems or faith partners for adults with intellectual disabilities

Pairing a person who with an intellectual disability with a buddy or faith partner can help provide extra support for a person with a disability. The idea of the buddy system or faith partners comes from the education setting, where a student with disability is paired with a peer without a disability to help both students develop skills in social interaction, compassion and understanding, and building relationships. There are also benefits for the buddy or faith partner, some of which include, ‘participating in a program that provides training and guidance on how to interact with a person with a disability; people involved are more likely to initiate social interaction with the person with a disability; and it leads to a history and comfort level that can only be developed through having a friendship.’<sup>39</sup> For this reason, the pairing can be of benefit to both the person with the disability as well as their buddy or faith partner.

The two primary purposes of the pairing:

- To make a personal connection that provides support and friendship;
- To increase full participation in congregational life for the person with an intellectual disability.<sup>40</sup>

### Finding a Buddy or Faith Partner

It is first helpful to identify the needs and abilities of a person with an intellectual disability by asking them or consulting with their family members or carer to complete a form about the abilities, desires, likes and dislikes of a person with disability. An example of this kind of information form for gathering information about an adult with intellectual disability is included in *Appendix 6: Collecting information from adults with intellectual disabilities and adults on the Autism Spectrum*, and can be downloaded in 12-point font and in large print.

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39 Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, “Including Adults with Disabilities in Religious Life and Education,” Nashville: Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, n.d., p 12.

40 Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, “Including Adults with Disabilities in Religious Life and Education,” Nashville: Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, n.d., p 12.

The form is also available in both PDF and in Microsoft Word form so that the document can be modified for your specific church context.

After discerning the person's skills, abilities and likes, you will be in a better position to match them with a buddy or faith partner.

Church leaders or members of the church's inclusion committee should first identify people in the parish who would be prepared to go onto a roster to serve as a buddy or faith partner. After an identified person agrees to be involved as a buddy or faith partner, they should meet together with the person with disability (and their family or caregivers) and a member of the inclusion committee to train them in Safe Ministry as well as serving as a buddy or faith partner. The meeting would also discuss the scope of the buddy or faith partner. For example, the buddy might be rostered on for one Sunday a month and will sit with the person during the sermon and stay with them for the first 20 minutes after the service ends to assist them with getting food or facilitating discussions with other church members.

## **Guide for a Buddy or Faith Partner for an Adult with an Intellectual Disability**

According to the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Development Disabilities, 'A buddy or faith partner is someone who:

- is a leader through example by focusing on ability rather than on disability and modelling a good attitude;
- is aware of person-first language;
- is aware of disability etiquette;
- is a communication guide who can help a person with disability in conversations with others;
- is a person who is willing to spend time with the person with disability after the service or at a later time to answer any questions that arise from the service or sermon;
- is a friend who can be available for social opportunities such as going to the movies or a café together outside of church time.<sup>41</sup>

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41 Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, "Including Adults with Disabilities in Religious Life and Education," Nashville: Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, n.d., p 13.

## Jesus Club Ministries

One successful model of including and discipling adults with intellectual disabilities is Jesus Club Ministries. Jesus Club Ministries run as fortnightly programs in 11 Anglican churches in the Diocese of Sydney. The aim of the Jesus Club program is to teach the gospel to adults with intellectual disabilities and to disciple people in their faith. This is done through a teaching program which is tailored specifically to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. Each program includes music, craft, Bible teaching, small Bible study groups and is centred around creating meaningful social connections. For more information on Jesus Club and the locations of the clubs in the Diocese, see the reference section at the back of these guidelines.

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## CHAPTER 9

# Including people on the Autism Spectrum

Autism Spectrum Disorder, or Autism, is a neuro-developmental condition that ‘affects how a person thinks, feels, interacts with others, and experiences their environment.’<sup>42</sup> The term ‘spectrum’ is used ‘to describe the range of characteristics and abilities’ found in people with Autism.<sup>43</sup> While there are general characteristics that can be associated with being on the Autism Spectrum – for example, challenges with social communication and interaction, difficulties with interpreting non-verbal forms of communication, repetitive behaviours, narrow interests – no two people with Autism are alike. It is because of the diversity of experiences of people with Autism that Professor Steven Shore, an adult on the Autism Spectrum is credited with the phrase, ‘If you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism.’<sup>44</sup> The experiences of one person on the Autism Spectrum can be completely different to someone else’s experiences of being on the spectrum.

The numbers of people diagnosed with Autism have increased dramatically in the last

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42 Aspect, ‘What is Autism,’ <https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/about-autism/what-is-autism>

43 Amaze, ‘Talking about Autism: Guidelines for Respectful and Accurate Reporting on Autism and Autistic People,’ (2019) [https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Talking-about-autism-a-media-resource\\_web.pdf](https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Talking-about-autism-a-media-resource_web.pdf), 3.

44 M. B. Walsh, A. F. Walsh, and W. C. Gaventa, *Autism and Faith: A Journey into Community* (New Brunswick: Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, 2008), 6.

decade, with a 25% increase in diagnoses in Australia between 2015 and 2018.<sup>45</sup> In Australia, males are 3.5 times more likely to be diagnosed as being on the Autism Spectrum than females,<sup>46</sup> however, there is evidence to suggest that girls are more likely to be undiagnosed due to the differences between the way Autism presents in girls versus boys.<sup>47</sup>

Autism affects the way that individuals are able to interact with other people and their ability to communicate thoughts and ideas. Individuals with Autism often rely on routines and prefer structure and schedules to cope with life. Unexpected changes or the introduction of new people or situations can be a cause of great stress for many people on the Autism Spectrum. Many individuals with Autism also experience challenges with sensory processing which means they can be hypersensitive to odours, the taste and texture of food, loud noises and bright lights. This sensory overload can result in a person with Autism having a 'meltdown,' which is an experience of complete sensory overload. A meltdown often results in a person becoming distressed and makes it difficult for them to calm their emotions. One method people with Autism use to calm themselves down is called stimming. This refers to a usually repetitive behaviour a person uses to calm, comfort or regulate themselves. Examples of stimming might include rocking back and forth, using a fidget spinner, waving or flapping arms, or repeating words.

Ann Memmott is an adult on the Autism spectrum who advises churches on Autism inclusion. She writes about her experiences of having Autism and describes some of the characteristics of having Autism: 'Our brains are wired to be excellent at specialised tasks but are fairly hopeless at understanding social relationships...We're on average ten times more accurate than other people, but the bits of the brain that "decode" people's behaviour, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and tone of voice aren't wired up very well.'<sup>48</sup>

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45 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Disability Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018.' [https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4430.0Main+Features102018#:~:text=disability%20\(Media%20Release\)-,Autism%20in%20Australia,1.3%25%20and%200.4%25%20respectively](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4430.0Main+Features102018#:~:text=disability%20(Media%20Release)-,Autism%20in%20Australia,1.3%25%20and%200.4%25%20respectively).

46 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Disability Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018.' [https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4430.0Main+Features102018#:~:text=disability%20\(Media%20Release\)-,Autism%20in%20Australia,1.3%25%20and%200.4%25%20respectively](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4430.0Main+Features102018#:~:text=disability%20(Media%20Release)-,Autism%20in%20Australia,1.3%25%20and%200.4%25%20respectively).

47 'Thousands of autistic girls and women "going undiagnosed" due to gender bias.' <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/sep/14/thousands-of-autistic-girls-and-women-going-undiagnosed-due-to-gender-bias>.

48 A. Memmott, "Including People with Autism" in *Making Church Accessible to All: Including Disabled People in Church Life* (Ed. Tony Phelps-Jones. Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2013), 76.

## Welcoming people on the Autism Spectrum into our parishes

While labels such as Autism Spectrum can be useful, ‘the label should not in any way take away from the fact that this is a complex person with individual gifts and needs.’<sup>49</sup> It is helpful to remember that Autism is a spectrum, which means there is a broad range of ways it can impact an individual. There may be people with Autism already in your parishes who are able to navigate church without too much difficulty. However, this will not be the case for all people with Autism. Some people with Autism also have an intellectual disability, but it is not always the case. Some people on the Autism Spectrum experience anxiety, while others do not. As with all people with disability, the most helpful thing a church community can do is to get to know the individual.

In order to best include and serve adults on the Autism Spectrum in your parish, it is helpful to gather some personal information about them with their permission (or the permission of the family or carers). Included in *Appendix 6: Collecting information from adults with intellectual disabilities and adults on the Autism Spectrum* is an information form designed to help you gather information from an adult parishioner with an intellectual disability or on the Autism Spectrum. It is advisable to gather this information in consultation with the person’s family members and or carers if possible. They will be your best source of information. If a person on the Autism Spectrum does not attend your church with family or carers, you can offer to help them complete the form.

It would only be appropriate to ask someone to complete this form if they were already or were planning on becoming a permanent member of your parish.

It should also be noted that it is not advisable to ask someone directly if they are on the Autism Spectrum. If a person offers this information or it is provided by a family member or caregiver, only then would it be appropriate to ask them to complete the form on supporting a parishioner on the Autism Spectrum.

The form is available in standard 12-point font and in large print. It is also available as a Microsoft Word document so you can modify it for your own parish. The downloadable version is included in *Appendix 6: Collecting information from adults with intellectual disabilities and adults on the Autism Spectrum*.

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49 B. J. Newman, *Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder* (Rev. Edition; Grand Rapids: Friendship Ministries, 2011), 6.

An excellent resource on including people with Autism in church communities is Barbara J. Newman’s *Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder*.<sup>50</sup> Two free online resources are also particularly helpful:

- One is from the Anglican Diocese of Oxford in the UK, entitled ‘Welcoming and Including Autistic People in our Churches and Communities,’ available for download [here](#). Full details are also available in the references section at the back of these guidelines.
- Another is from Autism Society of North Carolina, ‘Autism and Faith Communities: Welcoming and Supporting Faith Communities,’ available for download [here](#). Full details are also available in the reference section at the back of these guidelines.

<b>Tips for welcoming and including people on the Autism Spectrum</b>	
<b>In one-to-one and group conversations:</b>	
	Do not make assumptions about someone’s intellectual capabilities based on the fact they have Autism. While some people with Autism have an intellectual disability, this is not always the case. Take the time to get to know someone as an individual.
	Speak directly to a person with Autism rather than speaking through their carer or family member.
	Be patient in waiting for a response as sometimes it can take a little while for a person on the Autism Spectrum to process information and formulate a response.
	Treat adults as peers and do not patronise them or treat them like children. Respect their decisions.
	Be patient and flexible in your interactions with someone on the Autism Spectrum. They may be repetitive or have a very particular area of interest they like to talk about at length. Even when these aren’t your own areas of interest, look at it as an opportunity to learn something new so you can share knowledge of the topic with this person with Autism.
	Respect that someone on the Autism Spectrum might be very particular about the way to complete a task or follow a particular routine. Do not make jokes about the systems someone with Autism uses to cope with stress, for example, repetitive behaviours or stimming.

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50 B. J. Newman, *Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder* (Rev. Edition; Grand Rapids: Friendship Ministries, 2011).

Be aware that social interaction can be tiring for people with ASD as they might be working hard to try to understand verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as trying to cope with the sensory overload of being at church and out of their comfort zone. Be patient in your interactions and understanding of people on the Autism Spectrum or families with a member on the Autism Spectrum if they have to leave directly after the service finishes.

Recognise that it can be difficult for someone on the Autism Spectrum to pick up on social cues, especially vague comments or non-verbal forms of communication. For this reason, someone on the Autism Spectrum may stand too close or speak louder than others in an enclosed space. It is important to be patient and understanding in these situations. It is also possible to give some direct guidance and instruction if this is done with care and respect. For example, if a person on the Autism Spectrum interrupts when you are in the middle of a conversation with someone else, it is possible to gently say, for example, 'I am just speaking with Max at the moment but I will be finished in 10 minutes and then I will come and find you to talk to you.'

#### **In Church Services, Events, Meetings, and Communications:**

As with other kinds of disability, visual prompts such as images on PowerPoint slides during services and events can be particularly helpful for reinforcing what is being said verbally.

Transitions between one part of a service or event and the next can be difficult for people on the Autism Spectrum. It is helpful to be clear about what will be happening next. For example, some church services follow a similar order each service and parishioners know the right times to stand and sit. These transitions can be difficult or confusing for newcomers or visitors as well as people on the Autism Spectrum. Rather than assuming that everyone knows what will be happening next, make it explicit, for example, 'Please stand with us if you are able, so we can sing together.'

