

St
Martin
in
the
Fields



Something Worth Sharing

Hospitality is not an optional extra in the Christian life.

It is non-negotiable. And yet being hospitable requires us to do something risky. It obliges us to go beyond the familiar. Jesus puts it this way:

‘But when you give a banquet, invite those who are poor. Also invite those who can’t see or walk. Then you will be blessed. Your guests can’t pay you back. But you will be paid back when those who are right with God rise from the dead.’
Luke 14:13-14

Jesus calls us to step into the unknown and welcome others. Their stories may be very different from our stories; their perspectives very different from our perspectives. Yet their place at the table is essential. We are to seek to extend radical hospitality because God has extended radical hospitality to us. We love the outsider because we were the outsider.

Working out how to welcome disabled people well in our corporate life is just one example of this and we all need help. The Something Worth Sharing conference, hosted by St Martin-in-the-Fields, was an opportunity to learn by listening to the voices of those with a disability. I am very grateful that the speakers have taken the time to share some of their insights in this short booklet.

Their insights encourage us to reflect on how we do theology, for we may be looking in the wrong place for expertise. Many wanted to sideline Bartimaeus, but his spiritual insights were actually the most astute. They inspire us to think about our singing, which can sometimes alienate rather than celebrate our differences. They prompt us to revisit how we communicate, to recognise the varied ways that people process information. Above all, we are encouraged to be creative about how we can listen well and apply solutions.

This booklet is based on our 2018 conference on disability & church, a partnership between St Martin-in-the-Fields and Inclusive Church.



All of this takes courage. It takes courage to expose ourselves to criticism. It takes courage to risk getting it wrong. Perhaps most of all, it takes courage to recognise our own weakness and look to the Lord for strength. I hope that this booklet, which combines personal experience and practical ideas, will help to resource us as we seek to do this.

**The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE
Bishop of London**

Text above the line is from the speakers; below are comments from delegates and the wider conference community. Good ideas are worth sharing.

Introduction

It's easy to take what we know for granted. We forget that our 'normal' may have been honed by particular experience, or be the fruit of knowledge developed over many years. To realise that what we have is worth sharing.

Over the last seven years our conferences have promised 'disabled people gather to resource each other and the church'. And every year at least one person has gone home disappointed. 'But you didn't give me any resources,' they say on the feedback form. 'Where are the handouts?'

Yet there are serious concerns behind their complaint. As others have told us, 'This once a year is wonderful but where I live it's really hard.' 'I want to be part of church but I can't do it the usual way so I can't do it at all.' 'I'm told I'm being demanding – I want to challenge this but don't know where to start.' 'How on earth do we change the church?'

Looking around the table at a conference planning meeting, we realised that we were taking our own normal for granted. Since 2012 we've gathered and been resourced by each other and by the many delegates and speakers who have joined us. It is our duty and our joy to share what we know - about access and language, communication and structure, about getting in and joining in. We hope it may enable others to unlock gates and open gifts - because we all have something worth sharing.

Fiona MacMillan



“ My world cracked open and life broke through.

Access

Church: What are we accessing?

What do we mean by accessibility? Do our thoughts turn to wheelchairs and ramps? What about a hearing loop, or braille? Certainly these and other physical considerations are important. But what is access for?

Access in church communities is about enabling people of all kinds to reach a goal. To participate, able to bring to God and community all that they can offer. Whether that is by prayer, friendship, worship, music, serving, singing, bell ringing, management skills or leadership.

Access to faith is about access to God, within the fellowship and love of those in church. It's about access to Communion, for some, that sharing of bread and wine amongst fellow Christians. Each giving, sharing, participating, including, welcoming, all in different but equally vital ways. All are part of the one body of Christ. It is about shared goals, shared vision, shared trust. Recognising Jesus in each and every person. Recognising that everyone is a fellow follower of Christ. Enabling disabled and neurodivergent people to feel safe, and to be leaders, and includers.

