

# **VALUING DIFFERENCE**

*People with disabilities in the life and mission of the Church 1998*

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## **FOREWORD**

The dignity of the human person is at the heart of Catholic teaching. Each and every person is to be valued as God's creation. The Church's vision is firmly rooted in the example of Jesus, who turned no-one away, but made himself available to all. This document, *Valuing Difference*, puts forward a vision for enabling people with disabilities to participate fully in the life and mission of the Church.

The part that people with disabilities play within the Church is not one that we assign to them, nor one that they assume for themselves. Rather, it is a response to the calling given to Christ to them in baptism.

*Valuing Difference* is a pastoral document which invites us to reflect on our present situation and to take action where that is needed. It provides practical advice for promoting access and inclusion in all our church activities. I hope it will be used widely and wisely to build up the Body of Christ through the participation of all its members.

+ Basil Hume

**Archbishop of Westminster**

*President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales*

## **A VISION FOR VALUING DIFFERENCE**

Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ's faithful. Because of their equality they all contribute, each according to his/her own condition and office, to the building up of the body of Christ.  
(Code of Canon Law, n.208)

Each of us is created in God's image. God loves us as we are, with our own particular gifts and limitations, strengths and weaknesses. Christ's liberating message of love and hope celebrates difference because He values each and every person as unique and equal.

Christ teaches us that, through knowing and loving Him, each of us can grow in the knowledge and love of God. All of us are called to express God's love in our daily life, valuing the difference and equal dignity of every person. Each of us has a unique vocation and mission. The rich diversity of the body of Christ includes those who live with disabilities.

Our task, as members of the Church, is to translate Christ's message of inclusion into practical action, so that the contribution of each member is respected and nurtured. This is our shared mission. For just as each of us receives the gift of the Holy Spirit through baptism, so we can grow as a Church through the gifts each of us brings to the body of Christ. Active participation needs therefore to be accessible to all.

Progress has been made. We are becoming better at including all our members in Church life but there is still a lot to do. For people with disabilities to help build up the body of Christ, they must be able to participate fully, as the Church's teaching envisages.

Valuing Difference outlines both a vision and a method by which to achieve that goal. At its heart is the central role which people with disabilities should play in the Church's continuing development. Much can be learnt from those with whose life experiences Christ identifies (in the present) so closely.

As we prepare for the third millennium, we should embrace the opportunity which disability gives each and every one of us right now. Christ values the difference in each of us. Ultimately, in valuing difference, we value Him.

## **PART 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **The purpose of this report**

In 1981, the International Year of Disabled People, the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales issued a statement about people with disabilities called *All People Together*. The statement encouraged greater recognition of the contribution that people with disabilities make to the life of the Catholic Church and spoke of the need to value the capacities and gifts of all its members.

In the intervening seventeen years, much progress has been made in recognising the contribution of people with disabilities. One important change is that increasingly people with disabilities are themselves indicating the changes necessary for greater participation. However, more remains to be done to include people with disabilities as active participants in all aspects of the Church's life and ministry. In recognition of this, *Valuing Difference* aims to build upon the 1981 statement in four ways:

- by examining what is meant by a stronger, more inclusive Church
- by exploring more extensively what is required to make it a reality, so that people with disabilities are enabled to participate fully in all aspects of its life
- by highlighting what people with disabilities themselves can do to help the Church become more inclusive
- by offering examples and resources to assist people both with and without disabilities in the process of change and development

As well as *All People Together*, the Bishops' Conference has, from time to time, issued other documents about particular concerns relating to people with disabilities. In 1989, for example, the Bishops' Conference Social Welfare Committee published a report on *Christian Marriage and Sexual Relationships of Disabled People*, which is currently under revision. This report draws from that document, as well as from other sources.

### **The Context: Changing attitudes in a changing society**

There are approximately 6.5 million people with disabilities in the United Kingdom, almost 10% of the population. The World Health Organisation gives the figures for the United Kingdom as 1 in 10 children and 1 in 7 adults, whilst the Royal National Institute for the Deaf claims that 1 person in 7 is deaf or suffers some form of hearing loss. Additionally, there are at least 500,000 with dementia, many (but not all of them) elderly. In the past, many people with disabilities were not visible or active in society, but this is changing as more people become aware of their existence and their determination and right to be involved in today's world.

Society has been challenged to recognise the social, cultural and civic rights of people with disabilities as equal members of society, and to progressively remove barriers to the exercising of these rights. This has been the result of campaigning action by pressure groups and individuals, as well as growing social awareness of the need for equality of opportunity

for all. New legislation, such as the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995, has defined the rights of people with disabilities regarding access to goods, services, facilities and opportunities in employment and education which people without disabilities can take for granted.

In the Church too, a shift in attitude and understanding has begun to take place. There is greater awareness in parishes and dioceses of the importance of access and inclusion of all, although the ways in which practical advice, support and assistance are given vary from diocese to diocese. Many diocesan agencies now engage people with disabilities to help develop the services needed, and the services have a different focus and style.

There has been an important shift from "doing things for" to "working with", empowering people with disabilities to make their own choices and discover and use their gifts for the good of the Church as a whole.

One diocesan agency, for example, employs an Advocacy Development Worker, and in another diocese, Parent Advocate Groups are well established. Some dioceses have specialised services for people with hearing impairment, for people with learning disabilities and for other particular groups, usually located within diocesan agencies which provide care services. In other dioceses, there are advisers who are members of the diocesan religious education team or schools' commission and who work with schools and parishes to help them become more inclusive of, and responsive to, people with disabilities. Some dioceses have a pastoral centre from which services are offered, or which provides a base for particular groups to use.

There are also communities, voluntary organisations and associations which bring together people with disabilities, their families and carers, and others. Some of these are Catholic or Christian in origin, such as L'Arche communities, the Association of Blind Catholics (ABC), the Catholic Deaf Association (CDA), and Church Action on Disability (CHAD). In different ways, they express the mission of the Church to include and uphold the dignity of every person. Many more are for people of all faiths and none. All of these are important self-help groups through which information is circulated, needs are met and solidarity is built up. A number of these groups and agencies are listed later in this report.

One significant element of how society has changed is the movement to include children with disabilities in mainstream schools, providing appropriate support, rather than segregating them in specialised institutions. Catholic schools have played their part in this movement, and some have given particular priority to responding to children with special needs. Catholic education, with its emphasis on nurturing individual potential and imbuing tolerance and respect, can take a leading part in making plans for greater inclusion work. Indeed, the phrase "changing attitudes" in the title of this sub-section is descriptive both of the reality in society today and of the role that the Church can play in bringing that about.

## **How this report was written?**

The proposal for a new document about people with disabilities emerged within the Catholic Education Service, the education agency of the Bishops' Conference. After preliminary consultation, a small working party was set up, which produced a first draft text. It soon became clear that consultation and collaboration with a wide range of people and groups would be needed, because the task involved many areas of Church life. It was also evident that there are many different attitudes to disability issues, both among people with disabilities themselves, and among others, and few ways in which these are explored in any depth, especially at national level in the Church.

A list of those consulted is found in the Appendix. They include people with disabilities, priests, catechists, parents of people with disabilities, bishops, advisers on disability issues and many others.

There have been many drafts of this document, because of the importance of finding the right language to explore the concerns it covers. The statement may not have got everything right, but it does put down markers about how Church life should include and value people with disabilities.

This report is not exhaustive in the areas covered or in the examples given of what can be done. The needs of individuals are very different, and there is as much diversity among people with disabilities as among people without. In particular, it does not cover social and legal issues such as employment rights and benefits provision. Catholic teaching, especially Catholic Social Teaching, does provide resources for addressing these concerns, but to do so in the detail that would be required is beyond the scope of this report. Neither has the report attempted to explore in any detail the area of growth to personal maturity and sexual relationships, other than through the brief coverage of the Sacrament of Marriage, because the Social Welfare Committee's 1989 report has already covered this.

Perhaps most significantly, the report has not attempted theological reflection about the experience of people with disabilities. Some will perceive this as a real gap and this must be acknowledged. However, the authors of the report are aware of individuals who are actively pursuing this area of theological study and look forward to the fruits of their work. At the same time, efforts to increase access and inclusion, as outlined in very practical ways in this report, should enable a larger number of people with and without disabilities to reflect on these issues and contribute to the development of that theology in the future.

Throughout the report, an attempt has been made to give examples of what can be done in practice to ensure that access and participation are available to people with disabilities. At local level, there are probably many other creative ways in which participation and access are being increased, and support and advocacy around disability issues are being developed. It is hoped that this text can be part of a process of development, affirming the progress already made and encouraging further steps on the road to a stronger, more inclusive Church.

## **Who is this report for?**

*Valuing Difference* is for everyone who wants the Church, the body of Christ, to grow through a closer communion of all its members. It offers an exciting and challenging opportunity for renewal based on Christ's love and respect for the individual. It does not assume that its message is only for one audience, because the mission of the Church is common to us all. It identifies people with disabilities as a specific part of the Church only insofar as there is a need for each of us to reach out to one another, and in particular to those who may not have felt included in the past. So, people with disabilities, their families and carers, are encouraged to take their rightful place as equal members of the Church, with gifts to bring to its life and mission. The document seeks to outline what this means in practice.

As an exploration of how the Church can value the gifts and contribution of all its members, the report is addressed particularly, however, to people who exercise ministry or leadership in Catholic parishes, schools, chaplaincies, dioceses and other settings: priests, teachers, catechists, youth workers, bishops, advisers and others. Their example can show how our growth as the body of Christ is linked inextricably with being an inclusive and enabling Church. By increasing awareness of disability, challenging negative assumptions and taking practical measures to improve access and inclusion (as outlined in later sections of this text), they can promote a process of renewal in which we can all share.

## **Ecumenical connections**

Other Christian Churches are also working to broaden access and participation of people with disabilities in Church life. The concerns of this report run parallel to initiatives taken in other denominations, including the following:

- The Baptist Union has an organisation called BUILD, the Baptist Union Initiative with people with Learning Disabilities, and has published a report entitled *Against the Stream*. It has a fund which is used to help local churches provide access facilities for people with disabilities and others who need them.
- The Methodist Church has appointed district advisers to work on issues relating to the access and participation of people with disabilities in Church life.
- The Church of England has a Committee for Ministry among Deaf People which has recently produced a report entitled *The Church among Deaf People*, which explores the involvement of deaf people in worship, lay ministry and other areas of Church life.
- The United Reformed Church has produced a pack entitled *Disability: An Introductory Study Pack for People in the Church*.

There is much that the Churches can learn from each other and do together in this area, both at local level and at national level. Church Action on Disability attempts to help this process, but progress will depend on people taking initiatives in and through various

ecumenical structures so that these concerns become part of the main agenda of the Churches working together, rather than a specialised subject. The main purpose of any ecumenical activity or structure - to build up the wholeness of the body of Christ, finding unity within the differences Christians have - is achieved in a double way through ecumenical work to ensure that people with disabilities can participate fully in Church life.