Have an order of service available for anyone to pick up on their way into the service. As routine and predictability can be important for people on the Autism Spectrum, knowing what is going to happen in the service or meeting can lower a person's stress levels. For example, they can be prepared for when the music starts, which will be louder and potentially more difficult to cope with for someone on the Autism Spectrum. If possible, it is helpful to have visual representations on the order of service to indicate the different parts of the service, for example, singing, Bible reading, sermon, etc.

If possible, it is helpful to have some quiet spaces available in the church where people can retreat to if they are feeling overwhelmed by the noise or people. This room could be used during the service to quietly listen to the service content but also afterwards during the noisy times of morning tea or supper.

Have photographs on the website of outside and inside the church to give a person with Autism a better idea of what to expect at church when they arrive (for more information see *Appendix 4: Accessible Websites*).

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## CHAPTER 10

# Welcoming people with mental health challenges

While conditions such as anxiety and depression are not always immediately considered a form of disability among the general population in Australia, mental illness is considered a form of disability under the Australian Disability Discrimination Act.<sup>51</sup> According to the Australian Human Rights Commission:

‘The impact of mental illness on a person’s life determines whether it becomes a disability for them and whether it is a permanent or temporary disability. A person may experience one episode of mental illness in their lifetime and completely recover, while another may have to manage their illness for the rest of their life.’<sup>52</sup>

Simply put, a person’s mental illness may be considered a disability if it has a disabling impact on their lives. If a mental illness impedes a person in undertaking employment, accessing social services, experiencing friendships, and so on, then a person’s mental illness can be classified as a form of disability under Australian law. If a person is discriminated against on the grounds of their mental illness, this counts as a form of disability discrimination. This means that, as well as making accommodations for people with other forms of disability, our parishes must also consider the way we welcome, include, and support people with mental health challenges according to the standards set out in the *Disability Discrimination Act*.

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51 Australian Human Rights Commission, ‘Mental Illness,’ <https://humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12067>

52 Australian Human Rights Commission, ‘Understanding Mental Illness,’ <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/2-understanding-mental-illness>

According to the Australian Department of Health statistics, 45.5% of Australians – almost half our population – have or will experience a mental health condition during their lifetime.<sup>53</sup> One in five (20%) Australians aged 16-85 experiences a mental illness in any given year.<sup>54</sup> Despite this, there is still a great deal of stigma and lack of understanding around the experience of people living with mental ill-health.

The term *mental illness* or *mental health challenges* refers to a range of ‘health conditions involving significant changes in thinking, emotion, or behavior (or a combination of these).’<sup>55</sup> These conditions are often ‘associated with distress or problems functioning in social, work, or family activities.’<sup>56</sup> Mental ill-health can take many forms. ‘Some are fairly mild and only interfere in limited ways with daily life, such as certain phobias (abnormal fears). Other mental illnesses are so severe that a person may need care in a hospital.’<sup>57</sup> Many people live with mild depression or anxiety but are still able to participate in work and church, and care for family members. However, other people can experience mental health conditions which are much more disruptive to their lives and make it difficult to work, socialise, or fulfill their family responsibilities. This might be the case for someone with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance use disorders, eating disorders, or other forms of mental illness. ‘Mental health conditions can affect different aspects of a person, including personality, thinking, perception, mood, behavior, or judgment.’<sup>58</sup>

Many people in Australia today still feel stigmatised and isolated because of their mental health challenges. The World Health Organisation defines stigma as ‘a mark of shame, disgrace or disapproval which results in an individual being rejected, discriminated against, and excluded from participating in a number of different areas of society.’<sup>59</sup> People experience stigmatisation when they are told by friends, families or employers to ‘get over it,’

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53 Australian Government, Department of Health, ‘Prevalence of Mental Disorders in the Australian Population.’ <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-m-mhaust2-toc~mental-pubs-m-mhaust2-hig~mental-pubs-m-mhaust2-hig-pre#fig1>

54 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results*, 4326.0, 2007. ABS: Canberra, 2009.

55 American Psychiatric Association, ‘Mental Health: A Guide for Faith Leaders,’ Arlington: American Psychiatric Association Foundation, 4. <https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/faith-mentalhealth-guide.pdf>

56 American Psychiatric Association, ‘Mental Health,’ 4.

57 American Psychiatric Association, ‘Mental Health,’ 4.

58 American Psychiatric Association, ‘Mental Health,’ 4.

59 World Health Organization, ‘The WHO special initiative for mental health (2019-2023): universal health coverage for mental health.’ World Health Organization, 2019. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/310981>.

or ‘snap out of it,’ as though a person with a mental health challenge has complete control over the impact their illness has on their lives. Other people experience stigmatisation when they are overlooked for employment or voluntary roles as a result of their mental health condition. Misunderstanding and stigmatisation also occur when people use terms like ‘crazy,’ ‘insane,’ or ‘nuts,’ to refer to either a strange or unusual occurrence, or a particular person with a mental health condition. Such language does not help foster an attitude of compassion or understanding for people living with mental health challenges.

Stigmatisation in the church can occur when people who have experienced mental health challenges in the past or who have well-controlled mental health conditions are excluded from participating in ministry teams or serving on church rosters on the basis of their mental ill-health. Stigmatisation in the church can also occur if a person’s mental health challenges are dismissed as punishment for sin, demon possession, or a lack of faith, with no attempt to provide counselling, supports, or compassion for their condition. In contrast to such damaging stereotypes, church communities have the ability to ‘help the individual and family understand that emotional challenges and mental disorders are *illnesses* — part of our human frailty and vulnerability. Just as the stomach can be upset, the brain can experience imbalance and malfunction also.’<sup>60</sup>

## Welcoming people with mental health challenges into our parishes

Amy Simpson, in a book called *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church’s Mission*, refers to mental health conditions as ‘no casserole illnesses.’<sup>61</sup> By this she means that when someone has an accident or is diagnosed with an illness like cancer, people in the church will often offer to help by delivering meals to them. However, due to the stigma and uncertainty around how to support people experiencing mental health challenges, there is often not the same amount of support from church communities for people experiencing depression, anxiety, or other mental health conditions. Sometimes people with mental health challenges are made to feel guilty when they struggle to pray or read their Bibles or attend church as people do not understand how hard these things can be for someone experiencing a mental health condition.

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60 Pathways to Promise, ‘Mental Health Ministry: Children and Family Notebook,’ 5 [http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/resources/resource\\_guides/ChildrenFamilyNotebook/children-family-notebook.pdf](http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/resources/resource_guides/ChildrenFamilyNotebook/children-family-notebook.pdf).

61 Simpson, *Troubled Minds*, 37.

Matthew Sandford suggests that there are three things that the church can offer people living with mental health challenges that professional medical care cannot:

- *Hope* – ‘hope in Christ transcends circumstances and sustains us when the world around us sees the situation as hopeless.’
- *A holistic view of humans* – A Christian approach means recognising the whole person as physical, mental, spiritual, and relational. ‘The church’s holistic view of being human offers those struggling with mental health problems a more complete framework for recovery.’
- *Accessibility & supportive community* – As well as booking in to see health professionals, if the church were better equipped to serve and support people with mental ill-health, there would be always be a community of people around ready to help, pray, and care for an individual. Understanding and support from a local community network is often considered a vital element in a person’s recovery and management of ill-health, according to health professionals.<sup>62</sup>

It is not the job of the church to replace the role of professionals in the life of someone with mental ill-health. However, the church can have a significant role to play in offering hospitality and care to those who are often marginalised and stigmatised by their mental health conditions. Rather than judgement, the church can provide compassion and understanding. Rather than isolation and hopelessness, the church can offer community support and provide a sense of hope in the message of Jesus. The power of the gospel to transform lives and the support of a compassionate and grace-demonstrating community can make an enormous difference in a person’s ability to cope with the challenges of their mental health challenges.

Amy Simpson in *Troubled Minds* suggests that a common story among church-goers who are doing well managing or recovering from mental health challenges is that they had a core group of people in their church to whom they could turn for prayer and support.<sup>63</sup> This is not to suggest that people with mental health challenges should rely only on church friendships, but rather that, in conjunction with seeing their health professionals and taking medications when necessary, the church can form a vital component of an individual’s ability to cope with the challenges of mental ill-health.

One of the key ways to make a difference is to provide training for church members to better

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62 M. S. Stanford, *Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove: IVP, 2017), pp 253-255. Stanford lists these as 4 things; we have combined numbers 3 and 4.

63 Simpson, *Troubled Minds*, 134.

understand what mental ill-health is, the challenges that can be associated with it, and how to better support people who live with mental health challenges either short-term or long-term.<sup>64</sup> Training for ministers and parishioners on mental health is available through the Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute of Mary Andrews College in Sydney as well as through CBM Australia’s Luke 14 program. Contact information for both organisations is available in the reference section in the back of these guidelines.

In terms of participation in church life, mental health challenges do not necessarily prevent an individual from being able to contribute to the life of the church, if they wish to do so. This will benefit both the church and the person concerned. For most people, mental health can fluctuate, and so their involvement may be variable. It is helpful if the church community recognises and accepts this fluctuation.

**Tips for welcoming and including people with mental ill-health**

**In one-to-one and group conversations:**

- Be supportive of a person and offer support to an individual with mental health challenges. At the same time, recognise when you are out of your depth. Enlist the help of a leader or an additional support person (with the permission of the person you are supporting). Encourage people to seek medical help as well as the prayer and support of family, friends, and other church members.
- Make a point of checking in with someone with mental health challenges to see how they are coping. This is important not just on Sundays but also during the week.
- Ensure you give someone your full attention when speaking to someone with mental health challenges and don’t rush to give them answers and solutions. Take the time really to listen to their concerns and worries.
- Check that people feel safe from harm from themselves and from others.
- Offer to pray with a person or read the Bible with someone if they feel unable to do that by themselves; but do not make them feel guilty if they do not accept. If they do not feel they are able to read the Bible with you one week, do not assume the answer will always be the same. Be willing to offer again. Alternatively, share certain scriptures with them through text messages or notes in the mail.

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64 C. Andrade, ‘Developing Welcoming Faith Communities: Inspiring Examples of Faith-Based Initiatives to help Individuals with Mental Health Conditions Participate Fully in the Life of Religious Congregations’ (Philadelphia: Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, 2015), 6-7.

Encourage wise behaviour, such as eating well, sleeping well, and getting daily exercise; but again, do not make people feel bad if they are unable to do these things. Offer to do these things with a person with mental health challenges, for example, by helping them cook a meal, or going for a walk with them.

Offer practical assistance as you would for a person experiencing a physical illness. For example, offer to provide a meal or hang out the laundry or babysit their children.

#### **During Church Services, Events, and Meetings, and in communications:**

Talk openly and compassionately about mental wellness and mental health challenges in the parish and encourage leaders and parishioners to be honest about their mental health, and about talking to someone if they need support;

Include general prayer for people experiencing mental health challenges in the church, for instance: 'we pray for anyone in our church who is experiencing mental ill-health';

Provide training for congregations through a formal training session, or by inviting a guest speaker to share their experiences of living with a mental health condition;

Run an awareness-raising event in conjunction with World Mental Health Day (October 10). Resources for this are available from the Pastoral Care and Mental Health Institute's website. The information for these resources is available in the reference section of these guidelines;

Provide books and information on mental health in your church's library or resource area, such as Christian books on mental health, as well as contact information for community organisations and counselling services like Lifeline and Beyond Blue;

Encourage people to work at maintaining good mental health. Encourage parishioners not to overwork, to take good breaks from ministry, to have good boundaries in place, to encourage others, to take time to slow down and enjoy friendships and nature, and so on.

Develop support groups in your parish or in conjunction with a number of local parishes to support people with mental health challenges as well as support groups for families and carers;

Ministers and church leaders should be familiar with the signs of mental health challenges, and should know where to refer a person with mental health challenges, and when to do so.

There is a range of excellent resources available on mental health and the church to help ministers and congregations better support people living with mental health challenges and their families. For more information, see the reference section at the back of these guidelines.