Some disabled and neurodivergent people are placed in a building, and that's the end of the story. Theirs may be that lonely experience of sitting, friendless and unspoken-to, week after week. Anxious about which lonely place to occupy. A cold pew, in a cold church, being given the 'cold shoulder'. As far from the warm love of Jesus as one can get. I'll say of course that some people and some churches are fantastic. Others, though, have some catching up to do.

For a few, fear can be a big factor, or a lack of understanding. Miscommunication is another factor, especially when autistic and non-autistic people attempt to communicate. As new research shows, both groups speak different social languages, so each may think the other party is 'rude', when in fact it is a difference.

Jesus instructed that we have disabled people at the banquet, as equal partners in that feast. He went outside, to them. He went to their homes, to their marketplaces. If they could not get in to listen to him, people broke the building to let them in. His message was that powerful. That captivating. That liberating.

“ We need to move on from welcoming disabled people as an act of grace and see them as whole people with as much right to be there as anyone else.



So, how do we respond, when we are given the honour of considering access? Do we realise that this is missional? That this is something at the very heart of that body of Christ?

We are called to respond with love, and with inclusion. With fellowship and friendship. With shared journeying, and shared learning. We listen. We learn. We acknowledge our failings of the past, and are prepared to begin anew. We respect those whose journey to that pew, that altar, that meeting may have been one of pain, of fear, of loneliness. Those are things that will not just disappear. Those are things that must be held in listening, in love and safety, in building trust and confidence anew.

And then, together, we can move with confidence to share all that is to come in heaven.

Ann Memmott

“ This is not just about access but also opportunity... and the need for a disabled leadership that can minister through lived experience to the whole church the richness and variety that is God's design for humanity.

Resources

- Jean Vanier *We Need Each Other: Responding to God's Call to Live Together* (Paraclete Press, 2018)
- Shelly Christensen *From Longing to Belonging: A Practical Guide to Including People with Disabilities and Mental Health Conditions in Your Faith*, by Shelly Christensen (Inclusion Innovations, 2018)
- The Inclusive Church Resource books *Disability and Mental Health* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2014)
- Sheila Hollins *Going to Church: Wordless Book for those with Learning Disability* (Books Beyond Words, 2017)
- Andy J. Johnson (editor) et al *Religion, Disability, and Interpersonal Violence* (Springer, 2017)
- <https://includedbygrace.wordpress.com/>
- <http://www.allbelong.co.uk/>
- <https://www.throughtheroof.org/>
- <http://www.torchtrust.org/>
- <https://annsautism.blogspot.com/2018/09/autistic-and-trying-to-find-faith.html>



We need to encourage all people to participate and to make that possible even when it might appear to be difficult.

Theology

What is practical about being theological?

What is theological about being practical?

I don't really like the term practical theology, because for me, all theology is practical. To employ the term practical theology is to suggest two things that in my view are mistaken. The first is that theology is abstract and arcane, and that practical theology is the part that brings it down to earth. The second is that there's a real thing called theology and that we need to create one branch of it that's practical for the people who are a bit slow or impatient and want to see what the end product is, but that's not the real part, that's just a concession to those who can't stay with the real business of theology.

Beyond those formal difficulties there's a problem at the epicentre of the Christian faith. The word became flesh. Jesus is material, practical. Jesus embodied God's primordial commitment never to be except to be with us. Henceforth there can be no talk of God as essentially abstract, distant or aloof: God is among us, and in Jesus God becomes as practical and material as we could possibly imagine. For Christians, all theology is reflection on this fact, and on the consequences of it in Jesus' death and resurrection and the sending of the Spirit. There cannot be any theology that's not practical.

Since around 1970 the term practical theology has come to mean a theology that presupposes prior engagement or commitment. For liberation theologians, theology is critical reflection on action. They assume that a Christian absolutely has to be committed to the struggle for liberation. Theology is then reflection on that engagement, including social and economic critiques of conventional attitudes to injustice.