### **What is disability?**

As acknowledged above, theological reflection on disability is not the main purpose of this report. So the reason for asking the question, 'What is disability?', is to establish a reference point for the discussion of the practical issues which form Part Two of the report. In particular, there is a need to be clear that people with disabilities do not form one homogeneous group. So, as we consider the practicalities of access and inclusion, we need to keep a range of disabilities in mind.

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act defines a person as having a disability if they have 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [their] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.' (Clause 1) In applying the law, the assumption is that 'long-term' means the impairment is permanent or expected to last for at least a year. Unfortunately, the term 'impairment' may carry with it certain negative connotations, suggesting to some that those who are defined as disabled are imperfect or inferior. In seeking to assert the dignity of each individual, this may be one of the attitudes which the Church has to work to change.

There are three main categories of disability to consider:

*PHYSICAL DISABILITIES* relate to the body and affect mobility and muscle control. Such disabilities affect the individual's interaction with the environment. They either result from genetic or medical conditions (for example, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, polio) or from accidents or war (for example, paraplegia). Some are progressive, so that the degree of impairment will increase (for example, multiple sclerosis). Others remain relatively stable, with the degree of impairment remaining fairly constant (for example, being born with one hand).

*SENSORY DISABILITIES* affect people's sense of sight, speech and/or hearing and therefore affect how individuals communicate. They share causes similar to those for physical disabilities. However, many of these disabilities arise from relative, rather than acute or total, impairments. For example, a visual impairment does not mean necessarily that a person is blind, simply that their vision is sufficiently impaired as to make it a disabling factor in their lives.

*LEARNING DISABILITIES* relate to impaired brain function. This term describes a condition in which the brain does not function in an age-appropriate manner. Once more, causes can be genetic, medical or the result of accidental injury.

It should be noted that all of these conditions (together with Alzheimer's and other dementias) may also be associated with ageing but this does not mean that ageing itself is a



disability. However, many of us, perhaps most of us, will experience impairment as we get older and this will be a more significant feature as the age profile of the population rises.

Another consideration, when looking at the practicalities of access and inclusion, is the difference between an impairment or condition and the difficulties or disability which may occur as a result of that impairment or condition. The disability which results from an impairment may vary. A person who has become paralysed in an accident, for example, is always going to have that impairment, but the degree of disability which that causes depends on the situation and the aids which he or she uses. If the person is watching television, or reading, or sharing in a discussion group, for instance, the disabling effect of the impairment can be minimal unless and until movement about the room is necessary. Then, using, for example, a wheelchair in a building which has wide doors and ramps, mobility may not present any difficulties.

Thus, the degree of disability experienced by a disabled person relates mostly to attitudes and environment.

In seeking to get a better understanding of how disabled people feel in certain situations, some people might find it helpful to reflect on a "disabling experience" of their own, such as trying to communicate in a foreign country. The visitor does not become a different person, but ignorance does make communication difficult and indeed may make the affected person feel different. Similarly, a hearing person amongst a group of deaf people who are all using sign language may well feel disabled or excluded. Such a sense of frustration, even powerlessness, can mirror the feelings sometimes arising from the disabling effects of an impairment, whether physical or mental.

This document is concerned with the participation in the Church of people with physical, sensory or learning disabilities. It reflects an understanding that although each disabled person's condition is different, people with disabilities share a common experience of discrimination and rejection, and of barriers which impede access and participation, resulting in feelings of being marginalised or excluded.

People (including some with disabilities) live with other conditions which may also be excluding (such as poverty) and other kinds of difference through which they may encounter prejudice (such as race). This document does not deal with these concerns, although there may be parts of it which echo these other experiences.

In *Valuing Difference*, the Church is promoting an attitude of respect for each individual and proposing practical action which will help to eliminate discrimination of every kind.

## **PART 2: FROM VISION TO PRACTICE**

### **Access and Inclusion: GENERAL**

Through baptism, we are given a right to participate as active members of the community of faith. Part of the body of Christ is missing when any individual is excluded from Church life. Everyone therefore has both a need for, and a right to, access to all the activities which make up Catholic life and mission, and to the ministries and responsibilities which are open to all the baptised within Catholic teaching.

Accessibility is expressed through the attitudes, values and actions of members of the Church, as well as in the removal of physical or other barriers which impede entry or participation. Improving accessibility for people with disabilities means deepening the awareness of the Catholic community about what it means to be an inclusive community, both at parish and diocesan level, and in particular settings such as Catholic schools and colleges. It also means giving time, energy and resources to the practical and organisational changes which are needed to broaden and enable access to all the varied activities and events which take place in Catholic life.

Inclusion requires consultation, especially on matters affecting the participation of people with disabilities, since no-one can presume to know their needs. This is the starting point when planning and providing services and facilities for people with disabilities, and when considering how access to any aspect of Church life can be improved.

When facilities are provided to enable access for people with disabilities, they almost always benefit other members of the parish or organisation. The needs of people with disabilities are mostly the same as the needs of others: everyone needs to be able to hear, see, speak, move, respond and participate.

Inclusion is also expressed when people with disabilities are visibly present and participating in activities as various as studying theology, membership of the parish council, eucharistic ministry, diocesan employment and in action for social justice.

Change is often a slow process and, even when attitudes have been altered, implementation may be hampered by the lack of finance or resources. Nevertheless, change is a necessary part of the life of the Church community as it seeks to share the message of the Gospel with society today. Reflecting on greater access and inclusion of people with disabilities has a vital role to play in helping the Church to grow as a communion, as a body of people that expresses God's inclusive love of all. Working for unity means breaking down barriers of any kind, whether arising from racism or sexism, or from prejudice about other kinds of difference. A Church that values every kind of difference can be a parable of unity.

The Church can also give witness to its inclusiveness in practical terms, by enshrining in good practice its conformity to the legal requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and its satisfaction of Part M Building Regulations. There is much to be gained from making use of the facilities and expertise of the Disability Access Officer in each local authority and liaising with other secular organisations. Implementing change may well require a long-term

strategy which will enable steps to be taken, as resources allow, in moving towards a goal. The value of a planned approach is that it saves having to undo work already done when later steps are brought into play.

### **Access and Inclusion: PARISH**

The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather, the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit, a familial and welcoming home, the community of the faithful...

...the parish is to be a place in the world for the community of believers to gather together as a sign and instrument of the vocation of all to communion, a house of welcome to all and a place of service to all.

*(Christifideles Laici 26, 27)*

In approaching the issue of access and inclusion, there are two central questions: What does a parish need to do to enable all its members to participate fully in parish life?

What practical steps can be taken to ensure access for and inclusion of people with disabilities?

#### **First steps towards an inclusive parish**

The fundamental principle to start from is that of collaboration and dialogue. Whatever a parish does to improve access and inclusion of people with disabilities can only be effective if they participate in the discussion and planning along with other members of the parish.

A first step might be to survey the parish to find the people with disabilities among parish members and their families. This could explore what contribution they would like to make to the parish, and what kind of services and access they need. The survey would need to be repeated every few years, as people move in and out of the parish. It is best done as part of a general parish census, as there are other people whose needs could be discovered and other gifts and resources which could be found. It could also be done ecumenically, as could the other first steps listed below:

- Raising the profile of disability as an important issue by integrating the theme of valuing difference into a retreat or mission on, for example, Christ's respect for the individual.
- Holding a disability awareness day, with invited speakers describing their experience, to encourage all members of the parish (or local churches) to reflect on what can be done to ensure access and inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Circulating (and acting on the results of) an access questionnaire to all the different groups in the parish concerning the general level of access for and inclusion of people with disabilities in their particular activity.

- Ensuring that parish services and activities are accessible to all potential users, in line with the legal requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). Dioceses will need to be able to advise parishes on this. The audit on accessibility contained in Part Three of this report is a tool that parishes can use to assess the degree of access already available, and to identify what else could be done to improve access. Some provisions are obvious, such as the installation of ramps for wheelchair users, and of loop systems for people with hearing aids, but there are many other ways in which access can be extended. As access is improved, it is important to communicate this widely and clearly, and to encourage use of the facilities provided.
- Publishing information about local organisations and contacts in parish newsletters and on Church or hall noticeboards.

As a parish grows in commitment to including all its members, and works to extend access and participation, the following kinds of development might take place.

### **Specific assistance to enable participation**

The parish could aim to provide specific kinds of assistance to enable full participation in the life of the Church by parishioners with particular disabilities. These might include, for example, signing for people with hearing impairment in worship and in parish meetings, or the provision of monthly parish news on cassette tape for people who are blind. The occasional provision of a particular type of assistance will need extra resources or effort, such as payment for expert sign language interpreters, or sponsorship of parishioners to learn sign language, or the purchase of cassette machines and tapes. Some of the organisations listed in Part Three of this report may be able to offer advice on what is available and appropriate.

If a parish does provide specific assistance in some way, it is essential to advertise the fact to those who might use it, both in the parish and more widely across the local area. Regular mention in weekly bulletins will help, as will information on parish noticeboards and in diocesan and local directories. Another example of this kind of information would be the numbers for email, Fax and Telecommunication Devices for Deaf people (TDDs) which enable telecommunication access to people who would otherwise be excluded.

Where a parish cannot provide a particular kind of assistance such as signing, it could find out where such services are provided in the diocese, and make information and help with travel available to any who need it. It might also be possible to explore whether some types of assistance might be provided in co-operation with other local churches.

### **Involving people with disabilities in parish ministries**

There could be an effort to increase participation in parish ministries and to remove barriers which exclude or discourage people with disabilities from exercising ministries. Some of these barriers are physical, such as limited space where communion is distributed, and some are expressed in attitudes. In many parishes, it will simply not have been considered

to ask people with disabilities to take on ministries. There may also be need to explain clearly that the opportunity to exercise liturgical and other ministries based on baptism should be equally available to all, subject only to capacity to exercise ministry for the benefit of the wider assembly. For example: a minister of the Word needs to be able to proclaim the Word effectively: he or she does not necessarily need to be able to walk. Similarly, eucharistic ministers do not necessarily have to be able to stand. People with learning disabilities can act as altar servers.

### **Parish organisations**

Steps could be taken to invite people with disabilities to join various parish groups and activities (such as the Union of Catholic Mothers or St Vincent de Paul Society, justice and peace activities, prayer groups, parish councils, youth groups) and to provide facilities to enable their active participation, including an accessible venue. Parish members with disabilities could also be asked to undertake some of the tasks which need to be done on behalf of the parish, such as representation at diocesan meetings or on diocesan commissions, or acting as a school governor. Indeed, as mainstream education becomes more inclusive, in accordance with Government policy, governors with disabilities could have an increasingly important role in aiding the wider integration process.

### **Support for the families of people with disabilities**

Parishes can do much to support the families of people with disabilities and their carers. The needs of each family or carer will be different, and parishioners will have to be sensitive to the different ways that disability of one member affects other family members. The needs of people with disabilities and their families also change as they adapt and grow together, or if the condition of the person with disability alters.