# Mental health challenges and suicide

According to the Black Dog Institute, the statistics on suicide in Australia are incredibly grim:

- Over 65,000 Australians attempt suicide every year;
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for Australians between 15 and 44 years of age;
- Young Australians are more likely to take their own life than die in motor vehicle accidents;
- The suicide rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is approximately twice that of non-indigenous Australians.<sup>65</sup>

Mental health challenges are considered a major contributing factor to an individual's decision to suicide.<sup>66</sup>

Given these statistics, we need to ensure we are communities that are prepared to care for people with mental health challenges, that understand the warning signs of suicide, and that know how to refer someone to a health care professional, and how to talk to an individual who is having suicidal thoughts. As Matthew S. Stanford in his book *Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness* notes:

'The fact that individuals living with mental illness are seeking assistance and counsel from the church should prompt us to rise up and be the hands and feet of Christ to a suffering people. This is best done through the application of both biblical truth and mental health resources.'<sup>67</sup>

## Recognising the Signs of Suicide – from the Black Dog Institute

### Behavioural changes

If someone is acting out of the ordinary, it is not necessarily a cause for alarm. However, it

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65 Black Dog Institute 'Facts about Suicide in Australia,' <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/suicide-self-harm/facts-about-suicide-in-australia/>

66 Black Dog Institute 'Facts about Suicide in Australia,' <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/suicide-self-harm/facts-about-suicide-in-australia/>

67 Stanford, *Grace for the Afflicted*, 259.

is important to pay attention to changes in their behaviour, particularly changes that may include:

- sleep changes (too much sleep or too little)
- withdrawing from family and friends
- loss of interest in things
- changes in eating
- irritability, being moody or easily upset
- self-harming (e.g., cutting)
- putting affairs in order, giving things away, saying goodbyes, writing suicide notes or goodbye letters
- risky behaviour (e.g., consuming excessive alcohol or other drug use)
- decreased academic or work performance
- mentioning or joking about suicide, death or dying

## How feelings are expressed

Some people choose to talk about how they are feeling, however, this does not apply to everyone.

They might be feeling hopeless, depressed, angry and irritable, distressed, worthless, exhausted, like there's no way out of their problems or no reason for living at all.

They might say things which suggest that:

- they see themselves as a burden – e.g. *'You'd be better off without me.'*
- they can't see a way out of their situation – e.g. *'I've had enough,'* or *'I'm over it.'*
- they're feeling a sense of hopelessness – e.g. *'There's nothing to live for,'* or *'There's no point.'*<sup>68</sup>

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68 Black Dog Institute, 'Suicide and Self-Harm,' <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/suicide-self-harm/>

**If you or someone near you appears to be in immediate danger:**

1. Call Emergency Services on 000; or
2. Go to a hospital emergency department.

**If you or someone is having suicidal thoughts and need someone to speak to:**

3. Call Lifeline on 13 11 14
4. Talk to someone like:
  - A GP or counsellor;
  - A family member or friend;
  - A school, university, or TAFE counsellor;
  - A teacher or coach;
  - A work colleague;
  - A church minister or religious leader.

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## CHAPTER 11

# Including children and youth with disability and their families

‘Often, the biggest barriers people with disabilities and their families encounter are not inaccessible *stairs* but unwelcoming *stares*.’<sup>69</sup>

Statistics from the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare* indicate that almost 10% of Australian children and 8% of Australian teenagers live with some form of disability.<sup>70</sup> 1 out of every 70 children in Australia is diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum.

Getting to church on Sundays can be challenging for any family with children and youth. Attempting to find lost shoes, favourite soft toys, and arguments over the window seat are all too familiar to parents attempting to get to church on time on a Sunday morning. However, that process becomes far more complicated when one of those children has some form of disability.

The stresses on families who have children with disability are well documented. The divorce rate among parents of children with disability is higher, carers have an increased risk of mental health challenges, and for many families, the financial cost of caring for a child

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69 Taylor et al, *Welcoming People with Developmental Disabilities*, 4.

70 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/people-with-disability/prevalence-of-disability>

with a disability can also place additional stresses on the family.<sup>71</sup> It is not surprising that families with children with disability might be exhausted by Sunday and find it difficult to get everyone ready to arrive at church on time. If attending church causes stress to the child with disability, for example, because the music is too loud or the number of people is overwhelming, or, if parents experience ‘shushing’ and ‘eye-rolls’ from other families who were able to make it to church on time, the whole fiasco of getting ready can feel like it wasn’t worth the effort.

For many families with a child or young person with a disability, there is great deal of stress, hardship and grief as they come to terms with what it means to adapt to a reality different to what they were expecting parenting to be. This grief and shock can happen in the initial stages of a child’s birth or diagnosis, but can also rear up again at many different stages of life, as that child misses growth and development milestones or experiences isolation or teasing among peers. In fact, this grief can continue for many parents all the way along their parenting journey, as their child does not grow up to be as independent as the children of their friends and families.

While nuclear families must adjust to the birth or diagnosis of a child with a disability, their church ‘family’ doesn’t always embark on the journey with them. Many families of children or youth with disability can share stories of being asked to leave their child with a disability home on Sundays or to relocate to a church that specialises in disability ministry. What many families would benefit from is love and acceptance from their church community. Sadly, this is not always the experience of families living with disability.

Once again, the church has here a great opportunity to provide friendship, connection, and grace to families who often experience misunderstanding and exclusion at the hands of broader society. The church has the opportunity to create access to our children’s and youth programs in order to follow Jesus’ directive in Matthew 19:14, to ‘let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.’

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71 [https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/assets/documents/hilda-bibliography/other-publications/pre2010/Edwards\\_AIFS\\_newsletter\\_no11.pdf](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/assets/documents/hilda-bibliography/other-publications/pre2010/Edwards_AIFS_newsletter_no11.pdf)

# Welcoming Children and Youth with Disability into our parishes

The following section merely scratches the surface of practical ideas and solutions to facilitate inclusion for children and youth with disability. However, it provides a useful starting point. There is a range of excellent resources available to equip churches to better include children and youth with disability and better support their families and carers. The most helpful resources are:

- Amy Fenton Lee, *Leading a Special Needs Ministry: A Practical Guide to Including Children and Loving Families*.<sup>72</sup>
- Barbara J. Newman, *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities*.<sup>73</sup>
- Katie Wetherbee and Jolene Philo, *Every Child Welcome: A Ministry Handbook for Including Kids with Special Needs*.<sup>74</sup>

## Parents are your best resource!

Parents will always be your best resource when it comes to getting to know a child or young person with a disability. Rather than relying on the standard enrolment form used for all children in your parish, it is helpful to have an additional form which can be used to gather relevant information about a child or young person with any disabilities or health concerns. Instead of giving parents only 2-3 lines in which to describe the complexities of their child, use the form as a stepping-stone to create an open dialogue between the kids' or youth leader and the family. Arrange a time to meet with the family, including the child or young person with a disability, to learn about them and their particular needs.

in the appendix is a 'Parent Interview Checklist,' which highlights the key things to talk about when you meet the parents or carers of a child or young person with disability in

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72 Lee, Amy Fenton. *Leading a Special Needs Ministry: A Practical Guide to Including Children and Loving Families*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013.

73 Newman, Barbara J. *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities*. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2012.

74 Wetherbee, Katie and Jolene Philo. *Every Child Welcome: A Ministry Handbook for Including Kids with Special Needs*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015.

your program. This checklist encourages the leader to take the time to hear a family's story of disability, find out about the child's interest and abilities, allergies and medications, level of independence, strategies for calming, best strategies to manage difficult behaviours (if required), when to notify the parents about issues that might arise, share goals, and more. A sample copy of this checklist is included in *Appendix 7: Further information on including kids and teens with disability*.

Through getting to know the child or young person with disability and their family, you are also able to encourage families to put together a resource for the child or young person to make it easier for leaders and peers to ask questions and have conversations to get to know the child or young person. One example of this kind of resource is called a 'This is Me' book. A 'This is Me' book is designed to be a simple home-made booklet of photos and information about the child or young person and their likes and interests to help generate conversation. This can be a great way for a child or young person with disability to start a conversation with others, and vice versa. For children who are non-verbal, or who find verbal communication difficult, it also provides a way for them to communicate through their book.

- The child or young person's name, age, parents, siblings, pets;
- Where the child or young person attends school;
- Abilities, interests, favourite activities, such as TV shows, sports, songs, etc.;
- Age-appropriate information about the disability, its impact, equipment;
- What the child or young person is learning at school;
- Simple ways to support the child or young person at church.

An example of a completed 'This is Me' book is included in Appendix 7.

In light of the information you gather from the parents, you are then able to create an individual 'Ministry Inclusion Plan,' which sets out what you are going to do to implement inclusion for this child. This might include such things as how you will meet physical and access needs, what education for the leaders you will supply, how you will recruit a buddy for the child, how to involve the other children in inclusion, how you will work on parents' goals, and how and when parents are to be notified if needed. A sample Ministry Inclusion Plan is also located in Appendix 7.

## Creating inclusive programs

While some churches promote children's or youth programs that separate children with disability out of the main children's or youth program, this is not an approach advocated for by experts in disability in children's and youth ministry. While on some rare occasions this may be necessary (to be decided in consultation with the parents), Barbara J. Newman in *Helping Kids include Kids with Disabilities* suggests that this approach is not ideal because:

- This makes disability the focus and reinforces the stigma of 'otherness'. In reality, children are more alike than unlike their peers, and when they are included, the whole group can be helped to understand more of what it means to live as the Body of Christ.
- Children and teens with intellectual disability enjoy life as it is presented to them. While they may sometimes enjoy the same activities as younger children when placed in the same setting as them, it is just as likely they will also have a positive response to age-appropriate activities. Keeping children or youth with others who are at the same 'functional' or cognitive level together – for instance, putting a 15-year-old teen with an intellectual disability in a group for 5 year olds – will only further create distance between the child or young person with disability and other children or youth of the same age.
- The peer group misses out if the child or young person with a disability is not included. Inclusion is socially important for us all. It helps develop acceptance and gives us opportunities to receive from those whose perspectives and gifts we lack.<sup>75</sup>

In this book, Newman also addresses at length a range of strategies for helping children and young people include other children and young people with disability into church programs. One example of an exercise which can assist with this inclusion is also included in *Appendix 7: Further information on including kids and teens with disability*.

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75 B. J. Newman, *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities* (Rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2012).

## During Church Services

(before children & youth leave for designated programs or for services when children remain for the whole service)

Provide packs for children to keep them busy and calm. A 'Busy Bag' or 'Buddy Bag' is an item that can be collected on the way into church to help children or youth to be able to sit through the first part of a church service before heading out to a designated children's' or youth program. A 'Busy Bag' can include items like colouring sheets and pencils, quiet fidget spinners, squishies, or other quiet items that can help keep them occupied without disturbing others around them. The bag can then be returned at the end of the service<sup>76</sup>;

Create a welcoming and accepting attitude so if children or youth with disability need to cover their ears or wear earmuffs or headphones to cope with noise levels during the beginning of the service, that this is acceptable;

Be understanding if a child, young person, or family make the decision to wait in the foyer or outside until after the music is finished, if this makes it easier for their child or young person to adjust to being at church.



<sup>76</sup> Photo of busy bag from The Memphis Conference of the United Methodist Church website, <https://www.memphis-umc.net/newsdetail/99626>.

## During the Designated Children’s or Youth Programs (during Sunday Services or mid-week events)

As with adults with intellectual disabilities, buddy systems can work well for supporting children or youth with disabilities in church. For information on buddies for children or youth with disability, see *Appendix 7: Further information on including kids and teens with disability*.

In addition to a buddy for a child or young person with disability, it can also be helpful to have a designated leader, especially for children or youth with higher needs. You can assign a leader to oversee a particular child or young person with disability, or over a small number of children or youth depending on their particular needs. Leaders can be timetabled each week to fill this role. They can help keep an eye on children or youth who are likely to abscond, who have difficulties with fine motor skills and may need assistance with craft, or who need help remembering to sit and stand at the appropriate times during the program. They can also just help facilitate inclusion and ensure the child or young person is interacting with their peers. This designated leader role works better when the leader has had the chance to meet with a child or young person and their family outside of the Sunday service (ensuring that Safe Ministry principles are followed for this type of meeting).

Routine and predictability are important for all children and young people, but particularly for those with a disability. This does not mean that you have to repeat the same format in children’s or youth programs every week; but having a visual timetable, for example, can be one way to assist a child or young person with disability to feel comfortable and safe while they are at their program. A visual timetable can be placed on the wall, with images stuck on with Velcro that can be removed once that activity is complete. Small photocopies of the timetable can also be given to children or youth with disability, as well as children with low vision or with anxiety, if they want or need to refer to the timetable throughout the service. An example of a visual timetable and suggested resources for creating your own are included in Appendix 7.

Consider creating or adapting games to make them accessible for all participants.

Try to make transitions as smooth as possible from one activity to the next. Children and youth are most likely to get confused or overwhelmed during times of transition. Make sure that you have clear instructions on what is happening at each stage of the program and that this is reinforced verbally as well as visually.

Consider creating a ‘quiet zone’ for kids with sensory overload. Many children and youth with disabilities, especially those on the Autism Spectrum, can find the noise and activity of a kids or youth program overwhelming. In order to help children and youth participate but also get the downtime they might need to stay in the program, a ‘quiet zone’ can be a helpful addition to your kids or youth program. More information on how to set up a ‘quiet zone’ is located in Appendix 7.

