
Everyone Welcome

Accessible church for all



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on behalf Embracing Ministries
Diocese of Canberra-Goulburn

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These guidelines were compiled after significant consultation with people with disability and their families and carers, as well as with disability professionals and practitioners. Thanks to the numerous people who have been involved throughout the consultation, development and production stages of this project for both the first as well as the current edition.

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Welcome to the Accessibility Guidelines for the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn

In Australia, over four million people live with some form of disability. That is one in five Australians.¹ A further 2.65 million Australians provide unpaid care to a family member with disability or ageing family members.² 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.³ These statistics indicate that disability is not only common but an inevitable part of the present world.

Many parishes in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn have already taken significant steps towards building church communities that are inclusive and accommodating of 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 with disability or training leaders in Auslan or Key Word Signing (forms of sign language) which not only help with communication for some children with disability but also help to normalise the use of alternative forms of communication.

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.

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 work towards reducing 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. While paid support workers and therapists play an important role in the lives of many people with disability – in some cases, even assisting people in church contexts – they are not a replacement for 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 the region of Canberra Goulburn.⁴ In *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*, religious organisations are specifically listed as community organisations which need to ensure that “people with disability are able to fully participate” which “requires accessibility to be an integral part of the design of services and systems to avoid barriers arising.”⁵ 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.⁶

While we are yet to see the full impacts of the outcomes from the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* (Disability Royal Commission), there is no doubt that there will eventually be more legislative guidelines with respect to the inclusion of people with disability in our parishes. However, our primary driver for becoming communities of inclusion should not be government legislation but our commitment to live as the people of God, demonstrating God's love and character in the world. One way we can do this is through demonstrating our commitment to the care and support of people with disability and to create communities that can be places of belonging for all people.

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 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 the 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 Board of Embracing Ministries



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.’⁷

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.⁸

However, disability is about more than a person’s diagnosis. The current definition of disability according to the World Health Organisation states that:

Disability results from the interaction between individuals with a health condition, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and depression, with personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support.⁹

This definition of disability helps to emphasise that a person's experience of disability is more than just about what is happening in a person's body or mind, but is directly impacted by their life circumstances and the environments they inhabit. This highlights that environments which intentionally work to reduce barriers for people with disability can have a direct bearing on the extent to which a person is limited by their situation and environment.

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.¹⁰

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 worship 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 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.

The mission of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn is *engaging a world of difference with the love and truth of Jesus*. This mission is the acknowledgment that difference is a “defining characteristic” of our generation and that part of our Jesus-centred response is to be able to engage with different kinds of difference in a way that is “intentional, mutual, and faithful.” In creating communities that are responsive to and inclusive of people with disability in our church communities and beyond, we continue the long legacy of the Christian church in demonstrating the love and truth of Jesus in the world.

However, at present, there are barriers in place that make it harder for people with disability to engage not only in society but also in our church 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 (e.g., Gen. 1:26-28; Gen. 5:1-3; Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; 2 Cor. 3:18). 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 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.'¹¹ 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 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.



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 inclusion of people with disability as part of the diocese's mission to *engage a world of difference with the love and truth of Jesus*. 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?¹²

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. However, it is helpful to remember that not all disabilities are visible. You won't be able to determine

the number of people with disability in your parish simply by looking at the congregation.

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 parish'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 services on Sundays, are they extended the same kind of opportunities to journey together with others in the same way 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 disability 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.

Safe Ministry Requirements

The Canberra-Goulburn 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 Vulnerable People Registration (WWVP)

In the Australian Capital Territory, it is a legislative requirement that anyone 18 years of age or over obtains a Working With Vulnerable People Registration (WWVP) if they work with vulnerable people. According to the ACT Government, a vulnerable person can be a child or an adult experiencing disadvantage. Disadvantage includes:

- a physical or mental disability
- experiencing social or financial hardship
- an inability to communicate
- difficulty communicating in English.

It is required that any parishioners involved in direct ministry with people with disability obtain a WWVP. For more information about the WWVP, see:

<https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/business-and-work/working-with-vulnerable-people>

Current Safe Ministry training accreditation

Safe Ministry training provides awareness training for all church workers in the concepts of Safe Ministry, and additional training for those responsible for the implementation of Diocesan Safe Ministry (safe church) requirements on the ground.

Safe Ministry Essentials (Level 1) – A course for all clergy and lay position holders to develop awareness of the Diocesan Safe Ministry policy, protocols, procedures, and practices. The training includes biblical foundations, healthy team ministry, screening, boundaries, code of conduct, duty of care, child safe practices, responding to concerns (child and adult related) and self-care as church workers.

Safe Ministry with Children and Young People (Level 2) – A course for all children and youth workers (lay and clergy) to develop awareness of Child Safety and Child Protection. This course includes empowering children, identifying and responding to concerns (risk of harm), reducing the risks of child abuse and caring for all parties.

Safe Ministries Implementation for Senior Leaders (Level 3) – A course for all clergy, Parish Council members, Parish Safe Ministry Coordinators and Ministry Program Coordinators aimed at working through the implementation of Diocesan Safe Ministry Policy, Protocols, and Procedures (in particular, the Child Safe Standards, Reportable Conduct Scheme, screening of workers, Grievance Procedure, Professional Standards, and Ministry to Persons of Concern).

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, *Diocesan Code of Good Practice* sets out the standards of conduct required for church workers (including volunteers). 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:

Safe Ministry Unit

Phone: 02 6245 7160

safeministry@anglicands.org.au

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



CHAPTER 4

How our attitudes welcome or distance those with disability

‘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.’¹³

In order for churches to remove obstacles that restrict people with disability from full inclusion and participation in the life of the church, parishes must first be able to identify the barriers that 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.

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.’¹⁴ It is these attitudinal barriers that can also be the ‘biggest roadblock’ to the inclusion of people with disability in church communities.¹⁵ 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.’¹⁶ 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 welcome and included.’¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.’²⁰

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 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 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.²¹

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 disability 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.'²²

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 'having a disability' or '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.' 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 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."²³ It is important for people without disability to respect the language choices of people with disability. However, due to the complexity of disability, there are also people who cannot choose one set of vocabulary over another (for example, some people with intellectual disabilities). What is important is 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.

It is important to avoid language which expresses a judgement about the quality of life of a person with disability, 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 using outdated language which is no longer used to describe people with disability. Words such as 'retarded,' 'mongoloid,' 'spastic,' 'handicapped,' and 'invalid' are all examples of references to disability which are no longer appropriate. In addition, while Australians are renowned for shortening words, it is also important to avoid doing so in relation to disability. For this reason, it is important to 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. It is important to recognise that the experiences of people with disability in the first century are vastly different from people with disability in Australia today. We should be careful not to assume that all people living today are as desperate for healing as those we encounter in the gospels. Many people with disability today 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 particular, 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:²⁴

	TERMS TO AVOID	RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVES
When referring to people with disability in general	<p>Afflicted by... (e.g., afflicted by autism afflicted by mental illness)</p> <p>Differently abled / handi-capable / handicapped</p> <p>Suffers from... (e.g., suffers from dementia, suffers from quadriplegia)</p>	<p>People with disability</p> <p>Has / lives with disability</p> <p>Has / lives with a chronic health condition</p>
When referring to someone who uses a wheelchair	<p>Confined to a wheelchair</p> <p>Wheelchair-bound</p>	<p>Wheelchair user</p> <p>Person who uses a wheelchair</p>

When referring to someone with an intellectual disability	Intellectually challenged Mentally retarded Mentally disabled Simple Retarded	Person with a cognitive disability Person with an intellectual disability
When referring to someone with a mental health condition	Crazy Insane Mentally defective	Person with a mental health condition / mental illness / mental ill-health Person with depression / anxiety / bipolar etc.
When referring to toilets, parking, etc., which is accessible for persons with disability	Disabled toilets Disabled parking	Accessible toilets Accessible parking
When referring to a person without a disability	Normal person	Able-bodied person or non-disabled person

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 5

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 reduced vision are excluded from accessing 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 find printed information difficult to navigate can also have access to hearing the information shared verbally in the services.