This was a new way of doing theology that arose from a new understanding of the purpose of theology. Rather than seeking to understand the ways of God, theology was now primarily about seeking to refine the engagement of human beings. It didn't mean that liberation theologians had given up on the otherness and holiness of God. It just meant that they had decisively turned away from the notion of theology as a leisured pursuit of meditation and contemplation in the face of a world of suffering, and they had come to see the duty of theologians either to be poor or to see



the world and God from the perspective of the poor – what's sometimes called theology from the underside of history.

It's not hard to see how such an approach migrates to the field of disability. The three obvious distinctives about disability are first that the diversity within the community of the disabled is immense, second that the danger that the disabled will be defined by what they are not is greater than for other social locations, and third that, unlike for example race, being disabled for many is not a lifelong condition but may be something that emerges at a certain point in life. Notwithstanding these characteristics, theology of disability shares the basic assumption of contextual theology that privileges the perspective of the disadvantaged person and regards that person as having a privileged view of God. Just as the most fully revelatory moments in the life of Christ are when as a newborn infant he was constrained by swaddling clothes and as a dying adult he was tortured by spread-eagled, nailed hands, so those who experience constraint in their physical or mental capacities may see their perspective as nearer to the experience of Christ than that of those who don't experience such constraints.

In summary practical theology means a commitment to three things: reflection as a second step after sacrificial action; a commitment to prioritise the perspective of the oppressed, particularly their perspective on God; and an inclination to see how these two commitments translate into the culture, language, tradition, stories and practices of a community.

Sam Wells

“ There's a value and a strength in vulnerability.

“ We in our brokenness are still made in God's image.

Resources

- Samuel Wells and Ben Quash with Rebekah Eklund *Introducing Christian Ethics* Second edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017) ch 6
- George A. Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK 1984)
- John Swinton, *Who is the God We Worship? Theologies of Disability; Challenges and New Possibilities* https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/content-images/Who_is_the_God_We_Worship.pdf
- Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco: Baylor University Press 2007)
- Stanley Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1996).
- Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008)
- Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (New York: Orbis 1988)



How to honour the weakness that lies within you?

Language

The Language of Liturgy

New centuries need new songs and stories, to express new values. Times change and attitudes with them. One of the problems for our worship is hard-backed hymn books and liturgy books that are costly to replace, as well as a guarding of what may be an out-of-date tradition. Past views can still be found; many are from the nineteenth century when the segregation of disabled people increased as the workforce had to be more physically uniform to perform routine factory operations.

Disabled people came to be viewed as ‘worthy poor’, as opposed to work-shy ‘unworthy poor’, and given Poor Law Relief (a place in the Workhouse or money from public funds). Disabled people also became more and more dependent on the medical profession for cures, treatments and benefits and were shut away. Separate special schools and day-centres were set up that denied disabled and non-disabled people the day-to-day experience of living and growing up together. In some hymns, these values are combined with scriptural passages such as Isaiah 35 v5-6:

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer and the mute tongue will shout for joy.

We see the legacy of this in Charles Wesley, writing in 1739:

Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb,
Your loosen’d tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come,
And leap, ye lame, for joy.

John Hull pointed out at a conference session in St Martin’s that in Amazing Grace ‘Was blind, but now I see’ can and should be changed to ‘Was bound, but now am free’. New hymns are emerging, but it is always difficult to get them into common use; some are in the references below. For example, Fred Kaan’s For the Healing of the Nations contains the superb verse:

“ Disabled people are forever linked with the middle phase of the Biblical narrative... all too easily they risk forever being stuck in the Fall, with sin, punishment, guilt and suffering.



All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned:
pride of status, race or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life’s brief span.¹

We need to work hard at a change of attitudes: ‘[It may] involve learning new skills and expanding the meaning of concepts, often “unlearning” what was formerly believed to be true.’²

This can be done through the arts (like hymn singing): ‘Through performance, communities are finding ways of seeking truth and also recognizing its multiple faces.’³

This may involve developing new forms of loving and respect for difference: “Love” understood as a technology for social transformation.’⁴

So please get writing and searching for the new hymns that will effect this transformation as Christians embrace new ways of loving.