Consider allowing children to select from a range of different seating options during children's and youth programs. Allowing children and youth a choice about seating can allow children and youth with particular sensory likes or aversions to find the seating that works best for them. Consider a combination of floor mats, bean bags, or chairs with and without arm rests.

Allow children and youth the option to sit out of a game if they do not want to participate, especially in the case of games that require physical contact, which can be difficult for many children and youth with disability, especially for children and youth on the Autism Spectrum.

Make the program as tactile and sensory as possible, which will help better engage all children and youth as well as kids with disability.

It is important for all leaders in a children's or youth program to model inclusive behaviour and language. If a leader refers to a child or young person as 'different' or 'naughty' because of their disability, that label will impact the way other children or youth perceive that child. Instead, model positive and inclusive language to show that every child and young person is welcome and you are glad they are present.

Don't demand all children to make eye contact with you when you are speaking to them. This can be distressing and overwhelming for some children and young people with disability.

Some children's and youth leaders find it can be helpful to learn some basic Auslan or Key Word Sign Language, which can be used as a visual cue for all children and youth in your programs, but which is also helpful for any specific children or youth in your program who are Deaf or hard of hearing. For more information on Auslan learning sign language, see the reference section at the back of these guidelines.

Give clear, non-judgemental feedback to a child or young person when behaviour is not appropriate. If you are unsure about how to respond or handle a situation, ask your minister, inclusion committee representative or the child or young person's family member.

Contact Youthworks for more information on kids, youth, and family ministries. They offer intensive courses in these areas and will be of help as you think through accessible ministry: <https://youthworks.net/>

# Buddy systems for children and youth with disability

The idea of the buddy system comes from the education setting where a student with disability is paired with a peer without a disability to help both students develop skills in social interaction, compassion and understanding, and building relationships. For this reason, the pairing can be of benefit to both the child or young person with the disability, as well as their buddy.

The two primary purposes of the pairing:

- To make a personal connection that provides support and friendship;
- To increase participation in the children's or youth program for a child or young person with a disability.<sup>77</sup>

## Finding a buddy for a child or youth with disability

It is helpful to first identify the needs and abilities of a child or youth with disability. This process should begin with the Parent Interview Checklist and Ministry Inclusion Plan, outlined above. After discerning the person's skills, abilities and likes, you will be in a better position to match them with a buddy. While many children and youth with disability may not require a buddy, others would benefit from having someone to assist them and offer support throughout the program. Having a trained buddy assigned to a child or teen with disability will ensure they are able to get the most out of the program. Peers of children and youth can make great buddies for a child or youth where minimal assistance is required. Teenagers can also make great buddies for younger children where they have completed the required Safe Ministry Check and the associated training. It is also possible to use adult leaders as buddies, subject to the Safe Ministry considerations already discussed, but making friends with peers can be easier for children without the constant presence of an adult leader by their side. But again, this will depend on the abilities and needs of the individual child or youth.

It is helpful to have a small team of junior leaders who are trained in the role of buddies for

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77 Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, "Including Adults with Disabilities in Religious Life and Education," Nashville: Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, n.d., p 12. <https://vkc.vumc.org/assets/files/resources/disabilitiesrelmanual.pdf>

children or young people, who can be rostered on, for example, once a month. Junior leaders (13 – 17yrs) are required to have completed the Safe Ministry Check for Volunteers aged 13 to 17 years and to have completed the online Safe Ministry Training for Junior Leaders course before they can volunteer to work with children or other young people.

After a junior leader agrees to be involved as a buddy, they could meet together with the person with disability (and their family or carers) and a member of the Inclusion Committee to train them in serving as a buddy. The meeting would also discuss the scope of the buddy, for example, the buddy might be rostered on for one Sunday a month and stay with the child only for the duration of the children’s or youth program, or also for morning tea or supper.

## Supporting families and carers

According to research, in 2018 there were 2.65 million carers in Australia, representing 10.8% of the national population.<sup>78</sup> Research conducted on the role of carers indicates that ‘while caring for a person with a disability is very important, there are significant emotional, physical, social and economic costs to carers and their families.’<sup>79</sup> This research found that carers had significantly lower mental health, as well as poorer physical health than the general population. Not only this, but the research also indicated that divorce rates were higher among carers than the general population, and compared to other families there was a higher proportion of families of carers who experienced financial hardship.<sup>80</sup> This research indicates that while it is important for church communities to help support church members with disability, the church can also play an important role in offering love, friendship, and support to the families, siblings, and carers of people with disability.

Some possible suggestions for supporting families and carers might be:

- Creating a Bible study comprised of, or sympathetic to, the needs of parents and carers.

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78 Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘Disability, Ageing, and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018,’ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>

79 B. Edwards, ‘Caring for Families Caring for a Person with a Disability,’ *Family Relationships Quarterly* 11 (2009), [https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/assets/documents/hilda-bibliography/other-publications/pre2010/Edwards\\_AIFS\\_newsletter\\_no11.pdf](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/assets/documents/hilda-bibliography/other-publications/pre2010/Edwards_AIFS_newsletter_no11.pdf)

80 Edwards, ‘Caring for Families Caring for a Person with a Disability,’ [https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/assets/documents/hilda-bibliography/other-publications/pre2010/Edwards\\_AIFS\\_newsletter\\_no11.pdf](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/assets/documents/hilda-bibliography/other-publications/pre2010/Edwards_AIFS_newsletter_no11.pdf)

Such a group might allow members to participate via Zoom if they are not able to make it in person. They might allow for parents to 'tag team' participation while the other parent is home with the child or young person with a disability. Perhaps the Bible study could even be comprised of whole families where everyone is in the room together and it is noisy and chaotic but completely inclusive.

- Consider creating a support group for siblings as well as for parents and carers.
- Create rosters for meals, babysitting, sibling outings or other events to help support a family with a child or young person with disability. Allow parents and carers the opportunity to have a 'date night' once a month by providing respite for the family members.



# Appendices

# APPENDIX 1

## The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Building Code of Australia (BCA)

### Legislative requirements

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) is a federal legislation promoting the rights of persons with disabilities.

The DDA focuses on the provision of equitable, independent and dignified access to services and facilities for people with mobility, sensory and cognitive disabilities. The DDA covers existing premises, including heritage buildings, those under construction and future premises. It extends beyond the building itself to include outdoor spaces and within, to address furniture, fittings and practices provided within premises.

The DDA is a complaints-based legislation under which claims of discrimination can be brought to the Australian Human Rights Commission for conciliation and potentially resolution in court.

The DDA includes standards on Education, Transport and the Disability (Access to Premises—Buildings) Standards 2010.

Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards 2010 (Access to Premises Standards) - effective from May 2011 - details requirements for the provision of non-discriminatory access to public buildings.

The objectives of the Act are:

- 1.3 (a) to ensure that dignified, equitable, cost-effective and reasonably achievable access to buildings, and facilities and services within buildings, is provided for people with a disability; and
- (b) to give certainty to building certifiers, building developers and building managers that, if access to buildings is provided in accordance with these Standards, the provision of that access, to the extent covered by these Standards, will not be unlawful under the Act.<sup>81</sup>

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81 Australian Government - Federal Register of Legislation, 'Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010,' <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2010L00668>.

The Premises Standards apply to new buildings, any new part and any affected part, of an existing building. A part of a building is a new part of the building if it is an extension to the building or a modified part of the building about which an application for approval for the building work is submitted, to the competent authority in the State where the building is located. Affected part upgrades require upgrade of access ways and facilities for persons with disabilities when building work is proposed. Proposed building work anywhere in an existing building could trigger a need for enhanced access at the main building pedestrian entry and from that entry to all areas of the building that are subject to the building work.

It is the Premises Standard and Australian Standards AS1428.1 design dimensions that set the minimum requirements for accessible paths of travel and accessible facilities, within the proposed area of new work.

The Premises Standard and the BCA state in Part D3 access for people with disability must be provided to and within buildings by means of an accessible continuous path of travel (without steps or thresholds) to and within areas used by the occupants, including:

- from the site boundary at the point of entry from the road/footpath to the principal entry and at 50% of other entries; and
- from any accessible car parking space on the allotment (whether within or outside the building), and
- from any other building on the allotment to which access for people with disabilities is required;

National Construction Code (NCC) - Building Code of Australia - (BCA) is the code which regulates acceptable standards of building construction throughout Australia

Building applications are assessed for compliance under the BCA. The BCA Parts D3 and F2.4 detail the requirements for accessibility for each Class of Building detailed under the Code. Church auditoriums are places of Worship Class 9b buildings. The BCA calls up Australian Standards as reference documents for specific details of complying construction.

Whilst this code is primarily used for assessing new buildings, local Councils do have the right to request upgrades to existing buildings at any time in order to conform to this code.

The BCA (2019) includes the following parts to satisfy the performance requirements of the Code:

D3 Access for People with Disabilities outlines the general building access requirements, it includes:

- Table D3.1 - which outlines the parts of the building required to be accessible that must comply with AS1428.1 (2009)
- Table D3.2 - access to buildings which outlines requirements for accessways, doors and entrances
- Table D3.3 - the parts of buildings required to be accessible and meet the requirements of AS1428.1 (2009)
- Table D3.4 - exemptions
- Table D3.5 - accessible car parking requirements
- Table D3.6 - signage requirements for identification of accessible facilities, services and features
- Table D3.7 - hearing augmentation requirements
- Table D3.8 - tactile ground surface indicators
- Table D3.9 - wheelchair spaces in Class 9b Buildings
- Table D3.10 - swimming pools
- Table D3.11 - ramps
- Table D3.12 - glazing on an accessway
- Specification D3.6 - Braille and tactile Signs
- Specification D3.10 - Accessible water entry/exit from swimming pool
- E3.6 - outlines the requirements for passenger lifts in accessible buildings.
- F2.4 - outlines the requirements for unisex accessible sanitary facilities, accessible showers and cubicles for people with ambulant disabilities designed to meet the requirements of AS1428.1 (2009).

Australian Standard AS 1428 (Part 1) - Design for access and mobility Part 1 General requirements for New Building work - provides specific details for the construction of accessible building elements such as:

- Requirements for accessible paths of travel
- circulation spaces at doorways, in wheelchair seating spaces and in accessible sanitary facilities,
- ramp design including compliant gradients and lengths,
- construction requirements for compliant stairs and handrails,
- braille and tactile signage requirements
- requirements for the fitout of accessible toilets

NOTE:

- At the time of this publication AS1428.1 (2009) is referenced in the BCA 2019, however future updates are anticipated.
- The AS1428 suite of Standards are under revision making it is important to refer to the most recent edition. While not all the suite is currently referenced in legislation they provide very useful guidelines to best practice design and reference is recommended.

Whilst the BCA requirements are primarily for new buildings, the DDA is applicable to both existing and new buildings, even if they are not being extended or altered. No buildings are excluded from a potential claim under the DDA.

Obligations for provision of access for people with a disability continue past the construction of the building. If a building or part of a building becomes inaccessible as a result of any acts or omissions of the building manager, the building owner or manager may be liable to a complaint of unlawful discrimination. For example, if a building owner or occupier allows a unisex accessible toilet to be used as a storage area, thereby reducing circulation space, there may be grounds for a complaint of unlawful discrimination, even though the toilet was built to the required specification.

# APPENDIX 2

## Congregational survey on disability and accessibility

The purpose of this survey is to identify and accommodate the unique needs of our members. Statistics show that 1 in 5 Australians live with some kind of disability and that 1 in 9 Australians provide unpaid care to a family member with disability.

We would like as many people in our church as possible to answer this survey so we can:

- Learn more about the needs of people with disability and their caregivers in our parish;
- Make sure we are doing all we can to serve and support people with disability and their caregivers in our parish; and
- Make sure people with disability and their caregivers can enjoy full participation in the life of our church.

There are many different kinds of disability, which might include:

- A physical disability, for example, someone who might use a wheelchair or walking frame;
- An intellectual or cognitive disability or learning difficulty, for example, someone with Down Syndrome or someone on the Autism Spectrum;
- A sensory disability, for example, someone who is Deaf or has limited hearing or vision;
- A mental health condition which limits a person’s ability to participate in church, for example, anxiety or depression.

Your Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you consider our church to be welcoming and inclusive of people with different kinds of disability?

Yes     No     Unsure

6. In what ways do you consider our church to be **welcoming** and **inclusive** of people with various disabilities?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. In what areas do you think our church needs to **improve** in the way we welcome and include people with various disabilities?

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8. Do you or an immediate family member have a disability?

