



360 Accessibility Audit

Contents

Introduction	1
Advice and guidance	2
Website accessibility statement	2
The law.....	3
Theology.....	4
Getting started.....	5
The 360 Accessibility Audit	8

Introduction

1. Introduction

Accessibility is not only about steps and ramps and getting into the building. These things are important, but there is far more to making your church a place and experience where disabled people are able to fully belong and take a full part in the life and worship of the church. This means changing not just the physical building but thinking about the environment people experience, the attitudes they encounter, the language you use, the theology you expound, the liturgy you share, the worship you invite people into, and how disabled people can change the nature of church for all those who attend. Too often inclusion is only skin deep. It is approached as a matter of making space for disabled people to be present in the building but not really creating opportunities to belong to the community. You belong to a community when you find and can share friendship. You belong to a community when you are missed when you are not there. And you belong to a community when your presence, your personality, your embodiment, your spirituality make a difference to the whole community and you are able to fully participate and be appreciated in all aspects of community life.

A 360 accessibility audit is a process of deep reflection about your church and how diversity is recognised and appreciated. It is not a 30 minute task, achieved with a

quick walk around the building, but it is an ongoing process that you will never complete, but within which you will always get better.

Jesus told the parable of 'The Great Feast' (Luke 14:16-24) in which the poor, the blind, the lame and many other disabled and marginalised people are invited into the kingdom banquet. Not to be healed or changed, but to bring their unique experiences and perspectives into the kingdom. Your 360 accessibility audit is a step on the journey towards that banquet for you and all those that it will bring through your doors.

Advice and guidance

2. Advice and guidance

See the resources section for sources of advice and guidance that will help you through this process and visit the Diocese of London Disability Ministry webpage for a directory of links to a wide range of information and advice. Before you go any further, visit the Church of England, Advice and guidance for church buildings, accessibility page, where you can download the guide 'Equal Access to Church buildings.'

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/accessibility>.

This will introduce you to the basic principles of accessibility and lay the foundations needed to help you understand the breadth of what this means in practice.

In London the Diocesan Disability Ministry Enabler is available to support you through the process. Other dioceses may have a Disability Adviser or Inclusion Officer who can help. Your DAC will also offer useful advice.

Website accessibility statement

3. Website accessibility statement

All churches should have some information about accessibility on their website. This should include pictures and descriptions of:

- How to find your building – where it is, public transport etc
- Parking and any reserved disabled parking
- Physical access to the building
- Accessibility once inside
- Facilities, including toilets
- Seating
- Wheelchair space
- Space for assistance dogs

- Sensory – hearing loop, large print.

There should also be pictures of the worship space and a description of what happens before, during and after a service for those who need to process these before attending.

Your building will not be perfect, neither will the welcome and belonging you offer to disabled people. Your accessibility statement needs to be honest though. If physical access is challenging, it is far better that people know this and make an informed decision as to whether to try to attend your church or not.

The law

4. The law

The Equality Act 2010 places a legal duty on all to make provision for people with disabilities to access buildings, activities and services and to be able to play a full part in wider society. Churches are deemed to be voluntary sector organisations and providers of 'services.' Some churches will also be employers and the act has many provisions that employers must comply with.

The key things you need to know are:

4.1 The definition of disability.

This is much wider than you might imagine and includes not just physical and sensory disabilities but mental health issues and learning disabilities, as well as "hidden" disabilities such as epilepsy, diabetes, arthritis, autism, and various conditions which may cause chronic pain.

Disability is:

"a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities."

So, you will already have disabled people amongst your congregation and those who access your building, whether you are aware of them or not.

4.2 Involvement

The legislation emphasises the need to involve disabled people in consultation about adaptations and improvements to buildings and services. This should include people from the wider community as well as your congregation. The disabled people in your midst are the experts that you need to listen to.

4.3 Reasonable adjustments

The law requires you to do 'all things reasonable' to remove barriers by adapting the physical environment and/or providing services in different and accessible ways. 'Reasonable' is not defined in the act but it is acknowledged that in different circumstances different churches will be able to do more or less depending on the challenges of historically significant buildings and the resourcing available.

Accessibility must be at the heart of any proposed building or modernisation/refurbishment. You should not be planning to spend significant sums on a new sound and projection system while you do not have step free access or an accessible toilet.

4.4 Think and plan ahead

The legislation also requires us to think ahead about future needs and the needs of those who might not yet attend services or events. Don't just think of your current congregation, but plan for the full variety of disabilities to be represented in the future.

4.5 Independence

The principle that underpins the act is that of independence. Disabled people should be able to access and participate independently wherever possible even when there are people who are willing to offer assistance. This can be a particular challenge for a church where there are people not just willing but keen to help, seeing this as part of their Christian vocation and ministry.