For many people with disabilities and their families, the mutual support they offer each other through self-help groups is particularly significant. Parents of disabled children, or couples where one partner is disabled, have much to offer to others in the same or similar situations. The parish can help considerably by putting people in contact with each other and providing resources, such as a place to meet, and other forms of support for such groups.

There are a wide range of ways in which the parish can support families. Some family members need to be encouraged and enabled to participate in ordinary parish activities. Others may appreciate visits by clergy or other parishioners, through which they can receive parish news and feel included. If there is sufficient need, a parish befrienders scheme could be set up, through which parish members could offer to visit, if this is what fellow parishioners with disabilities would like. Where a severe disability means family members are together for much of the time, support could also include the offer of respite care (by those with appropriate skills and experience), so that both the person with disabilities and their family do have time to themselves. It is particularly important not to forget people

with disabilities and their families where the person is in residential care. Both the person in care, and the family, could benefit from friendship and be included in parish concerns.

Much of the support that can be offered to families is the ordinary interest, care and practical gestures which take place between people who are sensitive to each other's needs. Some families with a disabled member also need expert advice or assistance at particular times, which can be obtained from one of the charities or agencies with relevant expertise. It is important that the limitations of parish support are recognised, particularly the fact that people with disabilities, their families and carers, may wish to seek out specialist support at some distance from their own parish.

Nevertheless, it may be worth considering whether some training could be provided for parishioners who wish to support people with disabilities and their families. For example, those who undertake to visit people with dementia might need to acquire coping strategies, so that they do not abandon the visiting simply because the people with dementia seem to make no obvious response. The relevant agencies and charities could be asked to advise on this.

### **Action in the local community**

Some groups within the parish, such as a justice and peace group, or a Catholic Women's League group, could find out how effectively the wider neighbourhood community provides access in its facilities and services for those with disabilities. They could press for greater progress where it is needed, for example, by encouraging employers and providers of goods, facilities and services (such as shops and leisure centres) to fulfil their legal responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). They could also consider working with local and national disability charities, such as SCOPE and MENCAP, or developing joint enterprises with other churches and local organisations to raise awareness of disability issues. Women's organisations may wish to take an interest in how disability affects women, both directly and indirectly.

### **Access and Inclusion: CATECHESIS**

...every baptised person, precisely by reason of being baptised, has the right to receive from the Church education and instruction enabling him or her to enter on a truly Christian life...  
*(Catechesi Tradendae 14)*

Every parish has the serious duty to train people completely dedicated to providing catechetical leadership (priests, men and women, religious and laypeople), to provide the equipment needed for catechesis under all aspects, to increase and adapt the places for catechesis to the extent that it is possible and useful to do so, and to be watchful about the quality of religious formation of the various groups and their integration into the ecclesial community.

*(Catechesi Tradendae 67)*

Catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible, must be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way orientated to it. This implies that the catechesis of other age groups should have it for a point of reference and should be expressed in conjunction with it, in a coherent catechetical programme suitable to the pastoral needs of dioceses.

*(General Directory for Catechesis 59)*

Every Christian community considers those who suffer...forms of disability... as persons particularly beloved of the Lord. A growth in social and ecclesial consciousness, together with undeniable progress in specialized pedagogy, makes it possible for the family and other formative centres to provide adequate catechesis for these people who, as baptized, have this right and, if not baptized, because they are called to salvation.

*(General Directory for Catechesis 189)*

### **Catechesis and the Christian Life**

Catechesis is central to the evangelising task of the Church and to the lives of all Christians. It is activity which calls people to faith in Christ, to baptism and to maturity in that faith.

At each stage of life, catechesis assists baptised people to live their baptismal vocation, both personally and communally. It involves growth in a personal relationship with Christ and growth in prayer and in belonging to the Church, as well as gradual exploration of the Church's faith. It bears fruit in the liveliness, faithfulness and compassion of the whole community and in the witness given by each person living faith in his or her own particular circumstances.

At certain stages, such as when adults or children are preparing to celebrate sacraments for the first time, an organised and systematic programme of catechesis is usually provided, led by catechists. Sometimes these programmes involve sponsors and other helpers, or include meetings for parents and other family members. At other times, catechetical activity may be an element in other pastoral activities such as a bereavement group, a parish pilgrimage, a mission or retreat, or a course on Catholic Social Teaching.

The Church's documents state very clearly that all the baptised are entitled to receive catechesis (e.g. Code of Canon Law 774-777, General Directory for Catechesis 167, 168). They also encourage parishes and dioceses to see catechesis as a priority, requiring energy, resources and commitment. Very often the documents describe the catechetical needs of particular groups such as children, adolescents and older people, and increasingly they stress the primary importance of the catechesis of adults.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) sets out the principles that must underpin all catechesis: that it contains at its heart the telling and hearing of the Gospel; that it is a journey in faith that is communal and mutual, with catechists and those who are catechised learning more of the mystery of Christ from each other; that it is always an ecclesial activity, inextricably linked to the sacramental life of the Church.

## **Catechesis must include people with disabilities**

As members of the Church, people with disabilities are entitled to receive and indeed, where suitably qualified, give catechesis within the Christian community. People with disabilities who do not yet belong to the Church are also among those whom the Church seeks to call to faith. This is explicitly stated in the Church's documents (General Directory for Catechesis 189 and Code of Canon Law 777). Disability should not be perceived as an obstacle to the journey in faith which we all travel and which is nourished and deepened by catechesis.

It is desirable that, wherever possible, people with disabilities are included in the ordinary catechetical programmes and activities of each parish. For those with physical or sensory disabilities, this will require attention to how they can have access and participate as fully as possible. For those with learning disabilities, it is recognised that an RCIA group may not be the most appropriate vehicle, but the possibility of their being included in the parish programmes should not be automatically discounted.

The inclusion of people with disabilities in catechetical activities underlines the vocation of us all to belong to the body of Christ, each bringing our individual gifts and insights into the mystery of Christ to be shared with other members of that body. It also usually adds to the quality of the catechesis for other people, because catechists have to plan carefully and use a wider range of methods, images and resources. Most importantly, when people with disabilities are readily included and valued equally, then the fundamentally inclusive nature of the Church is seen and expressed more fully. It is a catechesis in itself.

## **Practical steps**

The following suggestions are offered to help parishes and dioceses to assess and develop the inclusion of people with disabilities in catechetical activity. Much of what is described below may already be part of how parish catechesis is planned and organised, since the principles of accessibility and adaptation apply to all who participate, not just to people with disabilities.

Those responsible for catechesis will need to pay particular attention to making catechetical activities accessible to adults and children with disabilities, just as they adapt their methods and means to meet the needs of anyone involved in catechesis. At a basic level, this means examining the physical surroundings, offering help with transport and paying attention to other practical matters as outlined in the accessibility audit in Part Three of this report. They will also have to look at the catechetical materials used, the forms of communication used, and the expectations and assumptions regarding participation and response. The way in which each disabled person is included will depend on their particular condition, and catechists, sponsors and others who help with catechesis will need to be adaptive, imaginative and creative.

For example, those who are deaf or hard of hearing, with the assistance of an interpreter, could take part in the parish confirmation programme. Children or adults with visual



impairment could take part in a parish RCIA group if they have assistance, and if resources on tape, in Braille, or in large print are available. Some catechetical resources are easily adaptable to a range of needs. One example is *Walk with Me*, a recent publication of the National Project designed for children not in Catholic schools.

Catechists, sponsors, priests and others involved in catechesis need opportunities to learn about and reflect on the ways that people with disabilities may respond to what they are learning. For example, people with learning disabilities are often particularly responsive to physical expression, and to symbols and to rituals, which enable them to learn what faith means in a very direct way. Sounds, touch and images are also especially valuable aids to catechesis involving people with such disabilities. Catechesis that uses these aids and methods will also be more enriching for the whole group, as they will encounter all the languages of faith rather than just its verbal and intellectual expression. The way in which catechesis is a mutual and reciprocal process can also be evident as people with learning disabilities catechise others by the response they give to symbols and rituals.

Most parishes give priority to the Christian initiation and religious education of children. This usually means providing Catholic schools and parish sacramental preparation to form Catholic children in faith. Children with disabilities who are not in Catholic schools because they attend State special schools are often left out of parish catechesis. Their catechetical needs may be greater than those of other children since they do not have the support of a Catholic educational community. They can certainly be included in any programmes of sacramental catechesis, but such programmes are usually fairly short, and focus mainly on one sacrament, and so cannot be seen as providing all that children in State special schools need. If there is catechesis provided in the parish for children not attending a Catholic school, they can be included. In other parishes, some specific provision for Catholic children attending State special schools will be needed. It may be more practical to organise such provision between a number of parishes if the numbers of children involved are small.

Some adults with disabilities, as well as some children and young people, may also need opportunities to think through and reflect on their experience of disability in relation to their faith. Such opportunities would need to be sensitively arranged and carefully prepared. Where possible, they should be led by catechists who are themselves disabled. It is part of the journey of faith for all people to express feelings of frustration and anger at whatever limitations or struggles they face, and to express hopes and desires about finding a way of life that brings fulfilment.

It is important to remember that parents and other family members of people with disabilities also have catechetical needs, including some which may arise from their own feelings in relation to the disabled family member. The faith of families will be supported if they are able to celebrate the gifts that the family member with disabilities brings to their life, and to express whatever anxieties or other feelings they have, in the midst of a Christian community.

Parish catechists, whether those who lead programmes or those who accompany the adults or children being catechised, have a vital role to play in ensuring access and full participation of people with disabilities. It will be a valuable sign if people with disabilities are included as

catechists and sponsors. Attention will be needed to inviting people with disabilities to share in this ministry, and to arrange appropriate access to formation for them.

Diocesan services and agencies can provide support for parishes to help them develop catechetical provision for people with disabilities. Formation of catechists to assist them in including people with disabilities in the programmes they lead is probably best done at area or diocesan level. Sessions on disability, the different needs it can create, and the importance of inclusion, could become a standard part of the formation offered to parish catechists, so that they become confident about making their catechetical programmes more inclusive.

It may be useful to provide a course specifically for experienced catechists who will work with people with learning disabilities, as there are some specialised approaches to catechesis which have been developed to meet their needs. The formation provided will enable catechists to develop the necessary skills to adapt programmes, methods and materials and to value the contribution and response of those they are catechising.

Diocesan agencies can also assist by giving advice about suitable resources and adaptation of catechetical programmes for particular needs. It will also be particularly helpful if a continuing exchange of ideas and reflection on experience are arranged at diocesan level. People with disabilities can offer valuable input from their own evaluation of catechesis, both as recipients and as catechists. Renewal and evaluation need to be part of any catechetical development.

### **Access and Inclusion: LITURGY**

It is the whole community, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates. A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols.

*(Catechism of the Catholic Church 1140 and 1145)*

### **Liturgy for the whole community of faith**

Full, active and conscious participation in the liturgy of the Church is the right and obligation of all Christ's faithful, who are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (1 Peter 2:9) by virtue of baptism. The Second Vatican Council described this full and active participation as 'the aim to be considered before all else' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14). Good liturgical practice enables all the members of the assembly to achieve this participation.