- Yes     No     Unsure     Rather not say

9. If yes, is that person:

- Yourself     A family member     You'd rather not say

10. If yes, what kind of disability does the person experience (tick all that apply):

- A physical disability  
 An intellectual/cognitive disability or learning difficulty  
 A sensory disability  
 A mental health condition  
 Autism Spectrum Disorder  
 Other  
 Unsure  
 Rather not say

11. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about you or your family member's disability?

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12. What areas or ministries of the church are the **easiest** for you or your family member to access?

Physical spaces

- Main church building;
- Hall/Kitchen/Other church spaces;
- Bathrooms;
- Car park;
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Ministries

- Sunday services;
- Children's/Youth ministries;
- Bible Study Group;
- Church meetings;
- Ability to serve (e.g., as a welcomer, as a youth leader; in music ministry etc);
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

13. What areas or ministries of the church are the **hardest** for you or your family member to access?

Physical spaces

- Main church building;
- Hall/Kitchen/Other church spaces;
- Bathrooms;
- Car park;
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Ministries

- Sunday services;
- Children's/Youth ministries;
- Bible Study Group;
- Church meetings;
- Ability to serve (e.g., as a welcomer, as a youth leader; in music ministry etc);
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Is there anything further you would like to tell us about you or your family member's ability to participate in church?

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15. What would enhance your/their ability to participate fully in the church? (tick all that apply)

- Improved physical access inside/outside the church (eg. more ramps);
- Large print documents such as bulletins, song sheets, Bibles etc;
- The installation of a hearing loop for people who use hearing aids;
- Seating with spaces for people in wheelchairs and who other mobility devices;
- Seating with armrests;
- Better lighting to read people's lips when they are speaking;
- Captioning on videos used in church and online;
- Communion being brought to people with mobility difficulties;
- Welcomers who could assist you with seating in the church;
- A more accessible children's/youth ministry program;

More access to mid-week church groups such as Bible study;

Separate quiet room from which to view the service;

Other (please list below):

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16. Are there any areas of church you or your family member would like to be more involved in or would like to serve in (for example, youth ministry, Bible reading, welcoming team, etc)?

Yes       No

17. If yes, which ministry would you or your family member like to be involved in and in what capacity?

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Leader/Server       Participant

18. Are there any other ways you feel the church could help serve or support you or your family member better?

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If you would like to discuss any of this survey, please contact your minister or the person overseeing the survey [Insert contact information below]:

Name of Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number/s: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

# APPENDIX 3

## Accessibility appraisal form

The accessibility appraisal form has been designed to help you consider some of the barriers which can prevent people with disability from enjoying full inclusion and participation in our Diocese. This appraisal is designed to be completed in conjunction with other steps towards inclusion, for example, developing a Parish Inclusion Committee which will then supervise issues of disability and accessibility in the parish. It is also recommended that parishes consult a professional **access consultant** who can undertake a complete accessibility audit of your parish grounds and buildings

This checklist is not designed to be a detailed, measured review, it is proposed to be used to highlight the potential access barriers to inclusion and failure to meet the intent of the DDA and current building standards and community expectation.

The Audit should be completed by a parish warden and/or members of the Parish Inclusion Committee by physically moving around the spaces of the church grounds and buildings and checking items in order and physically measuring the relevant spaces. If the Audit is completed without viewing each of the areas mentioned, it is possible to misjudge the height or width of dimensions.

### GETTING INTO THE CHURCH

EXTERNAL PATHS	Y/N	NOTES
<p>Are there step-free paths of travel from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The street/footpath to the church grounds;</li> <li>• From the carpark and accessible parking spaces to main entry;</li> <li>• From the main church entry to other buildings on site (e.g., hall, toilets, etc)?</li> </ul> <p><i>Paths of travel are required to include widths and surfaces to AS1428.1 Design for Access and Mobility Part General Requirements for Access – New Building Work.</i></p>		

VERTICAL ACCESS	Y/N	NOTES
<p>Is there a step-free access to the main church building? (e.g., ramps or lifts).</p> <p><b>Ramps</b> greater than 1900mm in length require a maximum gradient of 1:14 and must include handrails on both sides, landings with circulation space that facilitates turning or resting and tactile ground surface indicators (TGSi) top and bottom to provide hazard warning to people who are blind.</p> <p>Ramps including kerb ramps, threshold ramps and walkways with gradients shallower than 1:20, should include dimensions and gradients that comply with <i>AS1428.1 Design for access and mobility Part General requirements for access – New building work</i>.</p> <p>If steps are provided as alternate paths of travel on the site, do they include handrails on both sides, opaque risers, highlighting slip resistant strips on the tread edge and tactile ground surface indicators top and bottom to meet the BCA and requirements of AS1428.1 clause 11?</p> <p><b>Note:</b> modification of stairs should be undertaken only if existing stairs can be made fully compliant, this includes constant riser and tread heights.</p>		
PARKING	Y/N	NOTES
<p>Is there accessible parking? Do accessible space(s) include an adjacent space or shared zone to allow a person to enter and exit the vehicle?</p> <p><i>Parking space dimensions and shared zones are required to meet AS2890.6 Parking facilities Part 6: Off-street parking for people with disabilities.</i></p>		

BUILDING ENTRIES	Y/N	NOTES
Is there a step at the main entry door to the church building? (Entry doors should have a level threshold with a maximum of a 5mm lip allowed at bevelled abutting surfaces).		
Does the entry door include a clear door opening of minimum 850mm at the active leaf?		
Is there circulation space on the latch side of the door to allow someone using a wheelchair to independently reach the door handle? <i>Door circulation space are detailed in AS1428.1 Design for access and mobility Part: General requirements for access – New building work.</i>		
Are 50% of the entries within 50m of each other accessible?		
Are there signs identifying alternate accessible links and entries?		

## INSIDE THE CHURCH

TOILETS	Y/N	NOTES
Is there a step free path of travel to the toilets?		
Is there a unisex accessible toilet that includes circulation space to allow a person using a wheelchair to enter the room, use the WC pan and basin? <i>Unisex accessible sanitary facilities including circulation space and fitout requirements are detailed in AS1428.1.</i>		

INTERNAL PATHS OF TRAVEL	Y/N	NOTES
Are step free links provided to a range of spaces within the building, including to any stage or elevated area?		
When inside the church buildings are there step free paths of travel, with circulation space to manoeuvre into a wheelchair seating space and allow others to pass by?		
Do the allocated spaces for people using wheelchairs have good sight lines to the front of the building and can the person using the space sit adjacent other people?		

SEATING	Y/N	NOTES
<p>Where fixed seating is provided are wheelchair seating spaces provided with circulation space to facilitate access?</p> <p><i>AS1428.1 details space requirements for wheelchair seating spaces.</i></p>		
<p>Is there an opportunity for people with ambulant disabilities to access seats that are not on extended paths of travel and seating includes armrests and backrests?</p> <p><i>(People who have mobility difficulties or limited strength move on and off chairs more safely and easily if they can use the armrests as leverage.)</i></p>		

HEARING AUGMENTATION	Y/N	NOTES
Does the fixed PA system link to a hearing augmentation system?		
Are there signs to alert people to the type of system and the are it covers?  <i>AS1428.5 Design for access and mobility Part 5: Communications for people who are deaf or hearing impaired, details various systems and requirements.</i>		

FACILITIES FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR HAVE LOW VISION	Y/N	NOTES
Does your church have adequate lighting, signage with Braille and tactile information, etc?		

EMERGENCY EXITS	Y/N	NOTES
Does your church have adequate emergency exits?  <i>To meet the objective of the DDA and AS3745 (2009) Planning for Emergencies in Facilities, all users of the facility are to be provided with a means of egress from the premises to a place of safety. People with disabilities should be provided with the same level of protection as other premises users.</i>		

## ACCESSIBILITY OF COMMUNICATION

PRINTED MATERIALS (e.g., BIBLES, BULLETINS, etc.)	Y/N	NOTES
Are there large print pew Bibles available?		
Are there large print versions of any printed materials (e.g., Bulletins/notices, orders of service, event flyers, etc. [large print must be at least 18-point sans serif fonts])		

<b>DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN SERVICES (e.g., VIDEOS, POWERPOINT, etc.)</b>	<b>Y/N</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
Are all videos used in services captioned (captions assist people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, etc.).		
Are all PowerPoint (or alternatives) slides accessible for people with low vision? (e.g., 36-point sans serif font, max. 6 lines of text per slide, contrasting colours, etc.)		

<b>WEBSITE</b>	<b>Y/N</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
Sermons downloadable for people unable to make physical church (audio, video, transcription)?		
Accessibility information available on the website (e.g., toilets, parking, entrance, etc.)?		
Website compliant for use with assistive technology for people with low vision who use screen-reading devices?		
All videos on website and social media have captions?		
All images have alt-text for people who use screen-reading devices?		
Website has images of parking, entrances, inside the sanctuary, etc.?		

## APPENDIX 4

### Accessible websites

There are two important factors to consider in relation to websites:

- The website itself has accessible features and can be navigated by people with disability who rely on screen-reading technology;
- The website holds information about the accessibility of the parish for the benefit of people with disability, for example, outlining the presence of ramps, accessible toilets, accessible parking, etc.

#### Accessibility of Website

An accessible website is one that is compatible with a range of technology used by people with different kinds of disability, for example, someone with low vision who uses screen-reading technology. In order to fulfill the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, all websites for community groups and organisations – including churches – must be accessible for users with disability. The Human Rights Commission website states that:

‘Web designers should be aware that providing access to the navigational features of web resources is not sufficient to make the resource fully accessible. The way in which web content is presented or published will also affect its accessibility...Accessible web design refers to the philosophy and practice of designing web content so that it can be navigated and read by everyone, regardless of location, experience, or the type of computer technology used.’<sup>82</sup>

In addition, ‘The provision of information and online services through the web is a service covered by the DDA. Equal access for people with a disability in this area is required by the DDA where it can reasonably be provided. This requirement applies to any individual or organisation developing a website or other web resource in Australia, or placing or maintaining a web resource on an Australian server.’<sup>83</sup>

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82 Australian Human Rights Commission, ‘World Wide Web Access: Disability Discrimination Act Advisory Notes, Version 4.1,’ [https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/world-wide-web-access-disability-discrimination-act-advisory-notes-ver?\\_ga=2.65775849.692328683.1595068045-741099408.1595068045](https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/world-wide-web-access-disability-discrimination-act-advisory-notes-ver?_ga=2.65775849.692328683.1595068045-741099408.1595068045).

83 Australian Human Rights Commission, ‘World Wide Web Access: Disability Discrimination Act Advisory Notes, Version 4.1.’

The global standard for website accessibility aims to make web content more accessible for everyone, in particular, 'older people and people with disability, including blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, limited movement, speech disabilities, photosensitivity, and learning disabilities and cognitive limitations.'<sup>84</sup>

The **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)** are part of a series of web accessibility guidelines published by the Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium, the main international standards organisation for the internet. The WCAG have four principles that provide the foundation for web accessibility. Under each of the principles are guidelines which are basic goals parishes can work towards to make your web content more accessible.

The four principles are:

- **PERCEIVABLE** - Information and user interface components must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive.

This means that users must be able to perceive the information being presented. It cannot be invisible to all of their senses).

- **OPERABLE** - User interface components and navigation must be operable.

This means that users must be able to operate the interface (the interface cannot require interaction that a user cannot perform).

- **UNDERSTANDABLE** - Information and the operation of user interface must be understandable.

This means that users must be able to understand the information as well as the operation of the user interface. The content or operation cannot be beyond their understanding.

- **ROBUST** - Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies.

This means that users must be able to access the content as technologies advance (as technologies and user agents evolve, the content should remain accessible).<sup>85</sup>

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84 Australian Network on Disability, 'Global Web Accessibility Standards have Officially Changed,' 2018, <https://www.and.org.au/articles.php/36/global-web-accessibility-standards-have-officially-changed>.