It is also common now for ministry teams to record videos for social media and website to update congregants on what is happening in the life of the church. However, without captioning, the content of these videos is inaccessible to people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. In addition, it is very common for people to use captions even when they do not experience hearing loss. A recent study found that more than half of 13-39 year olds use captions regularly for watching videos on streaming platforms.²⁵ Given this is the case, including captions on videos on church websites and social media will not only be of benefit to people with certain kinds of disability but will be likely to have greater engagement among younger audiences.

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.²⁶ With our ageing population in Australia, hearing loss is projected to increase to 1 in every 4 people by the year 2050.²⁷ Given these statistics, it is important that our parishes are prepared to accommodate members who experience hearing loss.

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*.²⁸

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.

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 and other conditions, 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 Hearing Augmentation System.

There are a number of different Hearing Augmentation Systems 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 Hearing Augmentation System for your particular church building size and layout, it is best to consult with a technician who specialises in the installation of such systems. 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 Hearing Augmentation Systems, 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.²⁹

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 any videos that are shared on your church's website or social media, 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. As noted earlier, captions are also frequently used by younger audiences with a growing expectation that any videos they watch will incorporate captions. 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 55.³⁰ 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 30.³¹

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.

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.'³²

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.

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.



CHAPTER 6

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? Is there a ramp that gives access to the main building for people who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices? Is there adequate signage to indicate the accessible parking and accessible toilets? It's very often been said that a ramp into a church building is like a welcome mat showing the community that people with disability are welcome.³³ 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 in 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. When people with wheelchairs are relegated to the back of the church, 'out of the way,' their view of the song lyrics on the screens is often blocked by the congregants standing in front of them, preventing them from being able to participate in worship, in the same way as others in the congregation. 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 in the same way that non-disabled members can select from different positions in the church and choose to sit with friends and family..

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 a 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. ³⁴
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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 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 ACT Government to assist with funding building works to make the site more accessible. See

act.gov.au for more information.

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.³⁵

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



CHAPTER 7

Including people with intellectual disabilities

According to the Australian Government's *Shut Out* report, people with intellectual disability often 'struggle for meaningful engagement with the community...(and) are among the most isolated groups (of people)' in Australia.³⁶ People with intellectual disability often have fewer social networks and less genuine friendships than people without intellectual disability. Instead, their main relationships are with family members, family friends, and people in paid relationships such as support workers.³⁷

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.'³⁸ 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.

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 experience difficulty with 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.

As with other forms of disability, intellectual disability will look different for each person. Some people with intellectual disability work full time, are able to drive a car, negotiate public transport, and live independently. In contrast, other people with intellectual may require support 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. You will also learn about their strengths and gifts and they ways they will be able to contribute to the life of the church.

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 of support remain largely untapped.’³⁹ The church has great potential to make a difference in the lives of people with intellectual disability. 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 disability, and to provide natural social connections and genuine friendships. As communities committed to living out Paul’s concept of Church as the Body of Christ, we are called to recognize that all members of the Body have gifts they are given to use in the service of God and to one another. In our church communities, we have the opportunity to uphold the dignity and value of people with intellectual disability by serving them and ensuring they can use their gifts to serve God and others as well.

Sadly, the faith of people with intellectual disability is often overlooked and underrated as the markers of faith we normally expect from other Christians might not look the same as it does for people with intellectual disability. We should not judge the faith of a person with intellectual disability based on their ability to memorise and recite Scripture. God can be actively at work in the life of a person with an intellectual disability as they see the gospel demonstrated in the lives of others, hear the Bible taught, learn Scripture through worship songs, and as they actively participate in the community of faith. Sadly,

churches often do not take the time to teach and disciple people with intellectual disability. 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/or autism* is an information form designed to help you gather information from an adult parishioner with an intellectual disability. It is important you acknowledge the choices and agency of a person with an intellectual and allow them to decline answering any and all of the questions if they are not comfortable with answering them. The person needs to know there are no adverse consequences for not wanting to answer the questions on the form. It is helpful to explain the form is about gathering information so the church can get to know them and their gifts and find out the best ways the church can serve them. This is the position we should be coming from when gathering this information.

It is advisable to gather this information in consultation with the person's family members or carers if possible. The person with intellectual disability and their family/careers 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 but it is important to offer to them that they have a support person with them to help answer the questions if they would like to. The person with disability needs to feel safe and comfortable with the people and location and be aware they can change their minds about answering the form at any time.

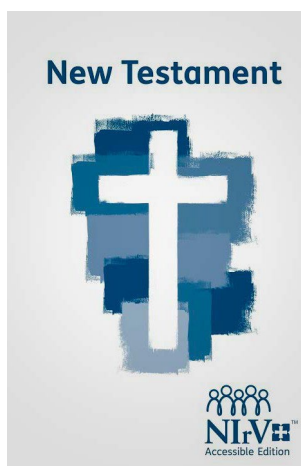
It is important to recognise the potential vulnerability of a person with intellectual disability and ensure Safe Ministry guidelines are followed. This will include advising leadership the meeting is taking place, providing safe persons and a safe environment in which to meet, consideration has been given to any potential power differentials, and any other elements of Safe Ministry which may be relevant to the situation.

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 a permanent member of your parish or were planning on becoming one.

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 disabilities and/or autism*.



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 agency and decisions unless this puts them or someone else in danger.

In 'get to know you' conversations, people often ask 'what do you do for work?' This can be an awkward question for many people such as those who have retired, stay-at-home parents, the long-term unemployed, as well as people with disability who may not be able to find meaningful employment. A helpful alternative question to 'what do you do for work?' 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. This question is helpful in many contexts including for those with intellectual disability. 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.' Don't use someone's lack of social awareness as an excuse to be rude or not engage with someone with an intellectual disability.

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 find abstract concepts challenging to understand. 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.

Buddy systems or faith partners for adults with intellectual disabilities

Pairing a person with an intellectual disability with a buddy or faith partner can help provide extra support for a person with a disability if they would like it. 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 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.'⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

It is important to respect the agency of the adult with disability that they might not wish to be partnered with a buddy or faith partner. It is also helpful to remember that like everyone, people with intellectual disability will 'gel' with some people and not with

others. Simply because a person with intellectual disability doesn't connect well with one buddy, does not mean the whole system of buddies is a failure. Work closely with the person with intellectual disability to find people with similar likes and interests and/or who connect well together. Respect their decisions and choices about what is going to work best to support their faith and experience of church.

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 and/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/or autism*, and can be downloaded in 12-point font and in large print.

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

'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 both person-first and identity-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.⁴²

CHAPTER 8

Including Neurodivergent Children, Youth, and Adults

The terms neurodiversity and neurodivergence have quickly become part of our vocabularies over the last few years. This section of the guidelines originally focused only on autism but has been expanded to provide an overview of some of the broad range of experiences that come under the umbrella term neurodivergence.

While many people use the terms related to neurodiversity interchangeably, it is helpful to understand the difference between the key words used:

Neurodiversity	Neurodiversity is the recognition that not all brains are 'wired' in the same way and there are differences between people in the way their brains work. These differences are part of the natural variety in human beings. Collectively, people together whose brains all work differently is a representation of neurodiversity. A group of people can be neurodiverse (including both people who are neurodivergent and neurotypical), however, individuals themselves are not neurodiverse. Individuals are described as either neurotypical or neurodivergent.
Neurodivergent	Neurodivergent is the term used to describe an individual who has a less typical cognitive variation which can include autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, etc.
Neurotypical	Neurotypical is the term used to describe an individual with typical development and intellectual/cognitive functioning.

While we most commonly associate the experience of neurodivergence with people with autism or ADHD, there are a number of conditions/labels that come under the umbrella of the term neurodivergence. These include:

- Autism

- ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Tourette's Syndrome
- OCD

Some people can experience two or more categories or labels of neurodivergence, for example, autism and ADHD, which is sometimes referred to as AuDHD.