Theology

5. Theology

Welcome, inclusion and belonging are kingdom imperatives. Jesus commanded us to 'love our neighbour as ourselves' (Matthew 22:39) and 'our neighbour' includes disabled people. St Paul teaches that the church is a body in which the 'less honoured' parts should be given special honour (1 Corinthians 12:22-25). (Or in other words, those who are dishonoured and marginalised by society should be welcomed and valued as essential and vital to the church community. Jesus also

told the parable of 'The great feast' (Luke 14:16-24) in which the disabled and poor of the land are invited into the kingdom banquet as they are, not cured or changed, but with their disabilities. Jesus in his ministry walked the margins of society and brought many disabled people from the margins to the centre of the kingdom. All of these passages, and many others, place upon the church a calling to be open to disabled people and to allow their perspectives, experiences and stories to change what the church is. Jesus rose from death still bearing the scars of crucifixion (John 20:27). In order for the church to be a fuller representation of the Body of Christ, we need the wounded bodies of disabled people to be amongst us as equal partners at the kingdom feast. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon 'all flesh' (Acts 2) which included (and still includes) the bodies and minds of people with all forms of disability. Disabled people are not marginal to the kingdom but in the centre. It is only when disabled people are at the centre of the church that God's kingdom will come amongst us.

Getting started

6. Getting started

6.1 Lay the foundations

As a church leader and in your leadership or ministry team, you will need to begin by taking time to read and reflect on disability issues. There are many books that would be useful but these will help lay the groundwork for the 360 Accessibility Audit experience.

Shorter books that are a good introduction to disability theology:

John Hull et al, *Disability - The Inclusive Church Resource*, Darton, Longman and Todd 2013.

Roy McCloughry and Wayne Morris, *Making a world of difference*, Christian reflections on disability, SPCK 2002.

Longer books that offer deeper and more challenging perspectives:

Thomas Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion - A theology of disability and hospitality*,

Brazos Press 2008,

John Swinton, *Becoming Friends of Time - Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship*, SCM Press 2017

There are many other books and online articles you could read. Visit the Diocese of London Disability Ministry webpage for a longer list of resources and links to many organisations that can give specialist advice and support.

6.2 Make it a theological issue.

Preach about disability and inclusion or ask someone to visit your church to do this. John Beauchamp, the Diocesan Disability Ministry Enabler, is available to do this in London. (john.beauchamp@london.anglican.org) Maybe there is a disabled person in your congregation who could speak from their personal experience.

Visit the Disability Ministry page of the diocesan website to find ideas for sermons and notes to help you.

You can get your home groups or any other small groups you have to look at disability issues. Visit the London Diocese Disability Ministry webpage for a short series of sessions you could use.

6.3 Form a Disability Working Group.

The first step in considering how accessible your building, worship, events and community are is to form a disability working group made up of those with a variety of lived experience of disability. Your disability working group should be the driving force behind any moves to improve accessibility, inclusion and belonging for disabled people. They are your source of wisdom and advice and their voices must be heard throughout any process or planning to increase accessibility. Listen to their stories and be humble in the face of the rejection and marginalisation they will tell you about.

6.4 Put it on your PCC agenda.

Talk about a 360 Accessibility Audit with your PCC and get their involvement and support. Get your Disability Working Group to lead the conversation. In London, you could invite the Diocesan Disability Ministry Enabler to attend a meeting, or invite your own Diocesan Disability Advisor if you are not in London. Give this sufficient time though and don't cram it into an already overcrowded agenda.

6.5 Appoint a 'disability champion'

Work with the Disability Working Group and your PCC to recruit a 'disability champion' for your church. This is someone who will focus on accessibility and inclusion and hold the brief to support the DWG, raise disability issues at PCC and be the named person that the congregation can talk to about accessibility and inclusion. See the Diocesan Disability Ministry webpage for a model role description.

6.6 Prepare and adopt a 'disability statement'

This should outline your commitment to improving accessibility, inclusion and belonging for disabled people and should be shared with the wider church. This should be done by the disability working group and PCC together. See the Diocesan Disability Ministry webpage for a sample disability statement.

6.7 Consult those who use your building.

Talk to your hirers and those who attend their events. If you can, invite one or two disabled users/clients onto your disability working group. Find others in the local community with a range of disabilities who can advise from their lived experience. The person who knows best if an accessible toilet is really wheelchair accessible or if your entrance and access around the building is really 'step free' is a person who uses a wheelchair. Those who know if your books, leaflets and projections are easy to see or if your lighting is adequate are those who experience a degree of sight loss.

Those who know if your hearing loop works or if lip reading is possible in your building are people with hearing aids and hearing loss. Those who know if the environment you invite people into for worship offers suitable welcome to people who are autistic or have sensory processing issues are those who live with these conditions every day. Those who know if you are offering welcome, involvement and belonging to disabled people are those who sit in your congregation but whose voices you do not usually hear.

6.8 Make this a whole church issue

A 360 Accessibility Audit is all about culture change and for this to take place, everyone needs to be involved. It needs theological foundations, spiritual reflection, prayerful support and a willingness for your whole church to be open to being challenged and changed. It will also require repentance. The repentance of attitudes, practices and prejudices that have excluded and marginalised some of God's children from making their full, God given contribution to the church.

6.9 'Your kingdom come.'