It is the duty of the whole Christian community to enable all its members to achieve full participation in worship. Parish liturgical celebrations should be accessible to all members of the parish, in ways that are appropriate for particular individuals and groups. This requires a willingness to adapt liturgy to enable both access and participation. Most parishes already recognise this principle in regard to groups such as young children, and some provide occasional liturgies adapted for groups such as young people, families or people with

learning disabilities. The elderly with developing dementia may appreciate and still wish to attend Mass or other services, and participation in a familiar and routine form of worship may evoke a response in them which is otherwise unobtainable. Although their behaviour may sometimes be disruptive (and considered by some to be inappropriate), it is not right to confine their participation to special events. The ordinary weekly worship of the parish can include all its members if sufficient care is taken to plan and develop access and participation.

The principles which make good liturgy are also the principles which will enable full and active participation of people with disabilities. The reverse is also true, in that the active participation of people with disabilities will help to create good liturgy because it will be more inclusive liturgy. The Church's documents speak about the need for simplicity and clarity. They emphasise that the intimate connection between the liturgical action or ritual, and the liturgical words, should be easily seen. They also say that liturgy should not normally need much explanation, and that it should be adapted to the needs of different groups and peoples.

Liturgy is not just the daily and weekly nourishment of the community's faith. It is also formative of that faith. The way that liturgy is celebrated, the way symbols are used, the ministries which are visible, and the quality of participation and response from people, all shape how we understand ourselves. When we see people with disabilities serving at the altar, or distributing communion, we experience and become a Church which recognises their dignity and their vocation to minister. For this reason, it is vital to ensure that people with disabilities are visibly included in worship, as participants and as ministers, when appropriate. This will help the whole community to become a body which recognises and values all its members.

### **The symbols and senses used in liturgy**

Catholic liturgy uses the language of symbols. When the symbols are strong and clear, liturgy becomes not just accessible to all, but also powerful for all who participate.

- The primary symbol is the community itself, gathered in prayer, but the actions, settings and objects used in liturgy are also symbolic.
- Pouring of water, anointing with oil, bowing of heads, the sign of the Cross, the sign of peace, and many other actions are ways in which those celebrating become aware of God's presence and action.
- There is also meaning in the way in which space and the liturgical environment are arranged: open space, lighting, colour and decoration all communicate, as does the very important symbol of whether or not the sanctuary area is accessible.
- Objects we use in liturgy are also symbols: candles, special clothing, the book of the Gospels, and most of all, those which focus the sacraments: bread and wine, water, oil.

Liturgy works through all our senses: it involves listening, touching, eating and drinking, and even the sense of smell.

- It is important not to rely on sight alone as the sole sense for engaging with the symbols, or on spoken words as the only means through which they may be interpreted.
- The sense of hearing is also engaged when music is used in the liturgy and, conversely, when powerful moments of silence are part of the celebration.
- The sense of touch is engaged in the sign of peace, in the laying on of hands in the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick, and in the individual blessing sometimes given to those unable to receive the Eucharist.
- The sense of taste is engaged when we receive communion; and we can smell incense and, less frequently, the perfume of oils used in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, anointing and ordination.

Attending to the quality and number of such experiences and finding other ways in which the senses can be engaged in liturgy enriches the participation of all present in the liturgical celebration. It also makes it possible for those for whom one or more senses are impaired to engage with the central symbols of our liturgy.

Those responsible for liturgy might consider the many ways in which it can be prepared so that it becomes more inclusive and responds to the needs of people with disabilities. For example:

- For people with learning disabilities, the elderly, and those with dementia, liturgical ritual is especially important. Ritual works through repetition and experience, gradually enabling a deepening awareness of God. Rituals such as making the sign of the cross, lighting candles, processions, bringing gifts to the altar, and the profound rituals of special days such as the washing of feet and marking with ashes, can play a central part in nourishing and forming faith.
- Music can play an important part in any liturgy and should always be carefully selected. It has the power to help participants both grasp and express thoughts and emotions which they might otherwise be unable to articulate. It may be particularly effective in evoking a response from people with dementia.
- For people with severe hearing loss, someone interpreting during the liturgy on a regular basis, particularly alongside the celebrant to maintain focussed attention, will enable participation, as will visual aids or providing the texts of readings, songs, the homily and announcements. However, there is a risk that providing texts can isolate people with hearing impairment and make them feel excluded, and this will not necessarily meet their needs. Good sound systems are an obvious requirement for the whole assembly, and loop systems are appropriate for most people with hearing aids. The loop should be permanently installed and cover the whole church, including the sanctuary. Portable loop systems are available and could be shared between parish groups, churches, church halls and other meeting places. Good

lighting in front of and above the lectern, presidential chair and altar is also important to ensure appropriate lighting falls on the face of the speaker. It would be helpful to allocate benches or seating with clear sight lines of the lectern, altar and presidential chair for people who need to lip-read, and to ensure that the microphone at the lectern does not obscure clear visibility of the reader's lips.

- Appropriate seating and space is also needed for other people with disabilities and their families or companions, though great sensitivity is required to avoid any implied segregation which would undermine the intended spirit of inclusion. People with visual impairment need large print hymnbooks, newsletters and service sheets. A hymn board with black numbers on a yellow background will be helpful.

### **Liturgical roles and ministries**

The primary role of the presider at liturgy is to lead the gathered assembly in prayer and to assist all to participate. The good presider will find ways of doing this without making any individuals or groups feel singled out.

- For example, the presider's use of gestures, clarity of speech, and physical stance, can be attentive to the needs of all.
- Care can be taken that the language of the homily is appropriate to the understanding of those present. For example, in Masses with children it is expected that the homily will be simple, clear and unencumbered.
- Sensitivity and thought could also be given to how invitations to the assembly are worded. For example, 'Let us stand to greet the Gospel' can feel excluding to people who cannot stand, whilst 'Let us all greet the Gospel' is inclusive. Similarly, 'Bow your heads for God's blessing' would exclude the deaf lip-reader from participating.

The Directory for Masses with Children (Rome, 1973) requires the presider to adapt the liturgy to the particular needs of children, because they are less able to participate in the usual way (DMC 16-19). It recognises that a greater degree of adaptation may be necessary for children with disabilities (DMC 6). This same approach may also be appropriate for celebrations involving adults with disabilities and, indeed, is in line with the general principle of 'legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions and peoples' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium 38*).

Other liturgical ministers can also play a part in ensuring that liturgy is sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities.

- Ministers of the eucharist can arrange communion distribution in a space that allows people in wheelchairs to approach to receive as others do. They can also be aware of the individuals whose physical disability requires reception of communion in a particular way, such as from the chalice only, or with the help of a teaspoon or straw, or through intinction (dipping a host into the chalice, rather than receiving both elements separately).

- Readers and cantors can become aware of any lip-readers and keep them in mind.
- Those planning music can find out what hymns and songs are known to any parish groups of people with learning disabilities.
- Those carrying out liturgical ministries will find ways to include people with disabilities if they ask what is needed and discuss practical arrangements. This will be easier still if people with disabilities themselves are among those charged with ministries. Children with disabilities can see in such ministers valuable adult role-models, encouraging them to realise that there is room for their participation in the life of the Church.

It is important that awareness of the needs of people with disabilities is an element in the formation offered to readers, eucharistic ministers and others who carry out liturgical tasks.

### **Special Events**

Those who experience particular disabilities can sometimes gain from celebrating a liturgy adapted to reflect their insight into the Christian faith, just as other particular experiences and needs are sometimes marked in distinctive liturgy. However, the provision of such a liturgy (no matter how frequently) is not a reason for failing to make appropriate provision to enable people with particular disabilities to play a full and proper part in regular parish liturgy. At the same time, when special event liturgies are planned, it is important that they are open to all parishioners.

The reasons for such liturgies vary. It may sometimes be especially supportive to celebrate a house mass with a person with a severe disability and their family. There might also be family liturgies linked to sacramental preparation for people with learning disabilities, or services of reconciliation in which particular provision is made for people with hearing or visual impairments. Sometimes the liturgical seasons suggest a focus for such celebrations: Christmas, and the Lent and Easter period offer many opportunities, as the liturgy of these seasons is rich in sign and symbol, and their role in faith formation is central.

### **Access and Inclusion: SACRAMENTS**

The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian's life of faith.

*(Catechism of the Catholic Church 1210)*

Christ's faithful have the right to be assisted by their pastors from the spiritual riches of the Church, especially by the word of God and the sacraments.

*(Code of Canon Law 213)*

Sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them...both pastors of souls

and all other members of Christ's faithful have a duty to ensure that those who ask for the sacraments are prepared for their reception.  
(*Code of Canon Law 843*)

### **Sacraments are for all**

These principles from the Church's teaching and law apply equally to all Catholics. In a Church which includes all, people with disabilities will be encouraged to share fully in its sacramental life. The emphasis will be on welcoming, and enabling participation. The sacraments are for all; they are part of the life of faith for all. Whilst the Church's law determines that individuals in particular circumstances may not receive certain sacraments, each specific case requires pastoral discernment. Care is needed that what God wishes to give is made available to all. In very rare cases, a priest may be unsure whether to delay reception of a particular sacrament for a particular person. It is important in such circumstances that expert advice is available for all concerned.

The Church's teaching continually emphasises that preparation for sacraments is a communal responsibility and that sacraments should, wherever possible, be celebrated in the public life of the parish. This has particular implications for people with disabilities. Like any others receiving sacraments, their preparation for the sacrament, and the celebration itself, should be in the midst of the community, unless pastoral necessity dictates otherwise.

Whilst always a communal task, sacramental preparation is also a personal and individual matter. The readiness and desire of each individual for each sacrament need to be nurtured and discerned. This discernment needs sensitivity and skill. People with disabilities will express readiness and desire in different ways, depending on the nature of their disability and their experience. Adults with physical or sensory disabilities, for example, may need the assistance of interpretation. People with learning disabilities may need assistance from those who understand and know them well enough to recognise their faith and desire, which is often very deep and intuitive.

For children with disabilities, the role of parents and other family members is obviously vital. As for all children, parents are the first educators, who know the children best and who speak for them in baptism. But parents need the support and assistance of the whole Church, expressed through catechists, godparents, sponsors and others who encourage them throughout the journey of bringing children to faith and to the sacraments. This is a particular priority for families in which there is a child with a disability; they should have first call on parish time and energy.

As members of God's family, people with disabilities are called, like all its members, to union with God through their friendship with Christ. They are called, like everyone else, to holiness. This is what lies at the heart of the Church's desire that the sacraments be made available to all who ask for them (perhaps asking implicitly in some cases of disability). The gift of coming closer to Christ, given in each sacrament in a different way, is for all.

## **Baptism**

Baptism is 'the basis of the whole Christian life, gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments' (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1213). Although the baptism of adults and the use of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is growing in the Catholic Church, most of those baptised are babies and young children. But whatever the age at which baptism is sought, a disability is never, of itself, a reason for deferring or refusing. Babies and young children with disabilities, like other children, are baptised because their parents and godparents profess faith. Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the baptised have the right to the love and help of the community.