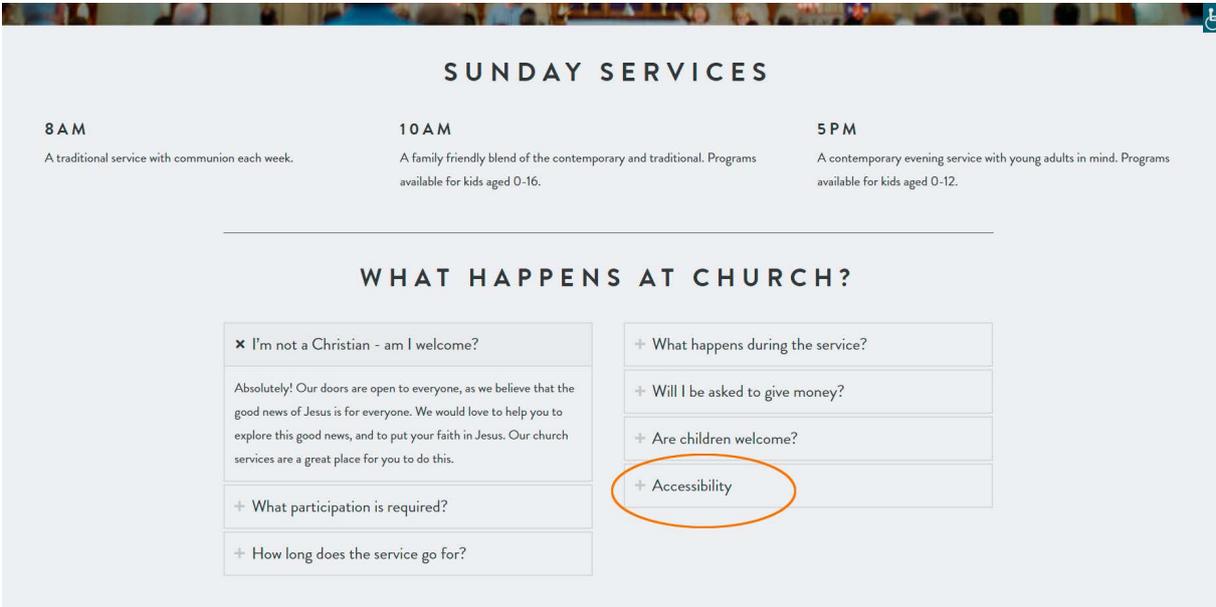
85 W3C, 'Introduction to Understanding WCAG 2.0,' <https://www.w3.org/TR/UNDERSTANDING-WCAG20/intro.html>.

For more detailed information on website accessibility, and the four principles and further guidelines see the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 (WCAG) at Web Accessibility Initiative available [here](#).

Some general principles to consider when building/modifying/editing a parish website:

- Make sure to avoid features that are known to be inaccessible to people with disability (e.g., scanned text images);
- Make sure to create sufficient difference between foreground (text) and background colours so text is more easily readable;
- Make sure that text is readable on plain backgrounds. Information laid over mottled backgrounds can be difficult to read;
- Make sure websites can be navigated from the keyboard and not just a mouse;
- Provide Alt-Text (alternative text) for all images on the website to ensure people who rely on screen-reading technology have the same access to information as other users;

For an example of parish website in diocese utilising some web accessibility features, see St. Thomas’ Church North Sydney’s website available [here](#). Not only does the website feature the ability to change font size and colour, it also features a tab with “accessibility” features of the church listed under their ‘What Happens at Church’ page.



### Accessibility of Church Grounds and Programs Outlined on Website

In addition to the website itself being accessible, your parish website is the best way for a parish to communicate the features of your church building, grounds, and services. Images from inside and outside of your church can help reduce stress and anxiety for a person

visiting your church for the first time. Other helpful information might include:

- Pictures of church staff;
- Pictures of the entrance to the church and car park, especially the location of the accessible parking spots;
- Information about public transport;
- Photos of what happens in your services as well as children’s and youth programs, Bible studies, and other church events;
- Images of people with diverse abilities and disabilities;
- A list of your accessibility features, for example,
  - Accessible toilets
  - Accessible parking
  - Hearing loop
  - Large print documents and Bibles
  - Children’s and Youth programs which cater for children and youth with disability;
  - Availability of Auslan interpreting;
  - Any other important accessibility features.

For an example of a parish website in the diocese which clearly lists the parish’s accessibility features, see Barney’s website<sup>86</sup> available [here](https://www.barneys.org.au/come-to-church/) which includes the following accessibility information:



The screenshot shows a blue-themed accessibility page. At the top, there is a header 'Accessibility' in white. Below it are four columns, each with an icon, a title, and a paragraph of text. The icons are: a hearing aid symbol, a wheelchair symbol, a male and female figure symbol, and a speech bubble symbol. The titles are: 'Hearing loop', 'Wheelchair access', 'Accessible toilets', and 'Large print notes'. The text under each title provides specific details about the church's facilities and services.

Icon	Feature	Description
Hearing aid symbol	Hearing loop	The auditorium is fitted with a hearing loop. Switch your hearing aid to 'T-coil' setting. The loop is installed on the right hand side (as you walk in) of the carpeted seating area. Once you sit down, you may need to shuffle a few seats to the right or left to get the best signal.
Wheelchair symbol	Wheelchair access	Please make use of our secure carpark, accessible via St Barnabas Street. Our elevator provides access between the carpark below and the auditorium. The carpark level is secured, so look for the usher with a fluoro vest for assistance entering and leaving. (It is attended for about half an hour before and after services.) There is also level entry and exit via Broadway.
Male and female figure symbol	Accessible toilets	An accessible toilet is located on level 1. An accessible toilet and shower is located on ground level (the lift operates between these levels at all times).
Speech bubble symbol	Large print notes	The sermon, songs and any liturgy used in the service are available in large print format. Please help yourself (they are outside the lift on level 1).

86 <https://www.barneys.org.au/come-to-church/>

## APPENDIX 5

### Accessible documents & PowerPoint presentations

#### Creating Accessible Documents

- Background and colour contrast
  - The best contrast is black or dark ink with solid white or yellow paper.
  - It is harder to read text written with dark ink on a dark background, such as on red, blue, purple, green, or grey paper, or to read light ink on dark paper.
  - It is difficult to read text on paper (or on an e-mail) that has objects, pictures, patterns, lines, multicolours, or shading in the text area.
- Text size, style, and layout
  - The standard definition of large print is 18-point font. Standard sized print is usually considered 12-point font;
  - Readability is best with a plain sans serif font, such as Arial, Calibri, or Tahoma. for large print documents use 18-point font for all text including body text, footers, page numbers, references, and labels on charts and graphs. Larger fonts may be used for headings.
  - It is harder to read thin or fancy fonts, or fonts with appearance affects, such as italic, cursive, bold, all caps, underline, block, or shadow, or to read text with many different sizes and styles of fonts.
  - For large print documents, use a minimum of 1.5 spacing or double-spacing when possible.
  - Left justify all paragraphs and do not use columns.<sup>87</sup>

Both PC and MACs have inbuilt accessibility checkers which can use for word documents to ensure optimum accessibility.

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87 Some information in this section has been adapted from J. J. Frank, 'Tips for Optimum Readability,' CRCNA Network, 2014, <https://network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/tips-optimum-readability>.

## Creating Accessible PowerPoint/Keynote Slides

- Background and colour contrast
  - Text is easiest to read on PowerPoint or Keynote slides when the contrast is a solid dark or black background with plain yellow letters.
  - It is more difficult to read text on a PowerPoint or Keynote slide if the background contains objects, shading, patterns, pictures, or any movement.
  - Uniformity between screens, that is, using the same colours, layout, background, text size, and style creates a less distracting presentation.
- Text size, style, and layout
  - It is easiest to read projected text with only 15 to 20 words per screen with the font as large as possible. The minimum font size on a PowerPoint or Keynote should be 36-point font.
  - Readability is best with a plain sans serif font, such as Arial, Calibri, or Tahoma.
  - It is harder to read thin or fancy fonts, or fonts with appearance affects, such as italic, cursive, bold, all caps, underline, block, or shadow, or to read text with many different sizes and styles of fonts.
  - For large print documents, use a minimum of 1.5 spacing or double-spacing when possible.
  - Left justify all paragraphs and do not use columns.<sup>88</sup>

Both PC and MACs have inbuilt accessibility checkers which can use for PowerPoints or Keynote to ensure optimum accessibility.

If a digital copy of the slides is going to be made available to church members, it is important to remember to include Alt-Text on all images. It is also important to avoid using text boxes as these make it difficult for someone to use with screen-reading technology.

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88 Some information in this section has been adapted from J. J. Frank, 'Tips for Optimum Readability,' CRCNA Network, 2014, <https://network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/tips-optimum-readability>.

## Large Print Bibles

Typically, Bibles are printed with very small, thin fonts. When Bible publishers use a larger, thicker font than what it is standard, these are referred to as 'large print,' 'extra-large print,' 'giant print,' or even 'super-giant print.' However, there is no standardised method for measuring fonts in Bible production and not all advertising for Bibles includes the exact point size of the font used. As a consequence, a Bible can be labelled as 'large print' or 'giant print' and can still be only 11 or 12-point font which is not considered large print on standard documents. Some 'large print' Bibles are available up to 24-point font size but these are expensive. There are no new Bibles available in 'large print' over 12-point font size.

Some large print Bibles available at Koorong include:

[NKJV Super Giant Print Reference Bible Hardcover](#) - \$38 17-point (This is the largest print and the cheapest price).

[NIV Super Giant Print Reference Bible](#) \$75 16.5-point font.

[CSB Super Giant Print Reference Bible](#) \$60 16-point font.

Koorong's website features a printable *Bible Print Sizes* document to compare the different font sizes available in their Bibles.<sup>89</sup> That document can be accessed [here](#).

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<sup>89</sup> <https://static1.koorong.com/images/BiblePrintSizes.pdf>

# APPENDIX 6

## Collecting information from adults with intellectual disabilities or adults on the Autism Spectrum

### Information form

It is recognised that information provided in this survey is very personal. It is intended for appropriate care of people and will only be used and disclosed to this end. It will be stored securely and destroyed once it is no longer needed.

Please check whether the person needs help with filling in this form.

1. What is your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. When is your birthday: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Where do you live: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Who do you live with: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you have an email address and are you happy for us to email you?

Yes     No     Unsure

If yes, write your email address here:

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you have any family members who go to this church?

Yes     No     Unsure

7. If yes, what are their names?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you have any friends who go to this church?

Yes     No     Unsure

9. If yes, what are their names?

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10. Do you have a disability?

Yes     No     Unsure     Prefer not to say

11. If yes, can you please tell us about your disability so we can help support you at church?

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12. What do you like doing or are good at doing?

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13. Do you need any help at church?

Yes     No     Unsure

14. If yes, what do you need help with?

- Help with a wheelchair or walker and getting around the building;
- Getting a large print Bible and other information in large print;
- A friend to help you get around;

- Special seating to see or hear better during church;
- Joining a prayer group or Bible study group that meets during the week
- Something else? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Are there any areas of church you would like to be more involved in or would like to serve in (for example, youth ministry, Bible reading, welcoming team, etc)?

- Yes       No

16. If yes, which ministry would you like to be involved in and in what way would you like to be involved?

- 
- Leader/Server       Participant

17. If you are interested in helping out at church, what areas do you think you might like to be involved?

- Welcoming at the front door of church
- Helping serve morning tea
- Setting up/packing up chairs
- Helping in the office
- Something else?

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18. If you would like to be a volunteer at our church, you will need to have a police check to make sure you have not committed any crimes. Is this ok?

- Yes       No       Unsure

19. If you would like to be a volunteer at our church, you will need to complete a course called Safe Ministry Training. Is this ok?

- Yes       No       Unsure

## Medical Information

1. Are you on any medication that it is important for us to know about?

Yes     No     Unsure

2. If yes, please tell us about your medication:

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3. Do you have seizures?

Yes     No     Unsure

4. If yes, do we need to know anything about your seizures:

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5. Are there any foods you can't eat? (Because of allergies or intolerances or other reasons)

Yes     No     Unsure

If yes, tell us about the foods you can't eat:

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6. If there is an emergency, who is the best person for us to talk to about you:

- Your mum or dad
- Your grandparents or other family member
- A support worker

A friend

Someone else? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What is their name and phone number:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If someone helped you fill in this form, what is their information:

Name of Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number/s: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 7

### Further information on Including kids and teens with disability

#### Parent Interview Checklist<sup>90</sup>

The following points are a conversation guide. One-to-one chats are better than filling in forms. Ensure you advise the family that this information will only be shared with those responsible for care of their child. Thank them for taking the time to share about their child!

- Date of meeting:
- Who is present:
- Personal details – name, age, date of birth, address and contact details during session, parents and siblings, school and year level
- Hear the story – learn how the child and family’s story has unfolded
- Description of child including likes and dislikes, interests and abilities
- Special needs or areas of challenge
- Medications and medical requirements
- Allergies
- Foods enjoyed
- Level of self-care support needed – bathroom, eating, dressing
- Child’s level of communication skills: speech, reading, writing, sign language
- Strategies for involving and managing behaviour. When do parents want to be notified if issues arise? How to reach parents in the church building
- Equipment modifications and accommodations (including physical environment considerations, advice about adapted equipment such as scissors, craft activities, games etc.)
- Brief history of child’s response to separation and play with others. If there are any challenges for them in social settings, what kind of support has been successful?
- Three shared goals to focus on. As you look ahead at this coming year, what are your hopes for your child in relation to Kids Church, peers, and relationships in our church in

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90 Parent Interview Checklist from CBM Australia’s Luke 14 Program, ‘Leader Handbook,’ 115.

general?