The experiences of neurodivergent people are broad and varying and the relationship between neurodivergence and disability is complex. Some neurodivergent people do not consider their neurodivergence a form of disability but part of the natural diversity of living as an embodied human in the world. They recognise in their neurodivergence strengths and abilities which differ from, but are complementary to, those of neurotypical people.⁴³

For others, there are some aspects of being neurodivergent that can be challenging and disabling even if they do not consider neurodivergence a disability in itself. For many other neurodivergent people, they experience their neurodivergence in combination with other forms of disability such as a physical or intellectual disability or a mental health condition. According to Australian statistics, 91.4% of people with autism in Australia have a disability.⁴⁴ Research also shows the high rates of mental health conditions and other disabilities for those who live with ADHD.⁴⁵

What this tells us is that the experiences of neurodivergent people vary significantly. Being neurodivergent does not automatically mean that someone requires specialised disability supports to help them to engage in church services and programs. It is important not to be quick to make a judgement about a person's ability to participate in church, be an active and contributing member to the church community, or their cognitive abilities based simply on their neurodivergence. As with the recommendations throughout these guidelines, the best thing we can do is listen carefully and get to know people's individual stories and experiences. It is out of these relationships that we will be able to grow in our understanding of the kinds of changes we can make to ensure our church services and programs are welcoming to everyone.

For a fabulous resource on explaining neurodiversity to Christian communities, see the resource "[This is Ned.](#)"

Welcoming neurodivergent people into our parishes

While the experiences of neurodivergence can differ greatly, there are still changes we can make in our services and parishes that will help make it easier for neurodivergent people to be able to participate and be active members of our church communities. As with much of the advice given in these guidelines, the changes we make to help make our services more welcoming and inclusive of neurodivergent people will likely be helpful for many others in our parishes.

Neurodivergent people and their families are your best resource. Respectfully ask questions about what the parish can do facilitate belonging. What tools/resources work best in other contexts that the parish might be able to adopt? Understand a person's triggers as well as the tools they use to self-regulate. If appropriate, you can use the forms for gathering information from families for children and youth with disability and/or autism or the form for gathering information for an adult with intellectual disability and/or autism. Please note that it is not appropriate to ask an adult to complete the form without them disclosing they have autism, neurodivergence, or an intellectual disability or, in the case of someone with high support needs, this information might be disclosed by a family member or carer.

Social, Sensory and Cognitive Engagement for Neurodivergent People

In his book, *Autistic Thinking in the Life of the Church*, Stewart Rapley considers how churches can be more welcoming and inclusive of neurodivergent people in three particular areas: social, sensory, and cognitive engagement.⁴⁶ While Rapley's book focuses in particular on increasing cognitive engagement for people with autism in the church, he recognises the challenges faced by neurodivergent in the areas of both social and sensory engagement by providing a list of resources to help make changes in those areas also. Below are some examples of barriers that can exist in our churches to make it harder for neurodivergent people to belong alongside some recommendations for how we can overcome those barriers.

As noted earlier in the guidelines, the most significant barrier to participation for neurodivergent people and those with disability are people's attitudes. As Kate Morris writes: "In my research, I've asked many Christian neurodivergent people and families with neurodivergent members what makes church hard for them...many identify the

core issue as a lack of understanding. Without understanding, needs go unmet, and they feel judged for being different.”⁴⁷

Identifying and overcoming social barriers

<p>Familiarity with church building, layout and people</p>	<p>Many neurodivergent people, especially those with autism, find it easier to engage and interact when they have a clear sense of where they are going, what is going to happen, and what might be expected of them. One key way we can help reduce some of the anxiety around these elements is to provide clear information on the church’s website and social media. Questions you could answer in a FAQ section might be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What happens in a church service in our parish? - How long does the service run for? - What is the layout of the building/grounds? - Who will I see at church? (ministers names and pictures) - Do I need to bring anything with me to attend?
	<p>Create a social story about going to church and going to children’s ministry/youth programs. Social stories are stories that explain social settings and can be used for both children and adults to help build familiarity and reduce stress especially when attending something or somewhere new. There are many examples of “going to church” social stories available online. The best ones, however, use photos of the real people and places people will see when they come to your parish. It is helpful to make these downloadable so people can print them out to use in preparation for coming to church.</p>
<p>Communicate clear expectations</p>	<p>Neurodivergent people, especially those with autism, can be very literal in their understanding of directions. It is helpful if you can clearly communicate what is happening in the program to ensure it is understood. For example, rather than just starting the service with the musicians, ensure someone welcomes people into the service and directs people to “stand if you are able and join with us to sing” or something similar. Do not assume people know they are expected to stand and sing when the music begins. For children and youth, clear communications include being clear about times it is ok to talk out loud and when it is quiet time. It might also be reminding children and youth about the expectations about behaviour during</p>

	<p>the program which can be reinforced by a visual list of expectations posted on the wall. Rather than the vague “behave yourself,” give clear guidelines on expectations for what is considered appropriate behaviour.</p>
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Identifying and overcoming sensory barriers

<p>Music can be loud and become a sensory overload</p>	<p>Many neurodivergent people are very sensitive to sensory issues including noise. What can seem a reasonable level of sound for a neurotypical person might be overwhelming for a neurodivergent person. This can present so much of a barrier that they may arrive at church late and leave early to avoid participating in worship. Others may not attend church at all because the noise is too much of a deterrent. We can help overcome this barrier by encouraging neurodivergent people and those with disability to do what they need to manage being at church. This might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wearing noise-cancelling headphones; - Staying in a quiet area (e.g., a designated quiet zone or in the foyer) during the noisier parts of the service. - Running a low-sensory service. <p>For examples from a church in the USA with a focus on including people with sensory needs, see Sante Christian Sensory Support - Sensory Healthy Church.</p>
<p>Greeting people before, during, and after the service</p>	<p>Talking with people you don't know very well can be difficult for many people, especially when there is uncertainty about whether you should shake someone's hand or have to physically touch people during the passing of the peace. During the return to in-person services, some churches developed stickers that church members could use to indicate whether they were ok with being touched or would rather not be touched by others. However, this is a system that could continue to be used on an ongoing basis to help accommodate neurodivergent people who do not like touching or being touched. A green sticker on a person's name tag could be used to indicate they are ok with handshakes and 'high fives,' while a red sticker could indicate someone does not want to be touched. This would also be helpful if someone is recovering from a virus and wants to avoid touching others and making them unwell. Systems like this can only be used as an 'opt-in' without forcing people to make a decision to wear a sticker.</p>

Lighting	Bright fluorescent lighting can make it difficult for some neurodivergent people to concentrate. Fluorescents can also be a trigger for people with migraines and other neurological conditions. More natural lighting or softer yellow lights are better for visibility in general and can make it easier for a neurodivergent person to participate in church.
Movement	As much as possible, allow neurodivergent people to be able to move. Whether this is through the use of fidget devices, stimming, physically moving around spaces. For adults, this might be building a culture where it is acceptable for neurodivergent adults to be able to move around at the back of the church building/auditorium or using a sensory room where they can still hear the service. For children and youth, in addition to tools like fidget toys, build in regular times of movement between activities.
Eye Contact	Remember that neurodivergent people don't need to make eye contact with you to pay attention. In fact, for many neurodivergent people, this may be overwhelming and too much of a sensory overload. This is the same when listening to someone speak from the front. Recognise that people learn in different ways and eye contact does not equal paying attention.