For a child born with a disability, the celebration of baptism in public in a parish Mass is a way of affirming that this child, like any other child, is welcomed with great joy. It also provides an opportunity for parish members to commit themselves to the practical and spiritual support of the child and the family. However, not all families will feel able or willing to take part in such a celebration. There is need for sensitivity to prepare the kind of celebration which will both signify that each baptism involves the whole Church, and enable the family to take part with confidence and ease.

Preparation for baptism is as important for children with disabilities and their families as for anyone else, and will normally follow the same pattern. Either personally or through others, it is the task of the priest to ensure that the parents of an infant who is disabled, or those who take the place of the parents, understand the meaning of the sacrament of baptism and the obligations attached to it. This will be achieved by inviting the family to take part in a parish baptism programme or by the usual range of visits to the family from priests or catechists.

The role of sponsors and godparents can be particularly valuable for people with disabilities, whether children or adults. Their task is to support and foster the faith life of the baptised person. Godparents are usually chosen either by the person being baptised or by the family, but it could be helpful if the parish offers some preparation for their role, perhaps including some disability awareness training.

## **Confirmation**

Confirmation binds people more closely to Christ and the Church and enriches them with the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is intimately related to baptism, and marks a further stage in the journey of becoming a full member of the Church. Confirmation calls those who receive it to witness to Christ in their daily lives. The ways in which members of the Church do this are shaped by the circumstances in which they live. For someone with disabilities, their individual experience of disability will also inform their faith. Each of us has a unique mission, and particular gifts and energy to contribute to the mission of the whole Church. This is what is celebrated in confirmation.



It is important that parishes ensure that people with disabilities are invited to receive the sacrament of confirmation at whatever age is appropriate, and to take part in the normal programmes of preparation. For most children and young people with disabilities, this will take place at whatever the usual age is in that parish or diocese. The age of confirmation can vary from six or seven in one diocese, to fifteen or sixteen in another, and the preparation and celebration of the sacrament is also arranged in different ways. The needs of children and young people in residential schools or care may need special attention and they should not be overlooked.

In preparing for confirmation with children and young people, it is usually good practice to offer opportunities for parents and other family members to reflect on their own understanding of this sacrament, and the ways in which they can help their child or teenager to continue growing in faith and to discover their own particular gifts and mission.

Confirmation for adults with disabilities will usually take place within a journey of initiation which may involve a longer period of time and the various stages set out in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). It would be enriching for the whole Church if more parish RCIA groups were to seek out and invite participation from adults with disabilities, whilst recognising that the RCIA model requires sensitive adaptation for people with learning difficulties. The style in which RCIA groups work - listening to people's experience, adapting to their needs and questions, and travelling the journey of faith as a mutually supportive group - may well provide a model for inclusion in other areas of parish life.

## **Eucharist**

The Eucharist is the 'source and summit of the Christian life' (Lumen Gentium 11). For the individual, it completes Christian initiation. For the community of the faithful, it is the sign and sacrament of unity. This unity includes people with disabilities and their families. The unity of the Church is incomplete if people with disabilities are not included and participating fully when their community celebrates and receives the Eucharist.

Most Catholics first receive the Eucharist in early childhood, but diocesan and parish policies do vary, and some families may wait until children are older to ensure they are ready. Some parishes are finding that families are seeking first sacraments for children at different ages which do not fit the traditional patterns. A few parishes are responding by developing an adapted form of the RCIA for children. At whatever age people first receive the Eucharist, there needs to be preparation for them and, when appropriate, for their families. This will usually be a programme of catechesis, either immediately related to the Eucharist itself, or as part of a longer process of initiation modelled on the RCIA.

It is most desirable that people with disabilities be included in the parish programmes provided for all its members. For those with learning disabilities, the programme can be suitably adapted as it proceeds. However, the most important feature is not so much expert adaptation of catechetical materials, though that is needed, but active involvement in a group of loving and caring people who enable someone with a learning disability to experience what the sacrament means.

The Church expects that those who receive the Eucharist recognise in faith that what they receive is the body and blood of Jesus Christ. People with disabilities will express their faith in Christ's presence in the Eucharist in different ways. Those with physical or sensory disabilities may need assistance or interpretation to express their response.

For people with learning disabilities, this may be more complex. They may express faith in the Eucharist through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally. It is vital that priests and catechists consult with parents or those who take the place of parents in discerning the readiness of people with learning disabilities to receive the Eucharist. In most cases it may be helpful to seek advice from diocesan advisers or other experts in making their judgement. Much will depend on the relationship between the priests or catechists and the person with a learning disability and his or her family. Those who know the person are frequently able to understand signs and sounds which show appreciation and reverence for the mystery of the sacrament, and a desire to share in it.

The faith of the family and carers for a person with a learning disability plays a significant part in the decision that it is right for that person to receive the Eucharist. As in baptism, their explicit faith can underpin the faith of the person with whom they live in communion, giving and receiving from each other at many levels. The faith of families in which there is a child who has a disability can also be greatly strengthened by the sign of acceptance of their child that reception of communion gives.

Some people find the actual receiving of communion difficult because of the nature of their disability. If this is the case, parents or other carers, or catechists or sponsors, may need to talk to the priest and to eucharistic ministers about the way in which communion is given. It may be most appropriate in some cases for a parent or helper to give communion to a person with a severe disability.

If it is determined that a parishioner who is disabled is not yet ready to receive the Eucharist, great care is to be taken in explaining the reasons for this decision. In such cases, it is vital that the individual and his/her family or caring group are given opportunities to talk about this decision and explore how to move forward. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favour of the right of the baptised person to receive the sacrament. Similar considerations apply in the case of the elderly with dementia.

During the process of preparing for Eucharist, or when it has been decided to defer this for some reason, there is a question about how the person can be included in some way at the moment of Communion in the Mass. This problem is not particular to people with disabilities, but applies also to young children and all those who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to receive the Eucharist. The practice of approaching the priest for a blessing is not universal and is not to everyone's liking. Certainly, no one should be forced to do this against their wishes, but it may be possible to devise some other gesture which would be appropriate. The very act of coming forward in procession and standing before the priest, deacon or minister, signals a desire to participate more fully. It may, in the case of a person for whom the celebration of the sacrament has been deferred, help to develop within that individual, or serve to demonstrate to others, the necessary pre-disposition for that celebration to go ahead.

After first reception of the Eucharist, it is important that people with disabilities are enabled to receive the Eucharist frequently within the ordinary life of the parish. This will nourish their spiritual life and ensure they feel included as members of the Church. It will also nourish the spiritual life of the whole eucharistic community, who will be able to see what it means to live, as well as celebrate, the sacrament of the unity of all.

## **Reconciliation**

The sacrament of reconciliation is a sacrament of healing. It is the sacrament in which Christians experience God's forgiveness, which enables them to recognise their sinfulness and their need to change, and to return joyfully to the Father who loves them. People with disabilities should have access to this sacrament at an appropriate time and in an appropriate manner.

Reconciliation is usually celebrated as part of the process of initiation, either before or after the Eucharist is received for the first time. The precise moment of celebration will depend upon the circumstances of the person being initiated and will be governed by parish and diocesan policy and practice. For example, a person who has not been baptised does not celebrate this sacrament as part of the process of initiation.

This is probably the sacrament most neglected in regard to provision to enable access for people with disabilities. However, there are different ways in which this sacrament can be celebrated appropriately with people with disabilities:

- Communal Services of Reconciliation are one important way in which some degree of participation can be offered to those with disabilities, although it is important that the liturgy is adapted to their needs as described earlier.
- Catholics who have a hearing impairment should have the opportunity to confess to a priest able to communicate in sign language, if this is their primary means of communication, or the choice of confessing with a sign language interpreter whom they and the priest involved both trust. The interpreter must accept being strictly bound to respect the seal of confession which ensures that what has taken place is secret. If this takes place during a Service of Reconciliation, then arrangements must be made so that the signing is not visible to the congregation.
- Whether or not a priest with signing skills, or a sign language interpreter, is available, Catholics with hearing impairment should be permitted to make their confession in writing. The written materials are to be returned to the person confessing or destroyed (perhaps in a symbolic way such as burning).
- If the deaf person does not sign but lip-reads, arrangements need to be made to ensure that face to face confession is possible and that there is adequate light on the priest's face.
- People with learning disabilities may also have difficulty in confessing, and may communicate sorrow through gesture rather than verbally. The priest may need to

assist with gentle and careful questions. The experience of this sacrament will be more fruitful for both priest and penitent if they know each other, and if the priest understands the nature of the person's disability and how it affects him or her.

- Careful discernment involving parents, carers, catechists and others will be needed to judge whether each person with a learning disability is ready for this sacrament. Some people with learning disabilities are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of having done wrong. They may also show an explicit joy when forgiven. As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of sorrow for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin very precisely, the person may receive sacramental absolution.
- Those with profound learning disabilities, who cannot experience even minimal contrition, may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community.

### **Anointing of the Sick**

The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is a sacrament of strengthening and healing. It is celebrated when people need peace and courage to overcome the difficulties that go with serious illness or the frailty of old age. It is a way in which the whole Church prays with and for people who are ill or suffering: it is a sacrament in which the laying on of hands recalls how Christ touched with compassion those whom he healed. It is celebrated in people's homes, in hospitals and in communal celebrations in parishes or elsewhere.

Since disability does not necessarily indicate an illness, Catholics with disabilities should receive the sacrament of anointing on the same basis and under the same circumstances as any other member of the Church. This will sometimes be through inclusion in communal celebrations of the sacrament of anointing, as well as in personal circumstances which make this sacrament appropriate, such as serious illness. People with dementia may be considered to be in need of this sacrament, repeated at appropriate intervals, rather more than those with physical disabilities.

### **Marriage**

In Christian marriage, two people, drawn together by human love, are invited to transform that love into a sharing in the creative love of God, and in so doing, both become more fully alive. Like friendship and family relationships, marriage responds to the basic need all people have to love and be loved. It is a unique and lasting commitment. In the Church's Canon Law and teaching, marriage is that relationship 'by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life' (*Canon 1055 §1*), which of its own very nature brings about their well-being and is open to children.

Every marriage is special. No two marriages are the same. People with disabilities have the right to marry, and to expect the support of the Church in celebrating and living their marriage. Like everyone else, they must fulfil the Church's requirements for a valid

marriage, which means that they understand the life-long commitment they are making and they are capable of taking on the rights and duties of marriage.

When people with disabilities approach a priest to ask to be married in Church, it is the priest's task to ensure that, like any other couple, they can fulfil the requirements in their own particular circumstances. They need to understand and be resolved to make a permanent commitment, expressed through mutual emotional, psychological and physical support, as well as in a sexual relationship open to the possibility of children.