- How you would like the disability explained to the other children?
- Requirements in a buddy
- Items for a buddy bag
- Would it be helpful for you to attend a couple of sessions to show volunteer leaders the ropes?

### **'This is Me' Book<sup>91</sup>**

A 'This is Me' Book is designed to be a simply home-made booklet of photos and information about the child/youth and their likes and interests to help generate conversation. This can be a great way for a child/youth with disability to start a conversation with others, and vice versa. For children who are non-verbal or who have little verbal communication skills, it also provides a way for them to communicate through their book.

- The child or youth's name, age, parents, siblings, pets;
- Where the child or teen attends school;
- Abilities, interests, favourite activities, for example, TV shows, sports, songs, etc.;
- Age appropriate information about the disability, its impact, equipment;
- What the child or youth is learning at school;
- Simple ways to support the child or youth at church.

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91 Parent Interview Checklist from CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program, 'Leader Handbook,' 120-122.

Hi, my name is Reuben Smith and this book will tell you about me.

I'm five, and I live with my mum Diane, my big sister Ruth, and a rabbit called Floppy. Do you have any pets at your house?



Me with Floppy and my sister Ruth.

I go to Riverview Special School. I love to catch the bus to school. I stay in my wheelchair in the bus because I can't walk by my-



This is the bus I catch to school.

At school I learn to walk and talk. I have a walker, and I am just learning how to use it. It's hard work!



I do lots of fun things in therapy at school, like bounce on a big ball and swing around in a circle.



I talk to people with a picture talker. I push the picture that I want, and the talker says the word for me. Ask me a question so I can show you!



I bet we like lots of the same things. I like the music we sing at Kids Church and playing with my train set. Do you like those things too?



Me and my mum

## Ministry Inclusion Plan<sup>92</sup>

Inclusion proceeds by meeting the needs of one child at a time. How is *this* child going to be included?

Arrange a meeting with parents and others with valuable insights and consider the following areas:

- Physical and access needs – how will you meet these, what accommodations and adaptations are needed, including equipment and budget.
- Are there any specific education or information needed – how and to whom should it be provided?
- Introducing the child to all who need to know, and recruiting buddies – how will this be done?
- How will you involve the other children in bringing about inclusion?
- Behaviour strategies
- Break strategies
- How to communicate with the child or youth
- What would be helpful to include in a buddy bag for this child or youth?
- How will you work on the goals the parents have expressed?
- How will you notify parents if they are needed, and at what point?

---

92 Parent Interview Checklist from CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program, 'Leader Handbook,' 118.

# Visual Timetable

church 
VELCRO
finish 

Use Boardmaker™ to place Picture Communication Symbols© here.

welcome 
sing 
Bible reading 
pray 
blessing 

### Suggested Use:

Put title, symbol representing the activity, individual's name, or individual's picture in the first cell. Laminate sheet and attach cells above with velcro. As each task is completed, remove the corresponding symbol and place it in the envelope.

Made with Boardmaker® and the Picture Communication Symbols ©1981-2004  
 Mayer-Johnson LLC - P.O. Box 1579, Solana Beach, CA 92075 U.S.A  
 Phone 800-588-4548 or 858-550-0084.  
[www.mayer-johnson.com](http://www.mayer-johnson.com)

## Quiet Zones

Children’s and youth programs can be noisy and crowded spaces! This can be incredibly overwhelming for children with sensory issues or children who are unable to express their feelings easily. Creating a break out zone or quiet zone gives children and youth a place ‘where they can calm down and regain a sense of security before re-joining the group.’<sup>93</sup> The following is an extract from *Every Child Welcome*:

### How to Create a Quiet Zone

By thinking creatively and proactively, quiet zones can be incorporated into most children’s ministry activities.

- A corner of a classroom can be fitted out with a portable screen to reduce visual clutter a bean bag chair, some stress balls, and other soothing items.
- If space allows, a small classroom can be designated as the quiet zone. It can be available during noisy, youth group gatherings, or Sunday morning contemporary worship services.
- For outdoor excursions, designate a particular place – perhaps a picnic table, a visible area a short distance from the main action...as the break zone. Stock a backpack with some of the more portable items and place it in the quiet zone.<sup>94</sup>

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93 Wetherbee and Philo, *Every Child Welcome*, 21.

94 Wetherbee and Philo, *Every Child Welcome*, 21-22.

## Lost in the Cave

All of us have unique gifts and abilities that can benefit others. This activity<sup>95</sup> is designed to help the group understand how everyone has strengths and limitations and how we can work together as a community to achieve common goals.

1. Divide group into smaller groups of four and assign the following roles:
  - Reader
  - Chooser
  - Recorder
  - Reporter
  
2. Using index cards, write on three cards the things they are good or that make them special. On the fourth card write one thing they find difficult, or can't do, or fear. Provide examples if they get stuck:

Whistling	Memorising things	Playing video games	Talking in groups
Cooking	Telling stories	Organising people	Solving logic puzzles
Acting	Following a map	Running long distance	Playing music
Singing	Being out in the dark	Taking care of kids	Understanding feelings
Climbing	Making things	Balancing	Speaking another language

3. Put all the cards face down on the table

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95 Adapted from M. Breeding, D. Hood, and J. Whitworth, *Let All the Children Come to Me: A Practical Guide to Including Children with Disabilities in Your Church Ministries* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications, 2006).

4. The reader then reads the Lost in the Cave story.

During an outing with [your church], the four of you decide to explore an old cave. You've been told to stay away from it, but it looks so interesting you can't resist. As you are exploring, you walk way back into the cave where it is very dark. You make several turns, exploring different passages. Suddenly, you hear a loud noise behind you. When you turn to look you see that part of the cave ceiling has fallen, blocking your way. You begin to panic when suddenly you see a small light coming from above you. This is your only hope, but you know that the only way you can escape is if you work together. You need a plan.

***Using the skills you have, how will your group escape from the cave?***

5. The chooser then selects seven cards from the pile.
6. The group discusses how they can use the abilities from the cards selected to escape from the cave. When they come across a card that has a limitation or fear on it they are to discuss how they can use one of their strengths or abilities to lessen the impact of the limitation.
7. The recorder records the group's solution to the problem.
8. The reporter reports to the rest of the group their solution.
9. The leader then leads the whole group in a discussion:
  - What did you do to get out of the cave?
  - Do we all have things that we are good at and that can help us in difficult situations?
  - How do you make the best of a situation when you have to overcome your fears or limitations?
  - How do friends help each other build on strengths and minimise limitations?

# Resource List

## Books on Disability, the Bible, and the Church

### General

**Beates, T. S.** *Disability and the Gospel: How God Uses our Brokenness to Display His Grace.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2012.

**Brock, Brian.** *Disability: Living into the Diversity of Christ's Body.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021.

**Bedard, S. J.** *How to Make your Church Autism-Friendly.* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Ontario: Hope's Reason, 2017.

**Carter, E. W.** *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations.* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2007.

**Hardwick, L.** *Disability and the Church: A Vision for Diversity and Inclusion.* Downers Grove: IVP, 2021.

**Hubach, S. O.** *Same Lake, Different Boat: Coming Alongside People Touched by Disability.* Revised and Expanded Edition. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2020.

**Johnson, P.** *The Church and People with Disabilities: Awareness, Accessibility, and Advocacy.* New York: United Methodist Women, 2014.

**Macaskill, G.** *Autism and the Church: Bible, Theology, and Community.* Waco: Baylor University Press, 2019.

**McCloughry, R.** *The Enabled Life: Christianity in a Disabling World*. London: SPCK, 2013.

**McKinney-Fox, B.** *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019.

**Newman, B. J.** *Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011.

**Newman, B. J.** *Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Church*. Wyoming: CLC Network, 2015.

**Phelps-Jones, T.** *Making Church Accessible to All: Including Disabled People in Church Life*. Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2013.

**Yong, A.** *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

## **Theological Approaches to Disability**

**Brock, B.** *Wondrously Wounded: Theology, Disability, and the Body of Christ*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2019.

**Brock, Brian.** *Disability: Living into the Diversity of Christ's Body*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021.

**Brock, B., and J. Swinton.** *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

**Jacober, A.** *Redefining Perfect: The Interplay between Theology and Disability*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017.

**Melcher, S., M. C. Parsons, and A. Yong.** *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*. London: SCM Press, 2017.

**Picard, A., and M. Habets.** *Theology and the Experience of Disability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Voices Down Under*. London: Routledge, 2016.

**Swinton, J.** *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016.

**Weiss Block, J.** *Copious Hosting: A Theology of Access for People with Disabilities*. New York: Continuum, 2002.

**Yong, A.** *Theology and Down Syndrome: Re-imagining Disability in Late Modernity.* Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007.

## **Disability and Children’s and Youth Ministry**

**Lee, A. F.** *Leading a Special Needs Ministry: A Practical Guide to Including Children and Loving Families.* Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013.

**Newman, B. J.** *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities.* Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2012.

**Wetherbee, K., and J. Philo.** *Every Child Welcome: A Ministry Handbook for Including Kids with Special Needs.* Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015.

## **Families with Children with Disabilities and Special Needs**

**Chapman, G., and J. Philo.** *Sharing Love Abundantly in Special Needs Families: The 5 Languages for Parents Raising Children with Disabilities.* Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2019.

**Eareckson Tada, J.** *Real Families, Real Needs: A Compassionate Guide for Families Living with Disability.* Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishing, 2017.

**Hurley, K.** *Take Heart: For Families Living with Disability.* Sydney South: Blue Bottle Books, 2008.

## **Mental Health and Mental Illness**

**Grcevich, S.** *Mental Health and the Church: A Ministry Handbook for Including Children and Adults with ADHD, Anxiety, Mood Disorders, and Other Common Mental Health Conditions.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.

**Simpson, A.** *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church’s Mission.* Downers Grove: IVP, 2013.

**Stanford, M. S.** *Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness.* 2nd edition. Downers Grove: IVP, 2017

**Swinton, J.** *Spirituality and Mental Health Care: Rediscovering a ‘Forgotten’ Dimension.* London: Kingsley, 2001.

**Swinton, J.** *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christian with Mental Health Challenges*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020.

**Thomas, A.** *Tackling Mental Illness Together: A Biblical and Practical Approach*. London: IVP, 2017.

## Individuals Experiencing Mental Ill-Health

**Simpson, A.** *Anxious: Choosing Faith in a World of Worry*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2014.

**Smith, R.** *The Anxious Christian: Can God Use our Anxiety for Good?* Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011.