June Boyce-Tillman

“ The projection onto God of the able-bodied human life is so all-pervasive that the able-bodied don’t notice.

Resources

- Bauerschmidt, Fritz (2018), *Wrestling with Words: Inclusive Language and the Difficulties of Prayer* <http://www.praytellblog.com/index.php/2018/07/20/wrestling-with-words-inclusive-language-and-the-difficulties-of-prayer/>
- Berry, Jan and Pratt, Andrew eds. (2017), *Hymns of Hope and Healing – Words and music to refresh the church’s ministry of healing*, London: Stainer and Bell
- Boyce-Tillman, June (2006), *A Rainbow to Heaven*, London: Stainer and Bell.
- Boyce-Tillman, June (2017), *Liberating language and concepts of the divine in contemporary hymnody* *Verbum et Ecclesia* Vol 38, No 2 (2017), 9 pages, Nov. <<https://verbumetecclesia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/1614/3344>>
- Disability ministries committee of the United Methodist church, *Hymns for Disability Awareness* <https://www.umdisministries.org/dasunday/dahymn.html>
- Duck, Ruth C. (1995) *Finding Words for Worship: A Guide for Leaders* Nashville: Westminster John Knox Press
- Government website (2014), *Inclusive language: words to use and avoid when writing about disability* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/inclusive-language-words-to-use-and-avoid-when-writing-about-disability>
- Inclusive church, *Hymns and Songs* <https://www.inclusive-church.org/resources/hymns-and-songs-old>
- Murray, Shirley Erena (1996), *Every Day in your spirit*, US: Hope Publications.
- Ward, Hannah and Wild, Jennifer (eds) (1995a), *Human Rites*, London: Mowbrays
- Wren, Brian (1989), *What language can I borrow?* London: SCM Press.

Footnotes

¹@Hope publishing

²Cohen, Cynthia, (2007) *Music: A Universal Language?* Chapter 2 in Urbain, Olivier, *Music and Conflict transformation: Harmonies and Dissonances in Geopolitics*, London: I. B. Tauris pp 26-39 p31

³Cohen, Cynthia (2008), *Acting Together on the World Stage: Performance and Peacebuilding in Global Perspective*. Paper delivered at International Peace Research Association Conference in Leuven, Belgium, July 2008. p3

⁴Sandoval, Chela, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) p22



Taking this seriously is an integral part of building the kingdom.



Structures

Structures

Understanding and engaging with church structures can feel very lonely as a disabled person or as a priest – or in my case, as both. It's difficult for all of us to understand how things work and how to create change in a parish or community setting, let alone within the wider church. How do we change our church buildings or church communities? How can disabled people minister to others and what might that look like?

My own experience is as a disabled priest in the Church of England and as a Diocesan Disability Adviser. This has given me some insight into ways we can each influence the people and structures of the whole church to make it more responsive to the needs, ideas and ministry of disabled people.

The role of the Diocesan Disability Adviser (DDA) is to advise the Diocesan Bishop in all areas of disability. About two-thirds of dioceses have a DDA – very few are paid posts, and most of us do it non-stipendiary (unpaid) or on top of our regular job. There's a huge breadth of lived experience among advisors including physical conditions, mental health issues and autism. Some are ordained, many are lay people. Most live with conditions, theologise and share their insights. Others have insight from being alongside loved ones and bring this perspective to the role.

All DDAs gather for a day conference every year which gives us a chance to meet and pool resources. It's organised by the National Disability Adviser and is an opportunity to discuss key issues which are particularly pertinent within the church.

DDA roles are more often appointed rather than applied for, and there's no nationally-agreed job description. This means we can define the role ourselves and be responsive to local need and opportunity. But it can also be challenging to know where to begin and how to create a more enabling environment for all God's people.