Sometimes there may be uncertainty about whether particular persons are able to take on the commitments of marriage. When such situations involve people with disabilities, the priest may need to consider the decision carefully with the disabled persons themselves, with their families or carers if necessary, with experts in the Church's teaching and law, and with medical or other experts if appropriate. What may seem to be a barrier to marriage at first may be able to be overcome with the right advice and support. For example, some physical disabilities may make physical impotence likely but the Church's law states clearly that if there is doubt about impotence, it is not to be presumed, and the marriage should not be prevented.

Similarly, whilst it can look additionally demanding for a couple, where one or both partners has a disability, to care for children, there are considerable resources available to help them, if the parents consider these necessary. Health and Social Services provide practical help, advice and support, and there are many self-help groups as well as the ordinary support of families, neighbours and friends.

Like other couples, people with disabilities, when they wish to marry, need the preparation for marriage which is usually offered in parish programmes. These programmes enable people preparing for marriage to reflect on the vocation that marriage brings, and the ways in which married life is a pathway to holiness as well as a vital witness to God's love.

Those organising marriage preparation programmes need to ensure that access is arranged, and that whatever aids to communication any individuals need, are provided. It will be especially valuable if couples where one or other partner has a disability are involved in helping to plan and lead marriage preparation programmes.

As for all other couples, the marriage celebration for a couple in which one or both partners has a disability, is a very special moment. Care is needed to adapt the marriage rites to the needs of the particular couple who are marrying. Catholics who have a hearing impairment, for example, may need to be offered the opportunity to express their consent in sign language, if this is their primary means of communication.

Sometimes it may be appropriate to have an interpreter for each partner, and for the priest, to symbolise the different individuals and the parts they play in celebrating the marriage.

The parish can do a great deal to help couples with disabilities to plan and prepare a joyful and memorable liturgy, including offering help with music, with prayers, readings and how they are communicated, with arranging the church, and with hospitality, printed booklets and other smaller matters.

Pastoral care for all married people is increasingly a priority for the Church. When there are catechetical and liturgical opportunities for the renewal of marriage vows, it is important that all couples are included: likewise, any parish initiatives to support and celebrate family life need to remember to arrange access and enable participation for all.

A more detailed explanation of the Church's teaching and law relating to marriage of people with disabilities is found in *Christian Marriage and Sexual Relationships of Disabled People*, a publication of the Bishops' Conference Social Welfare Committee. The publication is currently being revised.

### **Ordination to the diaconate and to priesthood**

It is a particularly valuable sign of an inclusive Church if people with disabilities are numbered amongst its priests, permanent deacons and religious. Sometimes a priest or deacon may become disabled at some point after ordination, but there are also some priests in the dioceses and religious orders in these countries who have been ordained with a permanent disability, such as deafness, blindness and dyslexia.

There can be a close link between experience of life with people with disabilities, and the emergence of a vocation to priestly ministry. Those who work in seminaries note that some students come to seminary with extensive experience of involvement with people with disabilities, and several would affirm that this has been a significant element in their path towards priesthood.

The Code of Canon Law, which governs the process of admission to the sacrament of orders, does not automatically exclude people with disabilities, although it does lay down criteria for discernment:

The diocesan Bishop is to admit to the major seminary only those whose human, moral, spiritual and intellectual gifts, as well as physical and psychological health and right intention, show that they are capable of dedicating themselves permanently to the sacred ministries. (*Canon 241 §1*) The Charter for Priestly Formation of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales develops these criteria further:

The most significant areas to look at during selection conferences are: the candidates' family and educational backgrounds; their professional qualifications and work experience or the way they have coped with unemployment; their physical and mental health; their spiritual life and apostolic involvement; their motivation for, understanding of, and commitment to, the priestly ministry; and their emotional maturity. (*Charter for Priestly Formation 50*)

Those who discern whether candidates with disabilities are suitable for ordination to priesthood would use these criteria, paying special attention to whether and how each individual has integrated his experience of disability in his personal growth and overall understanding of ministry and priesthood. If, at some point during the process of initial discernment, it becomes clear that the candidate cannot be accepted for priestly formation,

the reasons for this will usually be discussed with the candidate. Most often they will relate to personal, emotional and spiritual maturity, and a disability may be one element. It is vital that such feedback is given with care and sensitivity to all those not accepted, but even more so for those candidates with disabilities who are not accepted.

Once accepted, students with disabilities may require specific support during their training and, depending on the nature of their disability, may need to work harder to achieve the necessary level of integration and maturity for the demanding life of an ordained priest. It will be important that they see their ministry as being for the service of the whole Church, not just for specialised groups.

## **Access and Inclusion: EDUCATION AND FORMATION**

### **Catholic Schools**

The Catholic school should be a living embodiment of an ideal and a faith: it should demonstrate a way of life, it should be a witness to society. It should practise what it preaches about the dignity and worth of the individual.

*(Cardinal Basil Hume)*

Their belief in the value of each individual leads Catholic schools and colleges to have the duty to care for the poor and to educate those who are socially, academically, physically or emotionally disadvantaged.

*(Education in Catholic Schools and College, CBCEW 1996)*

Catholic education, based as it is on Gospel values, has a distinctive nature that ought to be reflected in distinctive practice. Catholic schools have a duty to communicate the Gospel message about the value and dignity of each person by expressing that message in every aspect of school life. One way in which Catholic schools demonstrate their commitment to the Gospel is through the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Unless the particular needs of an individual require separate provision, children and young people with disabilities ought to have access to the same educational opportunities as the other children served by each school. This will have implications for many aspects of the life of the school, from its admissions policy and use of resources, to its staffing and pastoral care system, but is an integral part of promoting the distinctive vision of Catholic education.

It has been estimated that, nationally, some twenty per cent of the school population will have special educational needs (SEN), the educational term which includes children with physical, behavioural, emotional, sensory and learning disabilities, at some stage in their school career. In the normal course of events, schools often make extra-ordinary arrangements to ensure that pupils with limited disabilities get the help they require. However, if all that the school provides still does not meet the child's learning needs, then a statement of special educational needs, specifying entitlement to additional resources, may be recommended.

As a result of the Education Act of 1993, a Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Needs was published (DfEE 1994). Although the legislation does not stipulate this, implementation of the Code generally involves a five-stage assessment procedure. The first two stages are the responsibility of the classroom teacher and the school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), with support from outside agencies at stage three. If the procedure reaches stages four and five, the school shares responsibility with the local educational authority and it is the LEA that actually makes the statement. Catholic schools can recognise in this code an expression of the principle of valuing the dignity and worth of each individual. However, the provision envisaged in law and codes of practice is not always easy to obtain. A recent study of Catholic secondary schools in urban poverty areas (A Struggle for Excellence, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1997) showed that the number of pupils actually statemented does not reflect the number of pupils who have been identified as needing statements.

LEAs are, of course, limited in what resources they can provide by the lack of adequate funding.

Catholic schools contain an increasing number of children with a wide range of special educational needs, many of whom may previously have been educated in a segregated setting. In July 1997, it was estimated that there were approximately 11,000 children with statements of SEN in mainstream Catholic schools. Some schools have worked to reassess their school policies and teaching methods to ensure that all their children, including those with disabilities, can grow spiritually as well as academically in a truly Christian environment. As well as the SEN co-ordinators (SENCOs), schools are now required to have at least one governor with specific responsibility for those with special needs. Many have worked hard to build a school community which welcomes and accepts pupils with disabilities.

Some of the ways in which Catholic primary and secondary schools, and Catholic Sixth Form Colleges, can work to develop the inclusion and participation of children and young people with disabilities are as follows:

- Having a mission statement and policy documents that enable the inclusion of people with disabilities but without highlighting them as a separate category.
- Applications for employment from people with disabilities could be actively encouraged when posts are advertised.
- People with disabilities could be appointed to serve on the school governing body.
- Chaplains and other pastoral staff may need to give special consideration to supporting children with special needs, particularly in large schools and colleges.
- Mentoring systems, in which pupils with special needs are assigned older pupils to assist them, could be considered.
- The school buildings and facilities will need to be made accessible to people with disabilities. If the school budget makes this very difficult, help could be sought from



local parishes or lay organisations for specific projects. Schools may also consider applying for funding from the Government Schools Access Initiative.

- Schools may, if appropriate, be able to offer support and assistance to parents and other children in families where a child with a disability is a pupil.
- Catholic primary schools need to pay particular attention to the needs of disabled pupils transferring into secondary education, and to liaise with secondary schools regarding provision for their needs. Secondary schools, for their part, need to ensure initial pastoral support of children with disabilities entering secondary education.

Each Catholic school has to find its own way forward in these matters, guided by its governors and by diocesan advisers, as well as by legislation. The wider Catholic community can, however, do much to support Catholic schools in moving towards greater inclusion of children with disabilities. All parents can encourage the school's commitment. Some may be able to help with fund-raising or give voluntary classroom assistance. For Catholic primary schools, the home-school-parish link provides many such opportunities.

### **Catholic Special Schools**

In acknowledging progress made towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools, it is important to celebrate the work of Catholic special schools. There are 13 Catholic non-maintained special schools, which serve around 1000 children. For many decades, they have provided Catholic education and care for particularly vulnerable children while offering hope and support to their parents. Such schools are still an important and integral part of Catholic provision for children with special educational needs. Whatever resources are available within mainstream schools, the needs of some children will still best be met in separate specialised settings. In keeping with the vision of the dignity and worth of each individual, these children have the right to segregated provision.

There are practical ways in which the parishes and dioceses to which they belong can support Catholic special schools:

- It is important that Catholic special schools are invited to take part in parish events, such as special celebrations, social activities, retreats and other activities.
- The parish could offer pastoral support to the pupils and families who use the Catholic special schools, by offering befriending for both pupils and their families, and by offering help and resources for liturgy and catechetical activities.
- It is particularly valuable to build links between Catholic special schools and local Catholic primary and secondary schools. This could enable the exchange and sharing of resources and specialist expertise. Where possible, joint activities such as social or educational projects, or catechetical programmes, could be arranged.
- It is important that parishes and all Catholic schools are aware of Catholic special schools, and can direct parents towards these schools when seeking the appropriate

provision for their children. Parents of children with disabilities, like other parents, have a right to choose a Catholic education for their children, with the costs paid by their local educational authority.

The needs of some Catholic children with disabilities are best served in local authority special schools. This may be because the nearest Catholic special school is at too great a distance, or because the LEA school has the most appropriate resources for the particular needs of the child. In such cases, their spiritual and catechetical needs, and those of their families, require particular attention, as they may be isolated with regard to faith and have little contact with Catholic Church life. Many children with profound difficulties are "hidden" children, often beginning their education in a State special school before the age of five and never becoming part of the Catholic education system. This is compounded if the family do not attend the local parish because of parental embarrassment or shame (usually caused by insensitive reactions by some parishioners when the child was younger). As indicated earlier, efforts could be made to include such children in parish programmes and activities in various ways. If practical factors make this difficult, adapted programmes based at the school itself (or the child's home) could be considered. The possibility of the local parish providing some chaplaincy support for the school might also be explored, as a sign that the Church values and supports the work that such schools do in serving the needs of these individuals.

