The Parish of St James

Disability statement

Adopted by the PCC on ………………………………

At St James we seek to be a church for all. We want our services and activities to be open and accessible to disabled people and we want disabled people to play a full part in the community of faith.

We acknowledge that we have not been welcoming and open to the participation and ministries of disabled people and seek to change the exclusionary culture and attitudes that exist in the church. We recognise that full participation and belonging is about far more than buildings and physical access and will only be achieved through a process of cultural change and facing our corporate and personal fears and prejudice.

We recognise the Gospel imperative to bring the devalued and marginalised of society into the centre of God's kingdom, allowing the unique gifts and perspectives that disabled people bring to shape and inform who we are as the people of God.

As we worship the wounded yet risen Christ and hear the revelation of St Paul that the dishonoured in society should be given special honour in the church, we recognise that without disabled people amongst us we are a weakened and incomplete representation of the Body of Christ.

We recognise that there are many forms of disability, hidden and visible. We seek to remove barriers to full participation and belonging and release the rich diversity of gifts and talents that disabled people bring to the worship and service of God.

We want to be a church that holds social justice at its heart. We commit ourselves to pray for and be a place of liberation for the marginalised and disregarded in our society, particularly disabled people and their families and carers.

To do this, we will:

a) Form a Disability Working Group (DWG) with people who have lived experience of disability to highlight issues and advise on solutions.

b) Appoint a 'disability champion' who will support the Disability Working Group, raise disability and access issues at PCC and be named as the person people can talk to about access and inclusion.

c) Reflect on theological issues of disability and embodiment and what it means to be made in the 'image of God.'

d) Carry out a 360 accessibility audit and draw up an action plan of immediate, medium-term and long-term changes we will make to our buildings, worship, communications, and across every aspect of the life of our church.

e) Explore as a whole church how we can be a place of welcome, participation and belonging in which disabled and non-disabled people are equal partners as disciples of Jesus Christ.

f) Pray for social justice and the liberation of all who are marginalised and disregarded.

g) Explore how we can partner with local disability support groups and services.

h) Prioritise accessibility issues in all plans for our building and other initiatives and developments and ensure that disabled people take leading roles in developing plans and projects.

i) Consider our use of language in communications, liturgy and worship and use the language of disability in positive and sensitive ways.

j) Include an access area on our website giving useful information for disabled people looking for a church to attend.

k) Ensure that disabled people are members of the PCC and its sub-groups/committees.

l) Ensure that disabled people are able to access small groups, Bible studies, nurture/discipleship courses etc and that group leaders undertake disability awareness training and are skilled in enabling participation and involvement.

m) Encourage disabled people into leadership in our church, identifying and supporting vocation and training for all people regardless of disability or neurodivergence.

n) Ensure that disabled people are visible and play a full part in our corporate worship, making what changes are necessary to make this possible.

Note

The words 'disability' and 'disabled' are used to refer to all people who experience barriers to full belonging and participation in society due to their embodiment. This can be due to physical or sensory impairment, learning disabilities, mental health challenges, chronic illness, neurodivergence and more. Although many people may not think of themselves as 'disabled,' the barriers they experience restrict their ability to fully participate in society and so 'disable' them. In line with the Social Model of disability, disability is not centred in a person's body or mind but is an experience that some people have as they attempt to live and operate in a society that favours certain body-mind types and disadvantages others.