## Online Publications on Disability, the Bible, and the Church

**Andrade, C.** “Developing Welcoming Faith Communities: Inspiring Examples of Faith-Based Initiatives to help Individuals with Mental Health Conditions Participate Fully in the Life of Religious Congregations.” Philadelphia: Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, 2015. <http://tucollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Developing-Welcoming-Faith-Communities.pdf>

**Gaventa, W.** “Signs of the Times: Theological Themes in the Changing Forms of Ministries and Spiritual Supports with People with Disabilities.” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 26.4 (2006): n.p. <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/815/990>

**Gosbell, L.** “The Experiences of People Living with Disabilities in Three Urban Anglican Churches.” Pages 147-187 in *Anglican Churches Engaging with People Living with Disabilities*. Edited by M. Short. Sydney: Bush Church Aid Australia/CBM Australia, 2018. <https://neutrinodata.s3.amazonaws.com/bca/userimages/Resources/Anglican-Churches-Engaging-with-People-Living-with-Disabilities.pdf>

**Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.** “Hidden and Forgotten People: Ministry Among People with Disabilities,” Lausanne Occasional Paper 35; Orlando: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005. [https://www.lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/LOP35B\\_IG6B.pdf](https://www.lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/LOP35B_IG6B.pdf)

**Patterson, E. A. and N. A. Vogel.** *Accessible Faith: A Technical Guide for Accessibility in Houses of Worship*. Chicago: Retirement Research Foundation, 2003. <https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/accessible-faith.pdf>

**Reena.** “Breaking Down Barriers: A Multi-Faith Guide to Accessibility in Places of

Worship.” Ontario: Reena, 2009. <https://network.crcna.org/sites/default/files/documents/BreakingDownBarriersGuideMF.pdf>

**Short, M.** *Anglican Churches Engaging with People Living with Disabilities*. Sydney: Bush Church Aid Australia/CBM Australia, 2018. <https://neutrinodata.s3.amazonaws.com/bca/userimages/Resources/Anglican-Churches-Engaging-with-People-Living-with-Disabilities.pdf>

**Taylor, C.E., E. W. Carter, N. H. Annandale, T. L. Boehm, and A. K. Logeman.** “Welcoming People with Developmental Disabilities and their Families: A Practical Guide for Congregations.” Nashville: Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, 2014. <https://vkc.vumc.org/assets/files/resources/CongregationPracticeGuide.pdf>

**Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.**

“Including Adults with Disabilities in Religious Life and Education,” Nashville: Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, n.d. <https://vkc.vumc.org/assets/files/resources/disabilitiesrelmanual.pdf>

## Online Resources on Disability, the Bible, and the Church

### General Disability

**139 Collective – Christian Parents of Children with a Disability**

[www.the139collective.com.au](http://www.the139collective.com.au)

**All Belong – Center for Inclusive Education**

<https://allbelong.org/>

**CBM – Luke 14**

<https://www.cbm.org.au/get-involved/church/>

**Collaborative on Faith and Disabilities**

<https://faithanddisability.org/>

**Elevate Christian Disability Trust – New Zealand**

<https://elevatecdt.org.nz/>

**Hope Christian Homes – Creating Christian communities for people with disabilities**

[www.hopechristianhomes.org.au](http://www.hopechristianhomes.org.au)

**Joni and Friends**

[www.joniandfriends.org/education-and-training](http://www.joniandfriends.org/education-and-training)

**Key Ministry**

[www.keyministry.org](http://www.keyministry.org)

**Through the Roof**

<https://www.throughtheroof.org/>

**Autism**

**Autism Society of North Carolina. “Autism and Faith Communities: Welcoming and Supporting Faith Communities.”**

[https://www.autismsociety-nc.org/wp-content/uploads/Faith-Toolkit\\_FIN.pdf](https://www.autismsociety-nc.org/wp-content/uploads/Faith-Toolkit_FIN.pdf)

**Diocese of Oxford. “Welcoming and Including Autistic People in our Churches and Communities”**

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Autism-Guidelines-2019.pdf>

**Blindness/Vision Impairment**

**Torch Trust. “Sight Loss Friendly Church: Best Practice Guidelines.”**

<https://www.sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk/downloads/resources/tt12090---slfc-downloadable-resources---best-practice-guidelines-v3-web.pdf>

**Deafness/Hard of Hearing**

**Auslan (Australian Sign Language) Bible**

<https://auslan.bible/>

**Auslan Bible Videos + Deaf Bible Studies**

<https://www.youtube.com/user/DarrenKirkegard>

## **Intellectual Disability**

### **Friendship Ministries**

<https://friendship.org/>

## **Children’s, Youth, and Families Ministry**

### **Through the Roof “8 Steps to Easier Transitions for Autistic Young People.”**

<https://www.throughtheroof.org/2018/08/15/8-steps-to-easier-transitions-for-autistic-young-people/>

### **Key Ministry “Ways the Church can Help Special Needs Siblings Thrive”**

<https://www.keyministry.org/church4everychild/2018/7/3/ways-the-church-can-help-special-needs-siblings-thrive>

## **Mental Health & Ill-Health**

### **The Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute**

<https://www.mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/>

10/10 videos are a great resource pack developed for use in churches for World Mental Health Day (10<sup>th</sup> October annually). However, the resources would be useful for churches to use at any time to educate and inform congregations on some of the complexities of mental health.

<https://www.mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/resources/1010-videos>

### **American Psychiatric Association.**

“Mental Health: A Guide for Faith Leaders.”

<https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/faith-mentalhealth-guide.pdf>

### **Key Ministry – Resources for Mental Health Ministry**

<https://www.keyministry.org/resources-for-mental-health-ministry>

### **Saddleback Resources.**

“Mental Health Resource Guide for Individuals and Families.” Rancho Santa Margarita: Saddleback Resources, 2015.

[http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/resources/resource\\_guides/Hope\\_Resource\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/resources/resource_guides/Hope_Resource_Guide.pdf)

## General Online Resources on Disability

### **Australian Government.**

“Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia.”  
National Disability Strategy Consultation report prepared by the National People with  
Disabilities and Carer Council. Commonwealth of Australia 2009.

[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2012/nds\\_report.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/nds_report.pdf)

### **Australian Network on Disability**

<https://www.and.org.au/>

### **People with Disability Australia**

<https://pwd.org.au/>

### **United Nations – Conventions on the Rights of People with Disability**

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

### **World Health Organization on Disability**

[https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1)

## Autism Spectrum Disorder

### **Aspect: Autism Spectrum Australia**

<https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/>

### **Amaze: Shaping the Future of Autism**

<https://www.amaze.org.au/>

### **Amaze. “Talking about Autism: Guidelines for Respectful and Accurate Reporting on Autism and Autistic People.”**

[https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Talking-about-autism-a-media-resource\\_web.pdf](https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Talking-about-autism-a-media-resource_web.pdf)

## Blindness/Vision Impairment

### **Blind Citizens Australia**

<https://www.bca.org.au/>

### **Vision Australia**

<https://www.visionaustralia.org/>

## **Deafness/Hard of Hearing**

### **Deaf Society**

<https://deafsociety.org.au/>

### **Deaf Australia**

<https://deafaustralia.org.au/>

## **Resources for Learning Auslan (Australian Sign Language)**

### **Deaf Society**

<https://deafsociety.org.au/>

### **Auslan Signbank**

<http://www.auslan.org.au/dictionary/>

To book an Auslan (Australian Sign Language) Interpreter for a church service or event:

### **National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service**

<https://www.nabs.org.au/>

### **Auslan Services**

<https://www.auslanservices.com/>

### **National Relay Service**

The NRS is an Australia-wide telephone access service which provides access to anyone in the wider telephone network for people who are Deaf or having a hearing or speech impairment. [www.relayservice.com.au](http://www.relayservice.com.au)

## **Mental Health and Mental Illness**

### **Beyond Blue**

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

### **Black Dog Institute**

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>

## **Children and Youth with Disability**

### **Raising Children**

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability>

## **Resources for Accessibility Audits**

### **Association of Consultants in Access Australia**

[www.access.asn.au](http://www.access.asn.au)

## **Resources for Audio Visual Systems in Churches**

### **Open Box Technology**

Christian company experienced with helping churches with audio visual systems

<https://openboxtechnology.com/>

## **Free Online Captioning Services**

### **Amara**

<https://amara.org/en/>

## **Professional Captioning Services**

### **AI Media**

<https://www.ai-media.tv/>

### **Caption It**

<http://www.captioning.com.au/>

### **The Captioning Studio**

<https://captioningstudio.com/>

### **The Substation**

<http://thesubstation.com.au/>

### **Zoo Digital**

<https://www.zoodigital.com/>

## Resources for Installation of Hearing Loops

### Connect Hearing

<https://www.connecthearing.com.au/>

### Hear Connect

[www.hearconnect.com.au](http://www.hearconnect.com.au)

### Hearing Loop Australia

<https://www.hearingloop.com.au/>

### Madison AV

<https://madisonav.com.au/>

## Resources on the Disability Discrimination Act and the Building Code of Australia

### Australian Human Rights Commission: Disability Discrimination Act 1992

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/brief-guide-disability-discrimination-act>

### Australian Human Rights Commission: Building Regulation and Equitable Access Australia

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/building-regulation-and-equitable-access-australian-view>

## Resources on Document Accessibility

### PowerPoint Slides

#### Queensland Government “Create accessible PowerPoint Presentations”

[https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/184136/create-accessible-powerpoint-documents.pdf](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/184136/create-accessible-powerpoint-documents.pdf)

#### Microsoft – “Make Your PowerPoint Presentations Accessible to People with Disabilities”

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/make-your-powerpoint-presentations-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-6f7772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25>

## Word Documents

### **Microsoft – “Make Your Word Documents Accessible to People with Disabilities”**

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>

### **Queensland Government “Create accessible Word Documents”**

[https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/182610/create-accessible-word-documents\\_0.pdf](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/182610/create-accessible-word-documents_0.pdf)

## Apple Mac Documents and Accessibility

Apple “Create accessible documents, spreadsheet, or presentations with Pages, Numbers, or Keynote”

<https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT210563>

## Resources on Website Accessibility

### **Human Rights Commission Advisory Notes on Website Accessibility**

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/world-wide-web-access-disability-discrimination-act-advisory-notes-ver>

### **World Wide Web Consortium Guidelines on Web Accessibility**

[www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT](http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT)

## Sydney Anglican Churches with Auslan Interpreting

### **St David’s Forestville (10am Service)**

St David’s Anglican Church, Forestville 697 Warringah Rd,  
Forestville Ph: 8012 2020 Email: [office@stdavids.com.au](mailto:office@stdavids.com.au)

### **MBM Rooty Hill (4pm Service)**

MBM Rooty Hill (St Albans)  
Cnr Rooty Hill Road North & Westminster St  
Rooty Hill  
Ph: 9677 0133  
Email: [admin@mbm.org.au](mailto:admin@mbm.org.au)

## Jesus Club Ministries Information and Club Contacts

Jesus Club is a great way to get started in including people with intellectual disabilities into your church community. If you are interested in starting up a club at your church, either visit their website <https://www.jesusclub.org.au/> or contact the operations manager Josh Reid on 0434 841 234 or [office@jesusclub.org.au](mailto:office@jesusclub.org.au).

Alternatively, if your parish is near to any of these existing clubs, you may like to connect people in with these clubs:

### Jesus Club Castle Hill

Coordinator: Julie Horgan  
Email: [jesusclub@spch.org.au](mailto:jesusclub@spch.org.au)  
Phone: 0422 500 373

St Pauls Anglican Church  
421 Old Northern Rd  
Castle Hill

### Jesus Club Croydon

Coordinator: Phoebe Hathaway  
Email: [phoebe.abc@hotmail.com](mailto:phoebe.abc@hotmail.com)  
Phone: 0448 437 904

St James Croydon  
2 Highbury St  
Croydon

### Jesus Club Dapto

Coordinator: Zoe Vesey  
Email: [zvesey@daptoanglican.org.au](mailto:zvesey@daptoanglican.org.au)  
Phone: 0423 428 313

Dapto Anglican Church  
100 Moomba St  
Dapto

### Jesus Club Jannali

Coordinator: Barry Steele  
Email: [jesusclub@jac.org.au](mailto:jesusclub@jac.org.au)  
Phone: 0413 187 247

Jannali Anglican  
83 Wattle Rd  
Jannali

### Jesus Club Lower Blue Mountains

Coordinator: Wendy Allison  
Email: [admin@lmap.org.au](mailto:admin@lmap.org.au)  
Phone: (02) 4739 1316 (Church Office)

Lower Mountains Anglican Parish  
1 Wascoe St  
Glenbrook

### Jesus Club Maroubra

Coordinator: Lara Fortmann  
Email: [lara@wildstreet.org.au](mailto:lara@wildstreet.org.au)  
Phone: 0433 652 452

Wild Street Anglican Church  
Corner Wild St and Holden St  
Maroubra

**Jesus Club Northern Beaches**

Coordinator: Natalie Berrill  
Email: [jesusclubnb@gmail.com](mailto:jesusclubnb@gmail.com)  
Phone: 9971 1048

St Faiths Anglican Church  
5-9 Clarke St  
Narrabeen

**Jesus Club Turramurra**

Coordinator: Liz Mann  
Email: [jesusclub@stjames.info](mailto:jesusclub@stjames.info)  
Phone: 0421 336 013

St James Anglican Church  
15 King St  
Turramurra

**Jesus Club Gladesville**

Coordinators: Kate Watson and Mike Allen  
Email: [office@christchurch.org.au](mailto:office@christchurch.org.au)  
Phone: (02) 9817 2631 (church office)

Kate Watson: 0439 730 731  
Christ Church Gladesville  
4 Jordan St  
Gladesville

**Jesus Club Rooty Hill**

Coordinator: Allie Mead  
Email: [allie95@live.com.au](mailto:allie95@live.com.au)  
Phone: 0432 984 254

MBM Church  
Corner of Westminster St and Rooty Hill  
Road North  
Rooty Hill

**WeBelong Newtown**

Coordinators: Leanna Fox (main contact),  
Susan Baumhammer, Mike Huntington  
(Moore College Service Team)  
Email: [webelong@neac.com.au](mailto:webelong@neac.com.au)  
Phone: (02) 9557 2043 (church office)

St Stephens Anglican Church  
189 Church St  
Newtown