Identifying and overcoming cognitive barriers

Communication regarding changes	Ensure you notify people as much in advance about changes to your program. For example, if the 9am and 11am congregations will be combined on one particular Sunday for a 10am service, ensure this information is available in multiple forms and shared in different platforms such as on social media, in print in the news bulletin and verbally in the service. Consider people who might not be physically present when the announcements are made to ensure they are advised.
Timetables and orders of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rather than just making runsheets or orders of service for those rostered to help in a service, make them more widely available. Orders of service can provide a sense of safety, comfort and familiarity for many neurodivergent adults as well as some people with mental health challenges. It helps people follow along with what is happening which can help with concentration. - Many children with disability and/or neurodivergence also benefit from the use of visual

	<p>timetables that everyone in the group can see but some children/young people might also like their own copy of the order of service to follow along with during their kids/youth program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adding visual elements to the run sheet (such as a picture of a Bible to indicate the Bible reading and a picture of praying hands to indicate a time of prayer) will also be of benefit to those with low literacy, as well as those with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
Respect people's need to move during the service	While it is ingrained in many of us that listening to a speaker means watching them intently while taking notes, this is simply not the case for many neurodivergent people (and many neurotypical people too!). For some people to concentrate, they need to keep their hands (or bodies) busy. Some people like to draw or doodle in their notepad. Others like to knit or crochet. Work to develop a culture where it is acceptable for people to do what they need to in order to concentrate (without disturbing the concentration of others).
Use more visuals	If you are teaching the Bible to neurodivergent people – children or adults – visual aids can help. Try using more images on PowerPoint during sermons and talks or including props or other tactile items to help keep people's focus.
Avoid verbal overload	Keep information, directions and instructions as clear and concise as possible.

As with all the other recommendations in these guidelines, the best place to start is those you know who are part of your parish already. By completing a community audit and identifying the barriers and needs of those with disability and neurodivergence already in your church, you will have a place to start with making accommodations. If you attempt to make all of these changes without understanding the needs of the people you already have in your parish, it is likely that you will find the process lengthy and overwhelming. Discuss any potential accommodations and adaptations with the people who will be most directly impacted by these changes to ensure they are the best way forward.

It is important to recognise that as our societal understanding of neurodiversity is expanding and developing, more adults are receiving late diagnoses of autism and ADHD. It's important to be supportive of people's diagnoses and recognise that while there are significant benefits to having a better understanding of the way your brain is wired, a late diagnosis can also take considerable adjustment. Rather than dismissing people's late diagnoses as 'unnecessary' or a symptom of over-diagnosis, listen well to

people's stories and journey with them as they come to terms with what the diagnosis means for them personally.

Even with the increasing number of late diagnoses, there are likely many people in your congregation who are neurodivergent who have not been officially diagnosed. Given this is the case, implementing these changes will not only benefit those who are already diagnosed but those yet to be diagnosed, along with the broader parish community.

The following sections will address the experiences of people with autism and ADHD more specifically.

Understanding autism

Autism is a neuro-developmental condition that 'affects how a person thinks, feels, interacts with others, and experiences their environment.'⁴⁸ The term 'spectrum' is used 'to describe the range of characteristics and abilities' found in people with autism.⁴⁹ While there are general characteristics that can be associated with autism – 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 with autism is credited with the phrase, 'If you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism.'⁵⁰ The experiences of one person with autism can be completely different to someone else's experiences of having autism.

The numbers of people diagnosed with autism have increased dramatically in the last decade, with a 41.8% increase in diagnoses in Australia between 2018 and 2022.⁵¹ Some research indicates that Australia's diagnosis rates are amongst the highest in the world with 1 in 25 children being diagnosed with autism.⁵² In Australia, the 2015 data indicated that males are 3.5 times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than females,⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

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 with autism. In addition, 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 sensory overload. 'Meltdown' is an experience of complete sensory overload. This can result in a person becoming distressed and can make it difficult for them to regulate their emotions. One method some people with autism use to calm themselves down is called stimming. Stimming is the use of repetitive behaviours such as rocking back and forth, using a fidget spinner, waving or flapping arms, or repeating words. However, some people with autism stim when they are happy or excited and is not always associated with sensory overload or distress.

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.'⁵⁵

A particular note on language

As noted in the introduction, language use across the disability community varies with some people preferring person-first language (e.g., person with disability) and others preferring identity-first language (e.g., disabled person). This is also the case with people with autism. While some people with autism prefer person-first language (e.g., person with autism) others have a strong preference for identity-first language (e.g., autistic, or an autistic person). When speaking with a person about autism, ask them about their language preferences or be guided by their use of language recognising that different people have different preferences or may use a combination of person-first and identity-first language.

Welcoming people with autism into our parishes

While labels such as 'autism' can be useful – especially for individuals to help them understand themselves better – 'the label should not in any way take away from the fact that this is a complex person with individual gifts and needs.'⁵⁶ 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 with autism experience anxiety or other mental health challenges, while others do not. As with all people in your parish, the most helpful thing a church community can do is to get to know the individual.

In the case of adults with autism who want to be a part of your parish but may experience challenges with aspects of the service, it may be appropriate to use *Appendix 6: Collecting information from adults with intellectual disabilities and/or autism* form to find out more about the person's gifts and challenges as well as how they might like to be able to participate in the parish. However, it is not appropriate to ask some directly if they have autism. 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 if they would like to complete the form.

See the section on training buddies in chapter ten.

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/or autism*.

There are a range of publications on helping include people with autism in church communities. These include:

- Barbara J. Newman, *Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder*;⁵⁷
- Stephen J. Bedard, *How to Make your Church Autism Friendly*;⁵⁸
- Stewart Rapley, *Autistic Thinking in the Life of the Church*.⁵⁹

Some additional online resources

For digital users, the links can be accessed by clicking on the underlined text. For users of the print edition, links can be found in the Endnotes.

- Two free online resources are also particularly helpful:
 - Anglican Diocese of Truro, UK:
['Welcoming and Including Autistic People in our Churches and Communities.'](#)⁶⁰

- Autism Society of North Carolina, [‘Autism and Faith Communities: Welcoming and Supporting Faith Communities.’](#)⁶¹

For a great article written by an autistic woman about her experiences of church, see Erin Burnett, [‘I Want to Love God with all my mind’](#) in *Premier Christianity*.⁶²

Tips for welcoming and including people with autism

In one-to-one and group conversations:

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 with autism to process information and formulate a response.

Treat adults as peers and do not patronise them or treat them like children. Respect their agency and decisions unless this puts them or someone else in danger.

Be patient and flexible in your interactions with someone with autism. They may be repetitive or be passionate about their special interest and talk about it 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.

Respect that someone with autism 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.

Tips for welcoming and including people with autism

In one-to-one and group conversations:

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.

Be aware that social interaction can be tiring for people with autism 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*).

Understanding ADHD

ADHD is a neuro-developmental condition that has an ongoing pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity. The term 'spectrum' is also used for people who have ADHD or 'ADHDers' (keeping in mind the guidance on language use throughout these guidelines). Just like no two people with autism are exactly alike, no two people with ADHD are exactly alike. However, there are general characteristics that can be associated with ADHD, for example, challenges with concentration, sensory and memory issues, and hyperactivity.

"ADD can make it tough to be a Christian. Two significant components of a typical worship service are the sermon and the prayers. Participation in either takes significant concentration. Most of the Christians with ADD with whom I have talked feel guilty about how little they participate in traditional worship. Many have abandoned the regular practice of their faith, not because of disbelief, but because of a sense of being 'out of place' in a worship service."⁶³

It is estimated that in Australia, ADHD affects around 6-7% of the population and while it is often considered to be a condition experienced by children and young people, research indicates that 3 out of 4 children diagnosed with ADHD still experience symptoms as an adult. Greater awareness of the symptoms of ADHD also means that more adults are being diagnosed in later life.

ADHD can present in 3 ways:

1. Inattentive symptoms – a person can get distracted easily and find it difficult to concentrate;
2. Hyperactive-impulsive symptoms – a person experiences hyperactivity and impulsivity;
3. Combined symptoms – a person has a combination of both.

Inattentive symptoms

People with inattentive ADHD might experience these symptoms:

- A tendency to start but not finish tasks;
- Put off tasks that need sustained effort;
- Become easily distracted;
- Have difficulty remembering things;
- Have difficulty with organisation of belongings or ideas;
- Often losing things;
- Have challenges with paying attention to detail;
- Struggles with tasks that require a lot of concentration.

