



A WELCOMING CHURCH

Loving.Living.Learning.

A Resource Pack for Churches

A Collaboration between Church of Ireland Youth Department,
United Dioceses of Dublin & Glendalough and the Diocese of Leeds



This pack is designed to help you as a church think through some of the issues and challenges involved in enabling church to be more accessible.

We recognise that including disabled people in the life of the church is a Biblical mandate.

We acknowledge that this is an area which the church needs to address proactively.

Disabled people should be able to access our churches, not just as members of the congregation, but as people who may also contribute to leadership.

We would all agree that we would want to fully include disabled people in the life of the Church, and now we are required by law to ensure that we do not discriminate against disabled people. The Equality Act applies to churches, as “service providers”, and as voluntary organisations, and they are required to comply with this legislation.

This legislation gives us a very broad definition of the term disability: “a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on an individual’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

There are around 10 million disabled people in the UK and around 600,000 in Ireland.

Wheelchair-users are about 7.5% of all “disabled” people.

95% of people will experience a disabling condition at some time in their lives.

There are many “hidden” disabilities: for example, dyslexia, epilepsy, arthritis and other

conditions which cause significant levels of pain, diabetes, fibromyalgia, endometriosis, mental health problems, autism spectrum conditions.

“Disabled People” are all different, all individual, and even people with the same impairment have differing needs and experiences.

The Equality Act is anticipatory – it is not sufficient to wait until someone with a particular need turns up in church – we should be thinking how our welcome, worship, teaching and other activities can include everyone.

The Equality Act requires us to make “reasonable adjustments” to features which could be barriers to disabled people. “Reasonable” is not defined in law, but it is recognised, for example, that a small church with a small congregation may well be less able to provide certain facilities than a large church or cathedral with more resources.

However, there is much that can be done at little or no cost to improve our welcome and accessibility for disabled people.

Listed buildings or those of special historic interest are not exempt from the Equality Act.

There are a great many resources available to guide us in this process – key ones are listed in section 8 of this guide, and Access Audits are also available.

Few churches will be able to do all that this guide suggests. But we can all improve on what we do and right attitudes matter most.

There is no one size fits all, perfect church, but there are small things we can all do to ensure that all who come feel welcome.

One of the keys is communication, if you have someone in your church with particular need, talk to them. It sounds obvious but doesn't always happen.

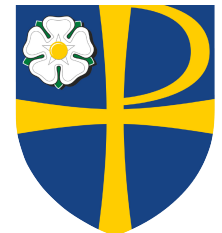
The posters are not exhaustive but hopefully will prompt thoughts and discussion.

You could display these in your church or hall, or use them as an audit for your PCC/vestry meeting to try and implement them in your church. If you have people in your congregations with some of these specific disabilities, make those ones a priority.

This resource was made by disabled people, and in consultation with disabled people. It was born out of discussions at Disability Awareness Training between children and youth officers who have a passion for disability inclusion within the Church.

With the best will in the world, we are only human, we sometimes get things wrong, and we are all learning together

If you'd like to raise an issue, suggest an alteration or addition, or flag up something, please email awelcomingchurch@gmail.com and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.



Do....

Use images and diagrams to support text.

Align text to the left and keep consistent layout.

Consider producing materials in other formats (for example audio or video).

Keep content short clear and simple.

Use dyslexia-friendly fonts where possible (e.g. Lexie Readable, Dyslexie, Comic Sans).

Print material on light coloured paper.

Don't....

Use large blocks of heavy text.

Underline words, use italics or write in capitals (use bold instead).

Force users to remember things from previous pages - give reminders and prompts.

Put too much information in one place.

Use text over a background image - keep the background plain.



for those who are

Hearing Impaired and/or D/deaf

Do....

Speak clearly, not overly loudly, to hearing impaired people.

Ensure your face and mouth can be clearly seen when speaking.

Look at hearing impaired people directly and speak normally.

Provide ISL/BSL interpretation if asked for it.

Use closed captioning and subtitles for videos/social media.

Don't....

Shout or exaggerate speech.

Speak when in the dark or shadows.

Assume all hearing impaired people use sign language or can lipread.

Discard the use of microphones if you think people can hear you - microphones are often needed for the hearing loop to work properly.



for those who are

Visually Impaired /Blind

Do....

Stand in good light for partially sighted people.

Show a blind person to a seat & introduce them to neighbours.

Offer visually impaired people large print / braille literature and signs.

Make sure that the floor / ground is as smooth as possible & there are no obstacles in the way.

Ensure that any steps or stairs have been marked with high-vis paint or tape so they can be clearly seen.