The way I have defined the role is firstly by modelling it. How can disabled people be inspired to ministry unless they see disabled ministers flourishing? I am also a vocations adviser and mentor disabled people going through the ordination process. Secondly, I am part of a conversation with others seeking to articulate a contemporary theology of disability. When we share our experience and ideas we are able to inform and influence the people around us.



People come before buildings – even Grade 1 listed buildings.



Thirdly, I advise on the Diocesan Advisory Council – the buildings specialists who advise on all church planning. (The Church of England is exempt from planning law and makes its decisions in-house.) It's an important opportunity to inform and to influence people whose decisions can create truly accessible buildings. Our work together has resulted in an understanding beyond physical access into how to make spaces which work for all God's people. It has changed the wider culture of how we engage with disability within the diocese.

What can we do as individuals? We can seek spaces to share our lived experience. Perhaps begin by looking locally or nationally for opportunities to join, to inform, to influence – these can help create changes to our existing structures. Each of us has something worth sharing and our ministry enables the whole church.

Where can a church begin? It is important to speak with and draw in local disabled people, listening to their lived experience of church and of other institutions, learning from mistakes and assumptions previously made, identifying needs and seeking out examples of good practice. This is not just about providing ramps and lifts but enabling disabled people to flourish as part of the whole Body of Christ. It is not them and us, but us.

Tim Goode



It's so refreshing – and challenging – to have communion distributed by disabled people. I think we often view our vicars as invulnerable and sorted. It means we could bring our all to Christ.

Resources

It's a good idea to start by checking what is already out there - in your Diocese, deanery or local area, in other areas or in other denominations. For example:

- The Diocese of Southwark has developed a series of downloadable resources and useful links. These include All One in Christ – a parish resource pack on disability and access, including language, buildings and a theology of disability. <https://southwark.anglican.org/about-us/what/caring-for-our-churches/secular-legislation/disability-access>
- <https://www.london.anglican.org/kb/provision-for-people-with-disabilities/> is a good guide to buildings and legislation and has useful links
- <https://www.bristol.anglican.org/accessibility/> has a quick guide to access audits and a useful collection of links across a wide range of topics
- The Baptist Union have produced a useful short guide <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=111328&view=browser> and
- <https://www.seba-baptist.org.uk/resources.htm> includes resources on mental health, dementia, and disability awareness training for stewards
- The Methodist Church is leading the way among Christian churches in its thinking about equality. The exceptional Equality, Diversity and Inclusion toolkit covers theology, the law and unconscious bias before diving into the detail of disability and other areas. <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/edi-toolkit/>
- Inclusive Church have developed downloadable resources suitable for small group study <https://www.inclusive-church.org/disability>



We need to remove barriers which exclude people.

Communication

Communication - But How?

At Something Worth Sharing I was tasked with speaking about communication. As ever, I found this a bit ironic given that I actually find it really hard to speak. I feel like a strong communicator, but the actual effort of speaking is hard to negotiate.

I have learnt skillfully to adapt and use all of the available means of communication to help shape my message and find my voice. I am fortunate to live in an age where the range of communication tools available is so vast and varied. If we all really have something worth sharing then it would figure that there must be a variety of ways to share.

At every Disability Conference, the planning team try to organise a wide variety of input; with talks from the front, conversations in small groups, times for listening to information and times for clarifying that information through Q&A. There are spaces to go if you feel overwhelmed by the amount of information being shared - silence and reflection are an important part of communication after all.

None of that is a mistake - we've tried carefully to plan different ways of sharing our stories and experiences. Just as we all have different access needs, we also have different communication needs. And we all have different areas of expertise: I have spoken on communication at a previous conference because that is what I know how to do; other people have alternative things that they can bring to the conversation. Ask yourself what voice, what experience, isn't being heard - is it yours? Likewise, my difficulty with speaking for long periods means that my tendency towards brevity has made Twitter a suitable medium rather than, say, creating my own YouTube channel. Just as we have different insights, we have different ways of sharing our knowledge and experience.