People with hyperactive-impulsive symptoms

People with hyperactive-impulsive ADHD might experience these symptoms:

- Struggle to stay still for more than a few minutes at a time;
- Talking for a long time without interruption and/or interrupting others while speaking;
- Reacting quickly to situations before working through the consequences;
- Seeking stimulation/attention;
- Participating in risk-taking or dangerous behaviour.

The experiences of one person with ADHD can be completely different to someone else's experience of having ADHD. It is important, as always, to listen to people's experiences rather than making assumptions about the way a person's ADHD is experienced for them.

Overlap between autism and ADHD

Interestingly, there is a significant 'overlap' between autism and ADHD in terms of neurobiology, symptoms and behaviours, and an individual person may be on either the autism or ADHD spectrum or both.

Welcoming people with ADHD into our parishes

Many of the recommendations in the previous sections will be helpful for people with ADHD. Here are some additional suggestions:

Tips for welcoming and including people with ADHD

In Church Services, Events, Meetings, and Communications:

Consider seating choices. Providing options for seating not only helps people with a physical disability, older people, and people who live with chronic pain, but seating options can be helpful for people with ADHD who might find it harder to sit still in uncomfortable seating such as traditional pews.

Build a culture where it is acceptable for people to keep their hands busy so their minds can focus on the talk/bible study content. Allow people to knit, crochet, use quiet fidget toys, or draw to help them concentrate. Help parishioners to understand that for some people movement facilitates concentration rather than considering it a sign of a lack of concentration.

Whenever possible, provide choices for activities (but not too many that it becomes overwhelming! Two or three items to choose from is enough). For children and youth, ensure there are options between activities, e.g., a quiet game or a noisy game, a game where you are sitting still versus one where you are moving around. For adults, this can be harder to incorporate into traditional church services but not impossible. Incorporating choices for activities for events and church retreats may be easier, ensuring there are options regarding the activities someone can participate in, e.g., a time of prayer that is still and quiet or a time of prayer that includes a walk through nature.

Additional reading

For digital users, the links can be accessed by clicking on the underlined text. For users of the print edition, links can be found in the Endnotes.

- For an insight into the experiences of ministers with ADHD, there is an article in *Christianity Today* worth reading called: ["Pastors with ADHD Can Burn Out or Shine"](#) by Megan Fowler.⁶⁴

- From the Pastoral Care and Mental Health Institute: “Living with Adult ADHD”
[Part 1](#)⁶⁵ and [Part 2](#).⁶⁶

CHAPTER 9

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 health conditions are considered a form of disability under the Australian Disability Discrimination Act.⁶⁷ 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.’⁶⁸

Simply put, a person’s mental health condition may be considered a disability if it has a disabling impact on their lives. If a mental health condition impedes a person in undertaking employment, accessing social services, experiencing friendships, and so on, then a person’s mental health condition can be classified as a form of disability under Australian law. This is referred to as a psycho-social disability. A psycho-social disability can affect a person’s ability to cope with stress, have enough stamina to complete tasks, interact with others, focus, or care for themselves.

If a person is discriminated against on the grounds of their mental health condition or psycho-social disability, 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 and psycho-social disabilities according to the standards set out in the *Disability Discrimination Act*.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 42.9% of Australians aged 16-85 have experienced a mental health condition at some time in their life.⁶⁹ According to the 2020-2022 data, one in five Australians aged 16-85 (21.5%) experienced symptoms of that mental health condition within the last twelve months.⁷⁰ 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 terms *mental illness*, mental ill-health or *mental health challenges* refer to a range of 'health conditions involving significant changes in thinking, emotion, or behavior (or a combination of these).'⁷¹ These conditions are often 'associated with distress or problems functioning in social, work, or family activities.'⁷² 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.'⁷³ 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.'⁷⁴

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.'⁷⁵ People experience stigmatisation when they are told by friends, families or employers to 'get over it,' 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 individuals, families, and the broader church to recognise the value and dignity of people with mental health challenges and find ways for people with mental health challenges to become active participants in their church community.

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.'⁷⁶ 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.

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 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.⁷⁷

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.⁷⁸ 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 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.⁷⁹ 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.

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.⁸⁰

Mental health challenges are considered a major contributing factor to an individual's decision to suicide.⁸¹

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.'⁸²

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 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.'*⁸³

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.



CHAPTER 10

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*.’⁸⁴

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.⁸⁵ 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 can become 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 with a disability can also place additional stresses on the family.⁸⁶ 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 process 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.'

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 is our hope that it will provide 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*.⁸⁷
- Barbara J. Newman, *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities*.⁸⁸
- Katie Wetherbee and Jolene Philo, *Every Child Welcome: A Ministry*

*Handbook for Including Kids with Special Needs.*⁸⁹

- Sandra Peoples, *Be All In: A Ministry Guide for Special Needs Inclusion in Children's Ministry.* Online.⁹⁰

Listen to the voices of kids, young people and their families!

Parents and families 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 in order to provide the best support for them in your parish's programs. Often standard forms give parents only 2-3 lines in which to describe the child's support needs, likes, dislikes, potential triggers and best soothing strategies. A form dedicated to collecting further information from the family can be useful not only for gathering information about the best ways to support the child or young person but can also serve as a stepping-stone to creating an open dialogue between the parish leadership 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 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 and supports required, strategies for calming, best strategies to manage challenging 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 young people with disability and/or autism.*

As with gathering information from anyone in our parishes, it is important to clearly indicate the purpose of gathering information and who will have access to this information once it has been collected. It is important to respect the privacy of children and young people with disability and the families and have a clear understanding of how a child/young person/family wish for the disability to be spoken about in front of leaders and other children/young people and under what circumstances.

Through getting to know the child or young person with disability and their family – if appropriate – 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-speaking, or who find verbal communication challenging, 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.

Once you create a draft plan, you should then discuss this with the family to make sure everyone understands the contents and agrees with the information, strategies and implementation.

A sample Ministry Inclusion Plan is also located in Appendix 7.

Creating inclusive programs

While some churches promote programs that separate children with disability out from 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), 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.
-
- 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.

A question often asked by churches is whether it is better for children and young people with disability to be with others who are the same age or to include them in a group that is closer to their 'functional' or cognitive level. While this is a conversation that needs to take place between leadership and the family, in general, it is more appropriate for children and young people to be with people the same age. If children and young people are grouped with people deemed of the same 'cognitive' abilities, then this makes it more difficult for a child or young person to connect with peers their same age. In addition, placing children and young people with those significantly younger than them will create a disparity in terms of emotional and even bodily development that will continue to mark the child or young person with disability as other.

In her book, *Helping Kids include Kids with Disability*, Barbara Newman addresses at length a range of strategies for helping children and young people include other children and young people with disability into church programs.⁹¹ One example of an exercise which can assist with this inclusion is also included in *Appendix 7: Further information on including kids and young people with disability and/or neurodivergence*.

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 service⁹²;

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.



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 children and young people with disability and/or neurodivergence*.

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 expect all children or young people 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.

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 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.⁹³

Finding a buddy for a child or young person with disability

It is helpful to first identify the needs and abilities of a child or young person with disability. This process should begin with the Parent Interview Checklist and Ministry Inclusion Plan, outlined above. After learning about the person's skills, abilities and likes, you will be in a better position to match them with a buddy.

While many children and young people with disability may not require a buddy, others would benefit from having someone to assist them and offer support throughout the programs they attend in your parish. Having a trained buddy assigned to a child or young person with disability will ensure they are able to get the most out of the program. Older children and young people can make great buddies where minimal support is required. Members of your youth programs 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, however, 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 young person and your own ministry context.