### **Higher Education**

It has been estimated that at least 2% of students in higher education have a disability. (Higher Education Funding Council Report Widening Access to Higher Education). But since the same report notes from the Labour Force Survey that around 7% of 18-30 year olds have a disability, it is clear that disabled students are under-represented in Universities and Colleges of Higher Education (IES 1995).

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act requires Further and Higher Education institutions to publish disability statements containing information about the facilities they offer for disabled people. However, as with other institutions, including the churches, what is needed extends beyond compliance with legal requirements. A welcoming attitude and responsive action are vital if access and participation are to be a reality and not a struggle for each potential student with a disability.

Catholic Colleges of Further and Higher Education have a particular responsibility to be exemplary in this area, in order to show what the Catholic vision of education means in practice. As with Catholic schools, this will have to be made clear in terms of an individual college's mission statement.

Catholic Colleges of Higher Education which provide initial teacher education and in-service training for teachers also have a vital role to play in making education generally more inclusive. Much has already been done, and this aspect of teacher education has never been absent from Catholic Colleges' provision, but it must continue to be a priority. The

increasing inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools will present new challenges, especially as education policy itself is changing rapidly.

College and university chaplaincies could see the area of inclusion of people with disabilities as part of their mission within the institutions they serve, as well as a challenge to their own programmes and activities.

### **Adult Christian Education**

Many earlier sections of this report have covered aspects of adult Christian education, since this term is usually understood as overlapping with adult catechesis and with formation of adults for various parish ministries. However, there are several other kinds of adult Christian education which are significant for the growth of members of the Church. It is important that these too should be accessible to people with disabilities.

Adult theological education is more usually provided in diocesan courses or in theological colleges than in a single parish.

- Some courses are part-time, such as the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS), which is provided in all the dioceses of England and Wales, and in Catholic Higher Education Colleges. Henesy House in Salford Diocese provides a CCRS course for deaf people at Henesy House and at Vaughan House in Westminster Diocese.
- Others are full-time, including degree courses in theology provided in Catholic Colleges of Higher Education, in Heythrop College (which is part of London University), and in seminaries.
- There are also degree and other courses in theology which can be taken by correspondence, with some element of short residential summer schools (Maryvale Institute, Birmingham; Life-Light Home Study Courses, Oxford).

It is important that any Catholic institution or organisation which provides adult Christian education examines whether the courses provided are accessible to people with disabilities, and considers ways in which access could be improved. Whilst some courses are run with minimal financial backing, and might therefore be limited with regard to adaptation of premises or materials, many of the adaptations needed (such as provision of course materials on cassette) could at least be considered.

As well as improving access to enable people with disabilities to participate in theological education, it is important to communicate the invitation to pursue such studies to individuals who might be interested, and to assist those who do register for courses with sponsorship or other forms of practical support. Parishes could undertake to offer this to their disabled members.

There are also courses in theology and ministry provided by other Christian denominations which may be of interest to people with disabilities, and which may be more accessible, either geographically or in other ways.

## **Formation for Priestly Ministry**

The question of access to priestly formation has already been discussed (see p.48-49), but there are several other important ways in which priestly formation can play a part in enabling the Church to become more inclusive of people with disabilities:

In relevant areas of study of doctrine, such as what it means to say that each person is made in God's image, the implications for people with disabilities and for the Church could be explored.

- In moral theology, the implications of the principles the Church holds regarding the dignity of human life can be related to the legal, social, educational and ecclesial experience of people with disabilities.
- In pastoral formation, all students could be offered opportunities to learn about disability issues and meet people with disabilities, possibly through placements in ministry to people with special needs in parish and diocesan settings as well as in specialised communities. Other pastoral courses on matters such as bereavement could pay particular attention to how people with disabilities and their families and carers are affected (whether it be the disabled person, another family member or a carer who dies).
- Particular priority could be given in liturgical formation to educating students to be aware of how to celebrate liturgy in a way that makes it accessible to, and inclusive of, all people with disabilities, including those with dementia.
- Students should be actively encouraged to improve their communication skills, whether this involves learning basic sign language, enunciation, or how to preach or talk more effectively in the presence of people with disabilities.

Whilst it is important to cover these issues in the formal curriculum of priestly formation, it is even more important that seminarians integrate within themselves, as part of their own growth to maturity, a deep respect for those who are different in any way. Learning to accept and value people with disabilities is one avenue through which the deep motivation for pastoral ministry grows and is expressed. It is part of what Pastores Dabo Vobis calls 'the fundamentally relational dimension of priestly identity'. Students for priesthood who are disabled have special gifts and sensitivities to offer which help others to grow in awareness on a daily basis. As formation progresses, some students may demonstrate a particular calling and gifts for work with people with disabilities.

## **Access and Inclusion: DIOCESAN LIFE**

Let the lay faithful continually foster a feeling for their own diocese, of which the parish is a kind of cell, and be always ready at their bishops' invitation to participate in diocesan projects...lay people should not limit their co-operation to the parochial or diocesan boundaries, but strive to extend it to interparochial, interdiocesan, national and international fields... (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 10)

Episcopal Conferences are called to evaluate the most opportune way of developing the consultation and the collaboration of the lay faithful, women and men, at a national or regional level, so that they may consider well the problems they share and manifest better the communion of the whole Church.

*(Christifideles Laici 25)*

Through baptism, Catholics belong to the whole Catholic Church throughout the world. Most of the time, members of the Church live and express their belonging in a local parish, but there are also many diocesan pastoral activities which enable a fuller experience of what it means to be part of the whole Church. In Catholic teaching, the basic expression of the Church is the whole diocese, the people gathered around the bishop, who is the sign of unity. If this unity is to include all members of the Church, people with disabilities must be visibly included at diocesan level as well as in parishes and schools.

How can a diocese ensure that people with disabilities participate fully in diocesan life? The goal must be to make all diocesan activities accessible to people with disabilities, and to make diocesan structures as inclusive as possible. This is a shared responsibility.

Each diocese will respond to the needs and aspirations of its disabled members in different ways, according to the pastoral structures already in place and the resources available. The variety of ways in which dioceses provide services to people with disabilities has already been noted.

Whilst ensuring access and inclusion must be a shared responsibility, and one in which people with disabilities express what they need and how they wish to participate, it is particularly helpful if the diocese can appoint an adviser or advocate who will assist diocesan agencies and committees, as well as parishes and schools, to pursue this goal.

Even if there is a diocesan special needs adviser, the task of developing greater access and participation should be shared by all. Those who hold diocesan responsibilities as advisers and officers of its various agencies and councils can obviously play a vital role in ensuring that this task is held as a continual priority.

A diocese that has extensively developed access and inclusion for people with disabilities will have taken some or all of the following steps:

- The bishop will give priority to events which celebrate, affirm and include people with disabilities, and will show his commitment to making the diocese inclusive in whatever ways he can: when a bishop uses sign language even for a single prayer or a brief message at the homily; when he welcomes the assistance of liturgical ministers with disabilities; when he acknowledges the voice of people with disabilities in his teaching and preaching: all these speak powerfully about what it means to be an inclusive Church.
- Diocesan pastoral structures, such as diocesan pastoral councils or assemblies, and diocesan commissions for areas such as liturgy, ecumenism and justice and peace,

will all have among their members people with disabilities. For pastoral councils, there will be representation from different experiences of disability. Commissions will seek out disabled people with relevant interest and commitment and propose them as members.

- The diocesan care agency, where one exists, will advise and encourage parishes in a number of ways, which might include:
  - developing and monitoring practical aspects of accessibility such as the provision of ramps, loop systems etc.
  - training sign language interpreters.
- developing support groups for parents of children with disabilities and assisting them in advocacy in relation to statutory services and rights for people with disabilities.
- providing support for the carers of the elderly with dementia.
- providing a respite care service so that families and carers of people with disabilities can have rest and renewal.
- The diocese will have an equal opportunities policy for employment at diocesan level and the policy will explicitly include people with disabilities.
- There might have been a survey to discover the institutions, services and agencies for people with disabilities in the area covered by the diocese, such as special schools and centres for people with hearing impairment.
- There will have been an audit of the accessibility of diocesan buildings in which pastoral meetings take place, such as pastoral centres, and those which they may need to visit, such as diocesan offices.
- The diocese will employ architects who, in addition to ensuring that buildings comply with the requirements of appropriate legislation, will also take account of the specific needs of people with disabilities when, for example, designing the lighting system for a new parish or diocesan building.
- The diocesan directory will include information about access and services at diocesan and parish level. Relevant information will be made available in Braille and on cassette and in large print format.
- There will be good links between any Catholic or Christian institutions serving people with disabilities in the diocese, such as a Catholic special school, or a L'Arche community home, and their neighbouring parishes.
- Diocesan advisers for schools and parish and adult education will have explored ways of providing appropriate catechesis and formation for people with disabilities. Ways they can do this include:
  - arranging diocesan courses for catechists who will work with people with disabilities.
  - including disability awareness education as an element in other courses for catechists.

- ensuring that information about courses and resources reaches people with disabilities.
  - advising on suitable catechetical resources which parishes can use with people with learning disabilities.
  - supporting catechists who work with people with disabilities and providing occasional opportunities for evaluation and renewal.
  - advising priests, catechists and parents with regard to people with disabilities and reception of the sacraments, and setting out guidelines if this seems helpful. co-ordinating opportunities for reflection on ways in which pupils, teachers and governors with disabilities are involved in the life and mission of Catholic schools and colleges.
- The diocesan liturgy commission will have provided occasional workshops or training events to assist priests, deacons and other parish liturgy people to explore how to adapt liturgy to enable greater participation of people with disabilities.

There will be many other ways that access and inclusion of people with disabilities can be encouraged at diocesan level. As people with disabilities become involved in diocesan responsibilities, they will be able to propose further steps that can be taken.

## **PART 3: RESOURCES FOR CHANGE**

### **An Audit of Local Church Life**

This Audit has been adapted from materials developed by Church Action on Disability and the material is used with permission. A fuller version of the Audit is available from CHAD, who also produce an Access Pack, which gives hard information about access requirements.

#### **Purpose of this Audit**

The purpose of this audit is to help your church look at how open it is to people with disabilities. It is for your use. The church may want to ask others to help it look at the results and what action it can take to improve access, but it is not an exam to be passed or failed. You may also want to add categories of activity or even list all the parish organisations and ministries separately under the first question.

Perhaps the best way for those who are new to the idea is to think of what people need if they are going to share in the life of the church - and what prevents those needs being met.

The barriers are not just those linked to physical access, such as steps and narrow doors, though they are important. Attitudes are also a barrier if people with disabilities are regarded as 'those whom the church serves' rather than people who want to be fully involved in the life of the church.

#### **Scope of the Audit**

The audit consists of a number of questions. Some relate to the buildings and other facilities, some to activities and those who participate in them. Through the questions, it is hoped to establish three things:

- Are there any 'barriers' which prevent people with disabilities from getting into the buildings and moving about once they are inside?
- Are there any 'barriers' which prevent people with disabilities from participating as they wish in liturgy and other parish activities?
- Are there any 'barriers' which prevent people with disabilities from participating in any ministry, task or role to which God is calling them?