We can see this by taking a look at the pages of our Bible. Christians are people of the Word, but even looking through the pages of the scriptures I see the interpretation of "word" to be a pretty loose one. There is poetry, legal writing, historical accounts, correspondence and fantastical apocryphal literature. The sheer diversity of types of communication in the Bible

“ It's about speaking my truth, saying what I know. It's enough.



makes me more comfortable with the idea that God is at work through our very different means of communicating.

Managing communications at a large and busy church has certainly been a learning curve for me in thinking about how we consume information. There is no one way of getting our message across as a church. With everything, I'm having to think about who is consuming each type of information. So with every event I have to think about different streams of communication and tailoring our content to people's needs - posters, emails, an invite on Facebook. It might end up being more work for me but it's widening the pool of people who can be involved in our activities.

Of course I realise that I'm talking about people who can get through the doors of our church. And I know that in itself is limited. Because I know that there are some who can't even make it that far. There are people who because of health or geography cannot make it to one of our events. But through social media, through the archives of conference talks on the Inclusive Church website, even through the very publication of this booklet, we can ensure that those things we have which are worth sharing are shared with as many people as possible and in the widest variety of ways.

Emily Richardson

“ It's not difficult to be inclusive in every sense... We just need the will and the desire to listen to others' experience.

Resources

- IC Disability Website - many recordings of previous talks and presentations mean that it contains a wealth of information <https://www.inclusive-church.org/disability>
- Twitter - Searching hashtags can reveal a wealth of conversation, whether it's related to a particular condition (eg #ChronicPain or #ActuallyAutistic) or wider conversation around faith and disability (eg by following groups like @DisabilityJ or @YouBelong_2019)
- Facebook - Groups on Facebook are a good way to connect with others facing the same issues as you. Check out condition-specific charities as they often have very useful groups with a lot of interesting discussions on a wide range of topics.
- The Liturgists episode "Ableism" is a really well produced introduction to questions surrounding faith and disability. "Embodiment" is also a good episode. <https://theliturgists.com/podcast/> or on any podcast app.
- BBC Ouch - The BBC's online disability platform, with blogs videos and articles from a wide range of voices <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02r6yqw/episodes/player>
- Tara M Owens, *Embracing the Body: Finding God in our Flesh and Bone* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2017). A book exploring the spirituality of embodiment.
- Donald Eadie, *Grain in Winter: Reflections for Saturday People* (Wipf and Stock, 2012) A book of short, powerful reflections on the wilderness of life with chronic illness.
- The work of Henri Nouwen - Nouwen's writing was greatly influenced by his time spent in L'Arche communities. A short daily reflection is available online and always full of wisdom. <https://henrinouwen.org/resources/daily-meditation/>
- Steve Silberman, *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity* (Allen & Unwin, 2015) - A comprehensive, yet very readable, history of neurodiversity and how we can include those who think differently.
- Brene Brown - although not disability-specific, Brown's work, especially in her TED talks and in *Daring Greatly*, speaks powerfully of the importance and necessity of vulnerability in wholehearted living.



People can make a contribution because of their disability,
not in spite of it



Model

Disability Advisory Group: a model worth sharing

Disabled people are often isolated by experience or geography, or treated as a pastoral opportunity or a problem. But opportunities to gather, pool experience and share ideas can create an asset which enriches the whole community.

10 years ago St Martin-in-the-Fields had had a multi-million pound building project, an award-winning design adapted after careful consultation with professional disability advisors. But I still struggled to get in and join in, and I wasn't alone.

In general people who are affected by an issue have good ideas about what would work better. In our case, one of the key stages was simply to ask. At the second open meeting of people struggling to access the building and community, I invited people to say what we struggled with and what we thought would make it better. The answers were wide-ranging and clear. Using everyday language people named their difficult experiences and used their knowledge of the barriers to suggest solutions. We were sharing the insight of lived experience.