It is helpful to have a small team of junior leaders who are trained in the role of buddies for children and young people. These junior leaders could be rostered on monthly if there are enough young leaders available. Junior leaders (13-17 years) are required to have a WWVP Check and have completed a Safe Ministry Information System profile. They also need to have completed the online Safe Ministry training before they can volunteer to work with children or other young people. For more information, please refer to the Diocesan Protocol for Safe Ministry Screening and Training, in particular, the Table of Required Safe Ministry Screenings and Training.⁹⁴

Training Buddies

After a junior leader agrees to be involved as a buddy, they could meet together with the person with disability along with their family and/or carers) as well as the the children/youth minister or a member of the Inclusion Committee to train them in serving as a buddy. The meeting would also discuss the scope of the buddy's role, 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. Safe Ministry standards advise that a position description for buddies is also provided, so they know what is included and excluded from their responsibilities.

More extensive training for buddies can be provided by the Diocese's Embracing Ministries team.

Supporting families and carers

According to research, in 2018 there were 2.65 million carers in Australia, representing 10.8% of the national population.⁹⁵ 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.'⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ 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. 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 or consider ways you can support siblings by giving them the opportunity to do things away from their family. Siblings often carry greater responsibilities than those without a sibling with disability and are often relied on in many contexts as additional parents or carers. Provide opportunities for siblings to be with their peers without the responsibility of also being a carer.
- 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.

Seven Steps To Make Everyone Welcome

1.

Create an inclusion committee

Engage a team of people with disability & other people committed to inclusion to tackle matters of inclusion.

2.

Set the vision and communicate it to the parish

The Inclusion Committee & parish leadership should create a vision for accessibility for the parish. Communicate it to the parish & engage support.

3.

Assess the current situation

- Undertake a **congregational survey** to find out more about the people with disability already in your parish.
- Undertake an initial **accessibility appraisal** to identify some of the physical barriers in your parish.

4.

Identify solutions

Use the information gathered in step 3 to identify barriers for people with disability & begin to identify solutions for removing those barriers.

5.

Set priorities and goals

Determine both the short & long term priorities for reducing barriers in your parish and determine the next steps for reducing these barriers.

6.

Implement

Begin implementing your plans for change in dialogue with the people with disability in your parish.

7.

Review, evaluate and celebrate!

Review your progress, keep evaluating priorities and steps. And don't forget to celebrate the wins along the way!



CHAPTER 11

Seven steps a church can take to make everyone welcome

Very often, ministers and church leaders have a desire to work towards the inclusion of people with disability in their parishes, however, there is an uncertainty about how to begin this process. This chapter provides seven simple steps to help parishes move forward on their journey of becoming places of welcome and belonging for people with disability. Key to these steps are understanding the accessibility needs of people with disability already within the parish as well as developing a clear plan for identifying and removing the barriers that prevent people with disability from participating in your parish. Whether your parish has already been thinking about and working towards inclusion for many years or whether this is the first step in thinking intentionally about disability inclusion, this chapter will help provide some guidance for how you can continue your parish's journey towards inclusion.

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. It doesn't really matter what you call this committee – you might be able to come up with a much more innovative name for it – but the point is that you are creating a group who are committed to seeing the parish become more inclusive for people with disability. 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 – preferably a range of people with different kinds of disability - as well as people who are family members or carers of people with disability to be a key part of the committee. If you have people in your parish who are Occupational Therapists, Special Educators, Disability or Access Consultants, they can also make a worthwhile addition to your committee. You might also find people in the parish who are committed to inclusion even if their lives are not directly impacted by disability. 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. By contrast, if you have a smaller parish, your committee might also be small. In this case, it might be possible to meet with members of other inclusion committees in the diocese to share ideas and resources.

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 barriers 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

Set the vision and communicate it to the parish

A good way to make inclusion a priority in your parish is to document some statements that describe your vision or goals for inclusion. You might like to consider what it would be like to be known as an inclusive parish and how that might be different to how things are at present. A clear long-term vision for working towards greater inclusion and belonging for people with disability will help to keep you focused. A key element in the success of implementing this vision is in communicating the vision to the parish and engaging their support and participation.

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 3

Assess the current situation

One of the earliest tasks of the inclusion committee is 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 chronic pain? 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.

Remember to consider those with low vision, low literacy, or others who might need assistance with completing the form on their own. 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 make it clear to parishioners that they are not obligated to participate in the survey, and they can decline to answer any particular questions if they would like. Parishioners need to be assured there are no adverse consequences for anyone who chooses not to participate. You should store the information securely and destroy it once you no longer have a need to retain it.

Accessibility Appraisal

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).

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 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 4

Identify 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 of the venues. Perhaps those who cannot make it to physical church on a regular basis due to poor health or disability would like the parish to develop other ways for them to be connected with the church community. 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 reduce 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.

STEP 5

Setting priorities and goals for reducing 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

Implement

The next role of the inclusion committee would be to start implementing the plans for change in dialogue with the people with disability, family and carers of people with disability in your parish. 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, evaluate and celebrate!

The parish, led by the inclusion committee, should undertake an annual (or twice-yearly) review and evaluation of progress.

The 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 or she is not on the inclusion committee) to inform him of progress to date, successes to date, and the next steps moving forward.

It is also really important to acknowledge your progress on your journey and celebrate it!
Some ways to do this might be:

- Sharing your parish's progress on your social media and on your website;
- Having a morning tea or lunch with parishioners to share updates on the parish's progress;
- Host an event or service dedicated to disability that coincides with International Day of People with Disability (December 3) and invite a local speaker with disability to share about their experiences of living with disability and the difference accessibility makes to them.



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.⁹⁸

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.

We recognise that we are asking for people to share personal information with us. You are not under any obligation to participate in the survey, or if you do wish to participate, you are under no obligation to answer all the questions on the survey. There are no adverse consequences for anyone who chooses not to participate. You can answer the survey anonymously if you wish to.

The information gathered will only be used by church leadership and members of the parish's inclusion committee with the aim of improving the support and inclusion of people with disability in the parish. The information will be stored securely [*for example, in the church office*] and will be destroyed [*after a set period of time/at the conclusion of the survey*].

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;
- 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;

- Neurodivergence, for example, autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalcula, etc. While not all people with neurodivergence consider themselves as having a disability, for other people, their experience of being neurodivergent might be disabling or exist alongside other kinds of disability.

Your Name (optional): _____

5. Do you consider our church to be welcoming and inclusive of people with disability/chronic health issues/mental health issues?

Yes No Unsure

6. In what ways do you consider our church to be **welcoming** and **inclusive** of people with disability//chronic health issues/mental health issues?

7. In what areas do you think our church needs to **improve** in the way we welcome and include people with disability/chronic health issues/mental health issues?

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
- Neurodivergence (e.g., autism, ADHD, etc)
- A combination of different disabilities
- Other
- Unsure
- Rather not say

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

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?

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 church 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 use other mobility devices;
- Seating with armrests;
- Better lighting to read people's lips when they are speaking;
- Captioning on videos used in church, online and on social media;
- 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;
- Ability to join church services, church events and/or bible study groups online
- More ways to connect with church leadership/congregants for people who are unable to attend church in person regularly due to their disability/health issues;
- Other (please list below):

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 in church, welcoming team, Bible study groups, etc)?

Yes No

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

Leader/Server Participant

18. Are there any other ways you feel the church could help serve or support you or your family member with disability/chronic health issues/mental health challenges better?

19. Do you have any suggestions for new ministries or programs that might help to serve the members of our congregation with disability and/or their families better? (e.g., a WhatsApp group to connect people who are not able to physically get to church because of disability/health issues, a support group for carers,

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">• The street/footpath to the church grounds;• From the carpark and accessible parking spaces to main entry;• From the main church entry to other buildings on site (e.g., hall, toilets, etc)? <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>Ramps 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>Note: 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])		

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN SERVICES (e.g., VIDEOS, POWERPOINT, etc.)	Y/N	NOTES
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.)		

WEBSITE	Y/N	NOTES
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.’⁹⁹

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.’¹⁰⁰

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.’¹⁰¹

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).¹⁰²

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.¹⁰³

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;

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.

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.¹⁰⁴

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

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.¹⁰⁵

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.

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 pew Bibles available in 'large print' over 12-point font size.