As you lay the foundations for a 360 accessibility audit, many aspects of the life of your church that are not accessible or welcoming will start to become apparent. It is at that moment that you need to begin to audit your buildings, worship and activities. When you and your community are fully aware of the kingdom imperative of inclusion of all of God's children in an experience of mutual fellowship, respect and value, then your eyes will be opened to all that needs to change to bring the kingdom banquet to life amongst you.

6.10 Get stuck into your audit.

The 360 Accessibility Audit tool is an extensive look at accessibility, inclusion and belonging across all areas of your church and its worship and ministry. Your Disability Working Group and PCC will need to consider how best to use the tool and who is best placed to look at the different sections. It is important to remember that this will be a process not a one off event. Take your time to do this properly, but at

the same time set some goals and targets for reporting the findings to the PCC and church. Don't let this be squeezed out by other priorities of which there will always be many. The action plan that emerges from the audit will be multi-layered with some targets you can achieve quickly and easily, others that will be medium term goals and still others that will be aspirations for some future date. The audit should result in positive action but it should also result in disability becoming a constant consideration in all that you do. Your disability working group should continue to exist beyond the audit and should be given a brief to work with your Disability Champion and continue to highlight disability issues into the future.

The 360 Accessibility Audit

7. The 360 Accessibility Audit

The 360 accessibility audit helps you think through aspects of your building, services, language, theology, environment, ethos, activities, communications and leadership from the perspective of accessibility, belonging and participation for people who experience a wide range of disabilities. These include physical disabilities, sensory impairments, cognitive and intellectual disabilities, sensory processing disabilities and all conditions that in some way inhibit a person's full participation in the life and worship of the people of God.

The 360 accessibility audit will help you think through the experience a disabled person has when they come to your church to attend worship and take part in the social gathering that is part of being a faith community. The audit is designed to help you enter into the experience and perspective of people with a range of disabilities, from the moment they attempt to enter your building, through the physical, sensory, social and spiritual environments that they will encounter. However, the only way you can really know what disabled people experience is to talk to those who attend already, or to invite people with a range of disabilities to come to your church and then allow them to tell you how you might improve what you do.

Before you start this audit process, you should form a Disability Working Group (or you might call it an 'Accessibility and inclusion Group' or in fact whatever you like). This is the group that will enable this process to be disability led, which is the only way that it will really be effective. The disability rights strap line is: 'Nothing about us without us,' and this is as relevant and important in your church as it is in wider society.

The audit has 19 sections. Different people in your church will be best placed to complete different sections, but don't just turn the sections about buildings to your

buildings team or the sections about language and worship to your worship team. The audit needs to be as 'experiential' as it is practical, so get people from your disability working group, your buildings team and your worship team and others to work together to complete the audit.

The sections are:

Section 1 – General

Have you laid the foundations for the 360 Accessibility Audit?

Section 2 – Getting in the building

Looking at your external approach routes and entrance doors.

Section 3 - Once inside

Thinking about the initial environment disabled people experience and how welcoming and inclusive this is.

Section 4 - Toilets

Looking at your toilet facilities and any accessible provision you have.

Section 5 - Emergency exit routes.

Are your emergency exit routes and arrangements sufficient for disabled people?

Section 6 - Settling in your worship space

Looking at the welcome and environment that disabled people find in your Church.

Section 7 - Before the service

How settling or unsettling is the 15 minutes before a service begins?

Section 8 - During the service

How are you inviting and enabling disabled people to participate in worship?

Section 9 - After the service

How do disabled people join in the social gathering after a service?

Section 10 - Use of language

What is your use of language in liturgy, hymns/songs, sermons and communications saying to disabled people?

Section 11 – Leadership and participation

Are disabled people in leadership in your church and are they participating in worship and service?

Section 12 – Theology and Spirituality

How inclusive and empowering is your theology and spirituality?

Section 13 - Books leaflets and screens

How accessible are your communications and video displays?

Section 14- Dementia

This is something that needs particular thought as some of your older members begin to experience dementia. How do you keep them included and valued?

Section 15 - Children and young people with additional needs.

Children with additional needs and their families need to be welcomed and valued within your church. How can you make sure this happens?

Section 16 – The parish community

What do you know of disability in your parish or community? Can you support any disability support projects and services and can your church become a valued partner in supporting disabled people in the community?

Section 17 - Outside noticeboards

What do your noticeboards say to disabled people who might be wanting to know if they would be welcome in your church?

Section 18 - Your website

Is your website accessible and does it have useful information for disabled people?

Section 19 - Live streaming

Many disabled people have found the new trend for live streaming very valuable as getting out to church can be a struggle. Can you make your live streams more accessible and useful for disabled people?

The questions are designed to invite you to think, reflect and listen to what others say. They do not tell you what to do but hopefully will guide you to solutions and action appropriate to your situation. Your 360 Accessibility Audit should result in an action plan. See the 'quick wins' sheet for ideas of things you might be able to do immediately with little or no cost. Your disability working group and disability champion should be given responsibility for regularly reviewing the action plan and the progress made towards achieving its goals and this should be a regular feature on your PCC agenda.