Don't....

Push a visually impaired person - let them take your arm.

Rely on people being able to read to know information

Post pictures without image descriptions

Link to pages on website by saying "click here" - instead make the hyperlink the name of the page



for those with

Autism, Neurodiversity, & Cognitive Disorders

Do....

Keep services and meetings as short as possible.

Create a relaxed environment where people can make noise and move around if needed.

Reduce any intense sensory triggers
e.g. fluorescent lights, strong smells, loud noises.

Create a quiet space for people who might get overwhelmed.

Make it clear when people should sit and stand etc - don't expect everyone to know automatically.

Use plain, not childish language with people with learning difficulties.

Don't....

Rely too much on words and text - use images as well.

Force anyone to handshake, hug, or touch.

Be offended if people don't make eye contact.

Don't hurry a speech-impaired person, be relaxed and positive.

Don't finish people's sentences



for those who are **Wheelchair Users**
and/or have **Mobility Difficulties**

Do....

Reserve your own accessible parking bays for disability holders.

Sit down to converse at eye level with someone in a wheelchair.

Reserve seats with arm rests by the entrance for people who can't walk far.

If people block a wheelchair user's view, politely ask them to sit down.

Make sure the floor is as smooth as possible and there is plenty of room to get a wheelchair through.

Don't....

Don't lean on a wheelchair or move it unless the user asks you.

Rush someone with mobility problems....

Assume everyone can stand during songs/readings.

Leave heavy doors unattended if a wheelchair/crutch/cane user needs to get through.



for those with

Anxiety and Mental Illnesses

Do....

Make sure the main entrance, exit, and toilets are signposted so that people don't have to ask where they are.

Create an environment where people feel comfortable to get up and move around if they need to.

Keep sensory input to a minimum e.g. loud noises, bright lights.

Make adjustments if people ask for them (e.g. turning music down).

Be aware of the signs of a panic attack and strategies that could help.

Don't....

Make people feel embarrassed for any behaviour that seems abnormal to you.

Call attention to someone who appears to be in distress.

Call on people without knowing they would be comfortable.

Be offended if someone leaves suddenly or refuses help.



for those with

Dementia

Do....

Have signage on both sides of doors (e.g. a sign on the inside of the bathroom saying 'this way to the main church building').

Use signs with images as well as text.

Keep sensory triggers to a minimum (e.g. bright lights, loud noises, strong smells).

Provide lighting that minimises big shadows.

Arrange transport for a person with dementia if necessary.

Encourage the befriending of a person with dementia and a buddy system if necessary.

Don't....

Use dark coloured door mats if you have a light coloured floor (they can seem like a hole in the floor to someone with dementia).

Don't embarrass people if they make a mistake, or say something that sounds silly.

Don't become impatient with a person if they repeat something more than once.



for those with

Asthma and Allergies

Do....

Remove triggers, especially airborne triggers (e.g. flowers, incense, nuts, gluten) if asked.

Make it clear if there are any allergens in food/drinks you are providing.

Provide allergen-free alternatives if possible, and keep them separate.

Take people's allergies seriously.

Make sure your first aider knows how to use an epi-pen.

Know the signs of an asthma attack/allergic reaction, how to help, and when to call emergency services.

Don't....

Dismiss someone's allergies as "not serious".

Prioritise traditions over someone's health and accessibility.

Demand someone participates in a physical task.



for those with

Chronic Pain/ Chronic Illness

Do....

Provide plenty of seating, especially seating with cushions/padding.

Make it clear that people can remain seated or move around if they need to.

Make sure your building is warm but not too hot (around 22°C is optimal).

Don't....

Expect everyone to be able to do what seems to you a simple task.

Dismiss people's experiences because their condition is invisible.

Force people to move around more than necessary.

A Welcoming Church for All

General Tips on What to Do

Speak directly to the person - don't use a go-between.

Offer to help, but don't be offended by refusal, and don't help without asking.

Some people with **hidden disabilities** may need assistance.

Use **positive terms** e.g. 'disabled people' not 'the disabled'.

Ensure people know where the **toilets** are and don't have to ask.

Give **eye contact**, whether or not returned, but don't stare.

Be patient – some people take longer to respond than others.

Enable disabled people to sit **where and with whom** they wish.

Give **help discreetly**.

Don't make the person feel conspicuous.

Introduce yourself clearly by name when meeting someone new.

Talk to your DAC (Diocesan Advisory Committee) about changes you want to make to the building.

Only pray for healing if you are asked - some people don't want that kind of prayer