This was crucial in challenging the widely-held view that St Martin's was inclusive of everyone - because surely everyone ought to include us? It was also a great tool to open ideas in those of us who were struggling, and to increase understanding within the wider community. It's resulted in the Disability Advisory Group.

The Disability Advisory Group brings together people with insight into physical, sensory, cognitive or mental health issues or neurodiversity, whether from our own lives or from a support, caring or professional role (paid or unpaid). We identify issues and suggest solutions, sharing ideas and the wisdom that grows from living with the knowledge of our own vulnerability.

We currently have 25 members, and around 15 at each meeting. We have open meetings once a term, each for two hours and with a 4 part agenda. The first & most substantive item is often about issues eg advising on the new stewards manual, on priorities for the next year, or completing an access self-audit ahead of an external exercise. We catch up with each other over a bring & share lunch, then share news over pudding – headlines & feedback, forthcoming events & opportunities for involvement.



Our lives challenge the church.



In the second half of the meeting we may have a guest to speak about a new initiative, or to lead us in Lectio Divina as we prepare to share our experience through writing liturgy or leading an informal Eucharist. We also reflect creatively – using images, ideas or open questions – and encourage the wider church community to think more deeply about strength and vulnerability, about needs & gifts, about being created to be as we are. We are something of a salty group: relatively small in number but whose effect has spread across the organisation – and beyond.

St Martin's now has a reputation for doing good work in the area of disability. But we had very simple beginnings. Asking the people directly affected to identify issues, suggest solutions and say what we wanted others to understand.

A Disability Advisory Group is a model which could easily be replicated within a larger church or across a benefice, ecumenically in a local area, in a deanery or across a Diocese. I believe it's a model worth sharing.

Fiona MacMillan

Resources

The Disability Advisory Group is a new model, so perhaps the best resource is to share what we did. It's an audit of sorts, a listening to and learning from people's experience and ideas. We began with dotted lines...

Church

- The thing I find hardest about the environment (Church, buildings, rooms) is...
- The thing that would make it easier for me to be in the environment is...

Services

- The thing I find hardest about services is...
- The thing that would make it easier for me in services is...

Activities & community

- I don't join in as much as I'd like to because...
- The activity I find hardest here is...
- I would join in more activities or groups if it were possible to...

People

- I am disabled (things made harder for me) when people...
- I am enabled (things made easier for me) when people...
- The one thing I would like people to understand is...

Group

- I would like this group to be...
- I would not like this group to be...
- The one thing I hope this group can do is...

Or even more simply, ask yourself - What's going well? What's not going well? What else could we do?



We come with empty hands, intent on sharing
our needs, our wealth – but more: all that we are.
We meet as partners for each other caring,
at one with people lacking voice or power.

We come to learn the courage of creating
a world of justice, hope and human worth,
to practice skills and secrets of translating
our words of faith into the life of earth.