Some large print Bibles available at Koorong include:

[NKJV Reference Bible Super Giant Print](#) \$58 17-point font,

[NIV Super Giant print Reference Bible](#) \$90 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.¹⁰⁶

APPENDIX 6

Collecting information from adults with intellectual disabilities and/or autism

Information form

Why are we asking these questions?

We would like to find out some more information about you so we can help you to become part of our church community.

We would like to know more about the things you like and don't like, the things you are good at and the things you find hard. All of this information helps us know how the church can look after you and make sure you feel you belong at our church.

Do I have to answer these questions?

It is your choice whether you want to answer these questions. If there are any questions you do not want to answer, you can leave them blank or tell the person who is helping you with the form that you don't want to answer that question.

We know that some of this information is personal so you do not have to tell us anything you don't want to.

You can stop answering questions at any time.

Who will see the answers on my form?

The information you share with us will only be seen by [the church leadership and members of our church's Inclusion Committee which is a group of people who are trying to make our church more welcoming for people with disability].

Do you need help 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 is it ok for the staff of the church to use it to email you? Yes No Unsure

If yes, write your email address here:

6. Do you have a phone number and is it ok for the staff of the church to use it to call or message you? Yes No Unsure

If yes, write your phone number here:

7. Do you have any family members who go to this church? Yes No Unsure

8. If yes, what are their names?

9. Do you have any friends who go to this church? Yes No Unsure

10. If yes, what are their names?

11. Do you have a disability?

Yes No Unsure Prefer not to say

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

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

14. Do you need any help at church?

Yes No Unsure

15. 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? _____

16. Are there any areas of church you would like to know more about or join in with?

Yes No

17. If yes, which ministry would you like to know more about or join in with?

18. 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?

19. 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

20. If you would like to be a volunteer at our church, you will need to complete a course called Safe Ministry Training. We can work with you to help to do the course if you would like help. Is this ok?

- Yes No Unsure

Medical Information

21. Are you on any medication that it is important for us to know about? Yes No Unsure

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

23. Do you have seizures?

Yes No Unsure

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

25. 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:

26. 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? _____

27. 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 young people with disability and/or neurodivergence

Parent Interview Checklist¹⁰⁷

The following points are a conversation guide. Conversations between the children's/youth minister/leader and the family 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 the child/young person including likes and dislikes, interests and abilities
- Description of any dislikes, fears or aversions
- Does the child/young person have any particular challenges, for example, behaviours of concern, repetitive behaviours, etc? What systems/methods work at home or at school to help manage these?
- Does the child/young person have any particular triggers? For example, the child might become upset if he/she hears loud, unexpected noises.
- Best ways to support the child/young person if they have been triggered/become distressed
- At what point would you like leaders to contact you if your child becomes distressed?
- Does your child/young person use any support items such as fidget toys? Would they benefit from the use of a low-stimulation quiet area if they became distressed?
- Medications and medical requirements that might be important for the church to know about

- Allergies/intolerances/aversions to foods or other allergies (e.g., bee stings)
- Foods enjoyed
- Level of self-care support needed – bathroom, eating, dressing
- Child’s level of communication skills: speech, reading, writing, sign language
- Equipment modifications and accommodations used at home/at school that we might be able to use at church (including physical environment considerations, advice about adapted equipment such as scissors, craft activities, games etc.)
- How you would like the disability explained to the other children/young people if at all?
- Requirements in a buddy that would be suitable for your child/young person?
- Items for a buddy bag?
- Would it be helpful for you to attend a couple of sessions to show leaders and volunteers some techniques for supporting your child/young person?

Ministry Inclusion Plan¹⁰⁸

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

Use the information gathered in the meeting with parents/family/carers of a child/young person with disability to create a Ministry Inclusion Plan.

Areas to consider:

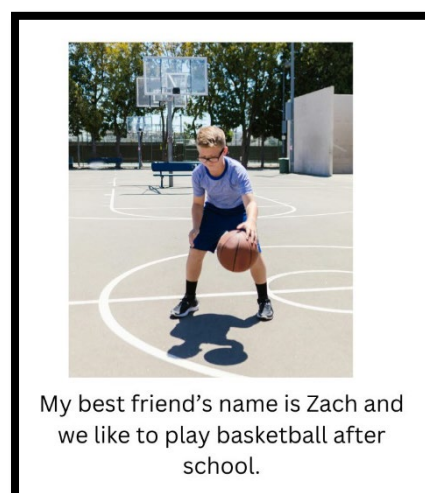
- How will the parish (and/or individual programs) provide support for the child/young person's physical and access needs? Are there any barriers in place currently preventing this child/young person from participating? What can be done to overcome these barriers?
- What training might the parish need to provide to leaders in order to support this child? Is it possible to run a leader's training session on understanding disability?
- How might the parish go about recruiting buddies?
- How can we help the children/young people in programs understand disability and difference in general and this child/young person's needs in particular?
- How will the leaders/volunteers be informed/training about responding to the needs of the child/young person?
- How will the parish notify parents if they are needed during the childrens/youth program?

'This is Me' Book¹⁰⁹

A 'This is Me' Book is designed to be a simply home-made booklet of photos and information about a child or young person with disability and their likes and interests to help generate conversation. This can be a great way for a child or young person disability to start a conversation with others, and vice versa. For children and young people who are non-speaking, who have limited verbal communication skills, or find social interactions challenging, the book also gives them an easy way into communication. This is best done with the support and assistance of the family of a child or young person with disability.

Information that could be included:

- The child or young person's name, age, parents, siblings, pets;
- Where the child or young 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 young person is learning at school;
- Simple ways to support the child or young person at church.



Resources for Childrens/Youth Ministry

Visual Timetables

A visual timetable outlines the sequence of events in a program. They can be used to serve a large group or individualised to suit the needs of individual members. Visual timetables help children and young people know what is happening and in what order as well as helping them understand what is expected of them at a particular time.

Visual timetables work well by putting them on velcro. Once each activity is finished, the item can be removed from the timetable and placed into a finished box or bag as a visual demonstration that the task is now complete.

You can make your own visuals (such as the samples below) or there are many examples available for free and for sale online.



Downloadable items for church-based visual timetables:

ASD in Church - <https://www.asdinchurch.com/downloadable-visual-supports>

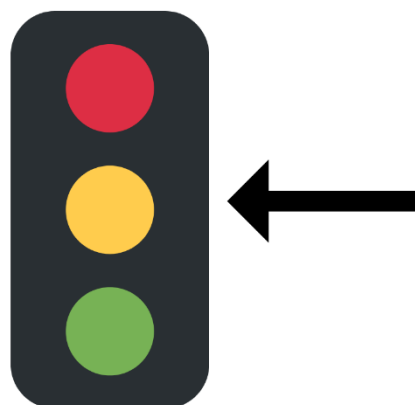
Simply the Gospel - <https://simplythegospel.com/product/visual-schedule/>

Special Needs Ministry Resources -

<https://www.specialneedsministryresources.com/shop/p/childrens-ministry-visual-schedule>

Talking Traffic Lights

Rather than having to remind children when it is listening time and when it is quiet talking time, a large set of traffic lights can be printed out with an arrow to point to the right colour – red = teacher talking only, yellow = quiet talking, green = it's ok to talk out loud.



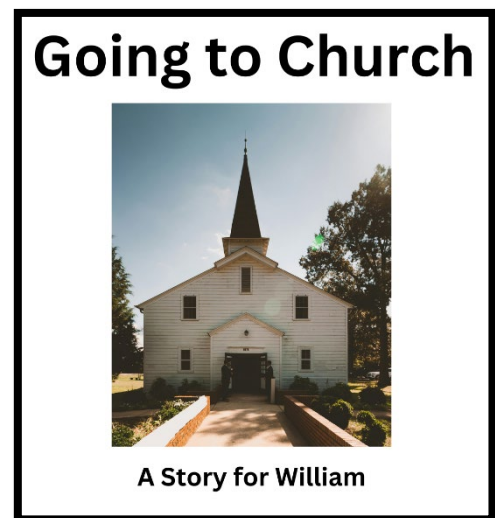
Visual Timer

Time is very difficult to measure for many people especially if you don't have a watch or a phone! Telling children and youth that you will be stopping an activity in 5 minutes is meaningless unless there is a clear way children are able to measure what that 5 minutes looks like. There are many ways you can visually represent the passing of time to help children and youth prepare for transitions in the program. For example, a visual timer app or website which can be projected on a screen a countdown timer. Online versions can be found by searching "visual timer" or you can purchase a device called a "Time Timer" which has a coloured section which gets smaller as the time passes making it clearer for children and youth see when that section of the program will be coming to an end (see picture right). "Time Timers" can be found online and in many education stores.