Are any of the following involved in:	Worship		Lay Ministry		Other Activities	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
People who use wheelchairs						
People with other mobility / disabilities						
People with hearing impairment						
People with visual impairment						
People with learning difficulties						
People with other difficulties ( <i>Please list</i> )						

If further information is needed, it can be obtained from the sources listed in the next section of this report. The audit focuses on church life and church buildings, but the church may also need to consider its responsibility in the community. Is there a need to look at access there, and, if so, how should the church go about it?

**A. Persons to be considered**

**B. Parish Activities**

	Yes	No
Do any of the people mentioned above hold position of responsibility in the parish and/or its organisation?		
Does the parish arrange any special services and/or activities for people with disabilities?		
Is there a transport and/or escort scheme to assist those who have difficulty in getting to parish buildings? If Yes, does it cover all activities?		
Are there any special arrangements to enable those with disabilities to participate fully in the life of the Church, such as special liturgies / catechesis / sacramental preparation?		
Has attention been given to the needs of those with learning difficulties within the service / within the Sunday School/RCIA / within other activities?		

	Yes	No
Are main access route floors covered in a way which would help those with sight problems identify changes of direction, level, junctions of corridors, doorways etc?		
If there is more than one floor in the building, is a lift or stair lift provided?		
Are parking spaces reserved in any church car park for those with mobility problems?  If Yes, are they clearly marked?		
Are hand rails fitted by flights of steps?		
Are all access routes (corridors, doors etc) wide enough for people using wheelchairs?		
Do you have ramps for all stepped areas - both those leading into the church and internally in all?		
Are floor surfaces even?		
Would any floor coverings present problems to those using wheelchairs?  If Yes, are any kerbs between the parking area and the buildings ramped?		
Are there places within the general congregation area where people using wheelchairs can sit?		
Can a guide dog be somewhere safe and comfortable next to its owner?		

**C. Physical Access**

**D. Enhancing participation**

	Yes	No
Does any sound system in the buildings provide good, clear sound with adequate voice levels?		

Is an induction loop fitted for hearing aid users?		
If Yes, is there a microphone input into the loop system from the choir?		
If Yes, are the altar and sanctuary included within the loop?		
Is anyone available to provide signed interpretation? If so, does s/he cover all activities?		
If there is no signing available, does someone know the nearest church which offers the facility?		
Is the church well lit?		
Can the face of the preacher/speaker/reader be seen clearly from all areas of the church/room to aid lip-reading?		
If not, are areas which do give a clear view clearly marked?		
Are hymn numbers clearly obvious to everyone in the congregation?		
Are bibles/service books/notices/hymnbooks and sheets/other leaflets and magazines available in large print and braille and/or on tape?		
Are copies of the homily and pastoral letters made available, even just a synopsis, for those who need them?		

**E. Other considerations**

	Yes	No
Are facilities for people with disabilities clearly indicated somewhere which is visible from the road and in the entrance?		
Is the parish aware of local groups and centres which support and/or offer facilities to people with disabilities?		
If Yes, does it support such groups or centres?		
Does the parish offer any support for the parents/carers of people with disabilities?		

## **AGENCIES THAT PROVIDE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

For further information about the Church and people with disabilities, including resource material, book lists and study material, contact:

**CHAD (Church Action on Disability)**

Address: 50 Scrutton Street, LONDON EC2A 4PH Tel: 0171 452 2085

**A CAUSE FOR CONCERN**

Address: 10 Eaton Place, READING, Berkshire, RG1 7NG Tel: 01734 508781

For further information about adaptations and equipment for people with disabilities, contact:

**THE DISABLED LIVING FOUNDATION**

Address: 380/384 Harrow Road, LONDON W9 2HU Tel: 0171 289 6111

**ACCESS COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND**

Address: Unit 12, City Forum, 250 City Road, LONDON EC1V 8AF Tel: 0171 250 0008

Minicom: 0171 250 4119

For further information about rights and benefits for people with disabilities, including a Disability Rights Handbook, contact:

**DISABILITY ALLIANCE**

Address: 88-94 Wentworth Street, LONDON E1 7SA Tel: 0171 247 8776

Fax: 0171 247 8765

For further information and resources about physical disabilities and organisations that work with and for physically disabled people, contact:

**RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation)** Address: Unit 12, City Forum, 250 City Road, LONDON EC1V 8AF Tel: 0171 250 3222

Minicom: 0171 250 4119

Fax: 0171 250 0212

**SCOPE (for People with Cerebral Palsy)** Address: 6 Market Road, LONDON N7 9PW

Tel: 0171 619 7100

Minicom: 0171 619 7332

Fax: 0171 619 7399

For further information and resources about learning difficulties and organisations that work with and for people with learning difficulties contact:

**MENCAP (Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults)** Address: 123 Golden Lane, LONDON EC1 0RT

Tel: 0171 454 0454

For further information and resources about sight impairments and organisations that work with and for people with sight impairments contact:

RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind)

Address: 224 Great Portland Street, LONDON W1N 6AA Tel: 0171 388 1266

THE TORCH TRUST FOR THE BLIND

Address: Torch House, Hallaton, Market Harborough, LEICESTER LE16 8UJ Tel: 01858 555301

For information about resources and activities within Catholic settings for people with sight impairments, including cassette lending library and talking newspaper, contact:

ABC (Association of Blind Catholics)

Address: St Pius X Presbytery, Chantry Close, MIDDLESBROUGH TS3 7LZ Tel: 01642 314305

ST CECILIA'S GUILD FOR THE BLIND

Address: St Joseph's, Watford Way, Hendon, LONDON NW4 4TY Tel: 0181 202 5749

For further information and resources about hearing impairments and organisations that work with and for people with hearing impairments contact:

RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People)

Address: 19/23 Featherstone Street, LONDON EC1Y 8SL Tel: 0171 296 8000

NATIONAL DEAF CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

Address: 15 Dufferin Street, LONDON EC1Y 8PS Tel: 0171 250 0123

Fax: 0171 251 5020

For information about resources and activities within Catholic settings for deaf and hard of hearing people, including catechetical materials, contact:

CATHOLIC DEAF ASSOCIATION

Address: Hensy House, Sudell Street, MANCHESTER M4 4JF Tel: 0161 834 8828

Minicom: 0161 834 8828

Fax: 0161 833 3674

ST JOHN'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

Address: Boston Spa, WERTHERBY LS23 6DF Tel: 01937 842144

Fax: 01937 541471

For further information and resources about people with dual sensory loss of deaf-blindness, contact:

SENSE (National Deaf-Blind & Rubella Association)

Address: 11-13 Clifton Terrace, Finsbury Park, LONDON N4 3SR Tel: 0171 272 7774

Minicom: 0171 272 9648

Fax: 0171 272 6012

#### NATIONAL DEAFBLIND LEAGUE

Address: 18 Rainbow Court, Paston Ridings, PETERBOROUGH PE4 7UP Tel: 01733 573511  
Fax: 01733 325353

For further information and resources about mental illness and organisations that work with and for people with mental illness, contact:

#### MIND (The Mental Health Charity)

Address: Granta House, 15-19 Broadway, LONDON E15 4BQ Tel: 0181 519 2122  
London Info Line: 0181 522 1728  
Outside London: 0345 660163

#### ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE SOCIETY

Address: 10 Greencoat Place, LONDON SW1P 1PH Tel: 0171 306 0606  
Fax: 0171 306 0808

#### CCOA (Christian Council on Ageing)

Address: Dementia Working Group, c/o 8 St Robert's Gardens, KNARESBOROUGH, North Yorkshire HG5 8EH

For further information and resources about carers and families and organisations that work with carers and families, contact:

#### CARERS' NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Address: 20-25 Glasshouse Yard, LONDON EC1A 4JS Tel: 0171 490 8818  
Advice: 0171 490 8898

#### CONTACT A FAMILY

Address: 170 Tottenham Court Road, LONDON W1 0HA Tel: 0171 383 3555

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE SOCIETY [See section on mental health above]

#### WINGED FELLOWSHIP TRUST

Address: Andrew Billington, 20-32 Pentonville Road, LONDON N1 9XD Tel: 0171 833 2594  
Fax: 0171 278 0370

For information about local advice centres run by people with direct experience of disability, contact:

#### DIAL UK

Address: St Catherine's Hospital, Tickhill Road, DONCASTER DN4 8QN Tel: 01302 310123  
Fax: 01302 310404

For information relating to driving, contact:

DISABLED DRIVERS' ASSOCIATION

Address: Ashwell Thorpe, NORWICH NR16 1EX

Tel: 01508 489449

Fax: 01508 488173

PUBLICATIONS

Guidelines on Equal Opportunities Policy and Practice for Roman Catholic Institutions and Organisations, Department for Christian Citizenship and Responsibility, Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 1987

A Struggle for Excellence: Catholic Secondary Schools in Urban Priority Areas, Department for Catholic Education and Formation, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1997

Differentiation: A Catholic Perspective, Catholic Education Service, 1997

Christian Marriage and Sexual Relationships of Disabled People, Social Welfare Committee, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1989 [published by CTS in 1990 (£415) and currently under revision]

The Call to Holiness: The Way of the Learning Disabled, Joseph McClorry, Tau Publications, 3 Hemlock Close, Liverpool  
L12 OAX

The Church among Deaf People, A Report prepared by a Working Party of the Committee for Ministry among Deaf People, Advisory Board of Ministry. Church House Publishing.

The Disabled in Church, Nigel Dees RIBA, Article in Liturgy, Vol 15, No 4, April-May 1991

British Journal of Theological Education, Vol 8 No 2, Summer 1996 (All the articles address disability issues). Available from Tim Jones (BJTE) Manchester Christian Institute, Luther King House, Brighton Grove, Rusholme, Manchester M14 5JP.

Access Guide to Retreats: a guide to the facilities available for people with all kinds of physical disability (A survey of 94 Retreat Centres). Available from: Sr Kate Coombes, 3 Blakesley Avenue, London W5 2ND.

All People: Disability and Today's Church, Quarterly magazine produced by CHAD

Travelling Together: Valuing People with Learning Disabilities Travelling Together: Valuing Volunteers

Travelling Together Towards Community Care Travelling Together Towards Mental Health

Church in Society Publications, Trinity House, 4 Chapel Court, Borough High Street, London SE1 1HW

Some Diocesan Publications:

We are One People – Arundel and Brighton

Open for All? - Lancaster



## **APPENDIX**

### *People who have helped produce this report*

Special mention must be made of Mr Malcolm Bain (formerly the Catholic Education Service National Officer for Special Educational Needs) and Ms Pat Jones (formerly Assistant General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference) for their work on successive drafts of the document. In addition to the members of the Department for Catholic Education and Formation, the Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship, and the Department for Christian Life and Worship, the following are thanked for their particular contribution

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*The views expressed in this document are not particular to any of the individuals named.*