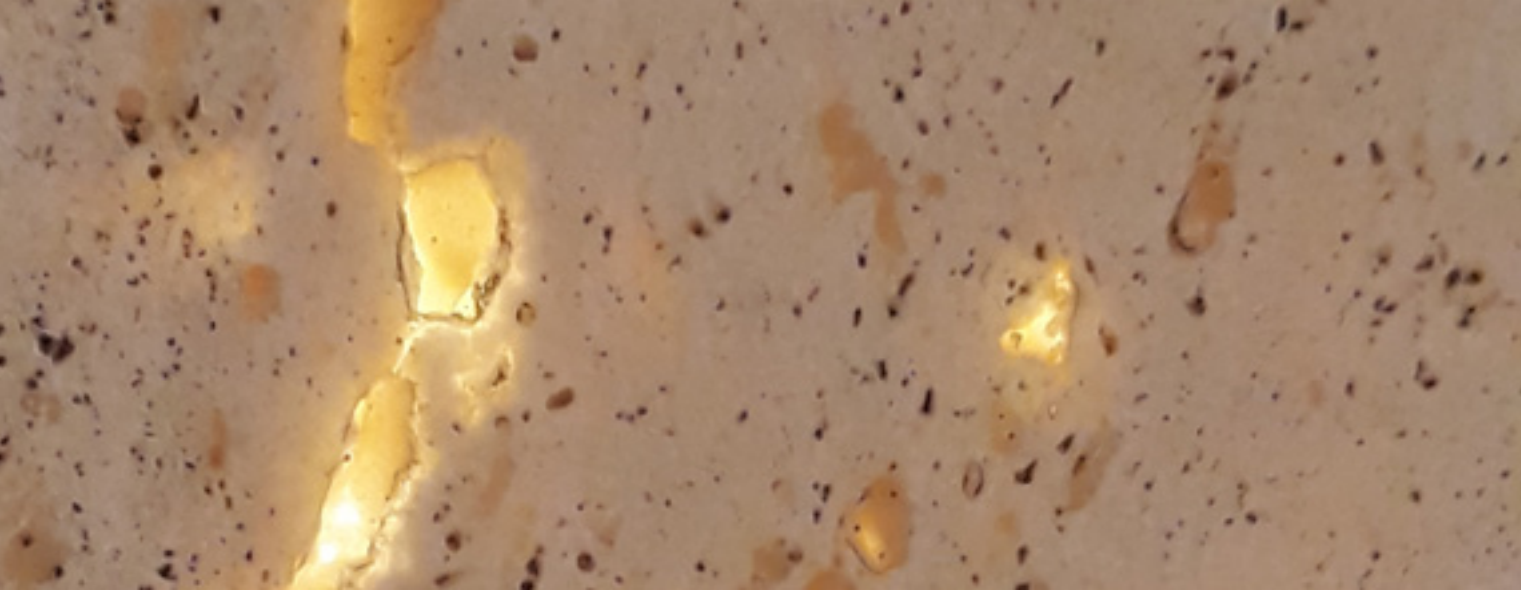
We would be true in sharing our resources,
in freedom eager to receive and give,
be open to the Spirit's gifts and forces,
be broken for the world in which we live.

Then widen, God, our vision and vocation,
our joy in what in Christ you showed and gave;
as still you share your Self with all creation,
help us respond with all we are and have.

Fred Kaan (1929-2009)

“ All people can be included... with time, clear thinking and
working together.

“ Everyone has a vocation. God has given each and every one
of us gifts to use. What gift has God given you?



Authors

Access: **Ann Memmott** is autistic, disabled and the author of the guidelines for autism for the Church of England. She is a national speaker on autistic access, and on the intersection of autism, disability and LGBTQ lives.

Theology: **Sam Wells** is Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields and a widely known broadcaster and author. He is also Visiting Professor of Christian Ethics at King's College London.

Language: **June Boyce-Tillman** is Professor of Applied Music at the University of Winchester and a celebrated hymn writer, composer and priest. She has a particular interest in the relationship between theology, spirituality, healing and the arts.

Structure: **Tim Goode** is rector of St Margaret's Lee and Diocesan Disability Advisor for Southwark. He is a member of the Church of England's General Synod and its Disability Task Group, and a trustee of Inclusive Church

Communication: **Emily Richardson** is a member of Moot, a contemplative community in the City of London, and communications coordinator for a busy church in South-West London. She is generally found on twitter, sharing her passion for inclusion and communication across digital media.

Model: **Fiona MacMillan** is chair of the Disability Advisory Group at St Martin-in-the-Fields, a trustee of Inclusive Church. and leads the conference planning team. She is a member of the Nazareth community.

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shares ideas from our first five years of conferences on disability & church. Material from all the conferences, suggestions for further reading and downloadable copies of the booklets are available from:

www.inclusive-church.org/disability • www.smitf.org

Enquiries: disability@smitf.org





“ The truth I have begun to perceive is that being inclusive hurts – it means taking ourselves out of our comfort zone in a struggle to understand the other... being willing to put ourselves in each others’ hands for good and ill. ”

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