Social Stories

Social stories are stories that explain social settings and can be used for both children and adults to help build familiarity and reduce stress especially when attending something or somewhere new. There are many examples of "going to church" social stories available online. The best ones, however, use photos of the real people and places people will see when they come to your parish. It is helpful to make these downloadable so people can print them out to use in preparation for coming to church.



For a guide on how to write a social story, see this information sheet from the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center in the USA, ['How to write a social story.'](#)¹¹⁰

Many websites have free or relatively inexpensive templates for creating social stories for church. Some examples can be found below:

Simply the Gospel - <https://simplythegospel.com/product/going-to-church-social-story/>

Special Needs Ministry Resources - <https://www.specialneedsministryresources.com/shop/p/going-to-church-social-story>

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 breakout 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.'¹¹¹ 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.¹¹²

Lost in the Cave¹¹³

All of us have unique gifts and abilities that can benefit others. This activity 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
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

A helpful introduction to Disability

Ladau, E. *Demystifying Disability: What to Know, What to Say, and How to Be an Ally.* Emeryville: Ten Speed Press, 2021.

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.

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.

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. *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 (eds.). *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 Disability

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.

Autism, Neurodiversity, and the Church

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

Bowman Jr, D. *On the Spectrum: Autism, Faith, and the Gifts of Neurodiversity.* Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021.

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

Rapley, S. *Autistic Thinking in the Life of the Church.* London: SCM Press, 2021.

van Ommen, A.L. *Autism and Worship: A Liturgical Theology.* Waco: Baylor

University Press, 2023.

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.

Spirituality and Disability in Faith Communities (beyond the Christian context)

Christensen, S. *From Longing to Belonging: A Practical Guide to Including People with Disabilities and Mental Health Conditions in Your Faith Community.* Inclusion Innovations, 2018.

Thompkins, A.V. *Spirituality is for Every Body: 8 Accessible Ways to connect with the Divine when Living with Disability.* Carlsbad: Hay House Inc., 2024.

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.
<https://tucollaborative.org/faith-religion-spirituality/developing-welcoming-faith-communities/>

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/index.php/dsq/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://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.cob-net.org/church/freespring/docs/access/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/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

<https://www.the139collective.com.au/>

All Belong – Center for Inclusive Education

<https://allbelong.org/>

CBM – Luke 14

<https://www.cbm.org.au/luke14>

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 disability

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

Our Place Christian Communities

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

Joni and Friends

<https://joniandfriends.org/>

Key Ministry

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

Through the Roof

<https://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

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

<https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/61f2fd86f0ee5/content/pages/documents/20211006-doc-mission-ministry-welcoming-autism-church-guidelines-v01.pdf>

Blindness/Vision Impairment

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

<https://torchtrust.org/sight-loss-friendly-church/>

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

With Ministries

<https://withministries.org/>

Children’s, Youth, and Families Ministry

Engaging Disability

<https://engagingdisability.org/>

Mental Health & Ill-Health

The Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute

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

American Psychiatric Association.

“Mental Health: A Guide for Faith Leaders.”

https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/Mental_Health_Guide_Tool_Kit_2018.pdf

General Online Resources on Disability

ACT Government

This website includes lots of helpful information about accessible transport and inclusive activities, children and young people with disability, and more.

<https://www.act.gov.au/community/people-with-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

Australian Network on Disability

<https://australiandisabilitynetwork.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-%20persons-with-disabilities.html>

World Health Organization on Disability

https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Aspect

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

Amaze

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

Blindness/Vision Impairment

Blind Citizens Australia

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

Vision Australia

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

Deafness/Hard of Hearing

Deaf Connect

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

Deaf Australia

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

Resources for Learning Auslan (Australian Sign Language)

Deaf Connect

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

Auslan Signbank

<https://auslan.org.au/dictionary/>

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

Auslan Services

<https://auslanservices.com/>

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

<https://access.asn.au/>

Free Online Captioning Services

AI Media

<https://www.ai-media.tv/knowledge-hub/insights/free-captioning-tools/>

Amara

<https://amara.org/>

Adobe

<https://www.adobe.com/express/feature/video/add-caption>

Resources for Installation of Hearing Loops

Hearing Loop Australia

<https://hearingloop.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 from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications>

Resources on Document Accessibility

PowerPoint Slides

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

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-au/office/make-your-powerpoint-presentations->

[accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-6f7772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25](https://support.microsoft.com/en-au/office/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d)

Word documents

Microsoft – “Make Your Word Documents Accessible to People with Disabilities”

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-au/office/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>

Apple Mac Documents and Accessibility

Apple “Create accessible documents, spreadsheet, or presentations with Pages, Numbers, or Keynote”

<https://support.apple.com/en-au/102031>

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

<https://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/>

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- ¹ Australian Disability Network. "Disability Statistics." 2020.
<https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/resources/disability-statistics/>
- 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.
- 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
- ⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*, 2021, 11
(<https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021-11/1786-australias-disability.pdf>).
- ⁶ 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/>
- ⁷ Australian Disability Network, "Disability Statistics."
<https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/resources/disability-statistics/>
- ⁸ Australian Disability Network, "What is disability?"
[https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/resources/disability-statistics/what-is-disability#:~:text=Disability%20Discrimination%20Act%20\(DDA\)%20definition&text=Physical%20disability%3A%20Impacts%20mobility%20or,ability%20to%20hear%20or%20see](https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/resources/disability-statistics/what-is-disability#:~:text=Disability%20Discrimination%20Act%20(DDA)%20definition&text=Physical%20disability%3A%20Impacts%20mobility%20or,ability%20to%20hear%20or%20see)
- ⁹ World Health Organization "Disability" https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1
- ¹⁰ Sev Ozdowski, "Disability Discrimination Developments." Australian Human Rights Commission, 2004. <https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/speeches/disability-discrimination-developments>
- 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
- ¹² The following indicators have been developed from 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.
- 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/sites/default/files/documents/09_2022/shut-out-standard-mod.pdf
- 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."
<https://accessiblecampus.ca/tools-resources/educators-tool-kit/understanding-barriers-to-accessibility-an-educators-perspective/>
- 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.
- 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
- ²³ People with Disability Australia, "What Do I Say? 7.
- ²⁴ People with Disability Australia, "What Do I Say?" 17-21.
- ²⁵ Some of this data is reported in the following article: A. Pennington, "Reading Between the Lines: Gen Z Really Loves Closed Captions," NAB Amplify, Feb 8, 2024.
<https://amplify.nabshow.com/articles/connect-genz->

[captions/#:~:text=Closed%20captions%20aren't%20just.olds%20prefer%20to%20use%20subtitles.](#)

²⁶ Access Economics, *Listen! Hear! The Economic Impact and Cost of Hearing Loss in Australia: A Report* (East Melbourne: Vicdeaf 2006), 5.

²⁷ Access Economics, "Listen! Hear!"

²⁸ Deaf Australia "Terminology Policy" as cited in "Getting it Right: Roadmap to 2025," 3.

<https://deafaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/DA-Roadmap-2025.pdf>

²⁹ 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>.

³⁰ AIHW, "Eye health," Canberra: AIHW, 2019. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/eye-health/eye-health>.

³¹ Access Economics, "Clear Focus: The Economic Impact and Cost of Vision Loss in Australia in 2009" (Canberra: Access Economics P/L, 2010).

³² 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>.

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