



Some Resources for Equalities/Accessibility Study for the United Reformed Church

from the METHODIST CHURCH

Language and definitions

a. Language

Language use is defined by conventions – words may have different meanings depending on how we choose to use them. The intention in this report is to use language which is generally understood in wider society, is owned by those experiencing discrimination and is connected to our Methodist history.

It is important to be clear about the use of language and to be conscious of its history and context, and that it changes. There is a danger of focusing on words and their meaning to such an extent that we avoid the challenges of confronting and seeking to eliminate the attitudes and actions associated with injustice.

There are three sets of language we could choose to use, although there are pitfalls with each.

- **The language used in Government legislation**
(eg: This is discrimination on the grounds of ... [age etc].)

An advantage of this turn of phrase is that any identity can easily be added (eg: grounds of theology). However this language is closely associated with legal definitions, and is becoming to be associated with discriminatory action, whereas our need is to use language which relates both to attitudes and action. This sort of language is also used in the general context of Equalities and Diversity work, so it is often easy to confuse equalities and diversity with equal opportunities (see definitions of terms below).

- **The ‘-isms’**
(eg: Racism, Sexism)

This language is already part of our Methodist understanding and terminology, and is connected with attitudes and actions. It is also understood in wider society, and is owned by activists connected to the challenging of injustices. However words associated with the ‘-isms’ are not consistent in their meanings – racism and autism are clearly very different concepts. This language can also be very powerful but over- use of it could be seen to diminish its power.

- **[Racial] justice**

An advantage of this is that the phrase has been used in Methodism for many years, becoming part of our culture and heritage. This phrase also indicates that the Church has a distinctive approach to this work. Yet, the parallel phrases are not always easy to come by (e.g. in the areas of sexuality and age). Therefore we would need to speak of racial justice, gender justice, disability justice, challenging homophobia and challenging ageism.

The language used in this report generally seeks to use the third option, although at times the other options may be used for the sake of clarity.

b. Definitions

- **Equalities** is the commitment to treating all people the same, in that one tries to act fairly. This includes challenging racism, sexism, homophobia, disablism and ageism. Within the Methodist Church there is also a desire to challenge discrimination on the grounds of theology. The use of equalities language, in isolation, implies that all people are equal to begin with (ie: that there is a level playing field).
- **Diversity** is used almost as shorthand to note a commitment to acknowledging that all groups have different needs and that we all bring different experiences, and none of us inherently has authority or superiority over another.
- **Equity** is a concept that brings Equalities and Diversity together as it highlights structural imbalances and inequalities: some groups need special assistance, provisions and encouragement. Positive action is one example of this.
- **Equal Opportunities** is the commitment to treat people with fairness, irrespective of status and identities.
- **Racism** is 'allowing prejudice to determine the way power is used to the personal, social or institutional detriment of ethnic minority individuals or communities' (The Methodist Church, Faithful and Equal, 1987).
- **Racial Justice** is a phrase that the Methodist Church has used since the inception of the Racial Justice Committee in 1992.
- **Disabilism** is not yet a word found in a dictionary, although the adjective 'disablist' is present. The term is increasingly being used by disability rights organisations to refer to 'discriminatory, oppressive or abusive behaviour arising from the belief that disabled people are inferior to others' (from SCOPE - the disability organisation in England and Wales whose focus is people with cerebral palsy).
- **Disability** is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in society on an equal level owing to social and environmental barriers. Disability is how society responds to people with impairments; it is not a description of a personal characteristic.
- **Disabled person** is defined by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

A disabled person is not a 'person with a disability' as the person does not own the disability in the way that you might be 'a person with brown hair'. The opposite of disabled is not able-bodied or abled - it is non-disabled or enabled. (Source SCOPE – Time to get equal: language). There has been some discussion within the Methodist Church about using the term 'person with a disability' to show the person comes before the disability, but this is not a phrase that is respected by disability organisations.

- **Homophobia** is 'an extreme and irrational aversion to homosexuality and homosexuals' (Oxford English Dictionary). It derives from the Greek word for same homo, not the Latin word for man (also homo) and therefore can appropriately be used of prejudice against lesbians and gay men. This is the word used by people working in equalities and diversity, and is comparable with the language of racism, sexism etc.
- **Heterosexism** is the assumption that heterosexuality is the only acceptable form of sexual orientation. The term places prejudice against gay people alongside prejudice against people on the grounds of ethnicity or sex. It moves the discussion into one of justice and freedom from oppression.
- **Sexism** is 'prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex' (Oxford English Dictionary).
- **Gender** is a social construction and concept of femaleness or maleness. It is different from sex in that sex relates more to definitions based on parts of the body.

- **Gender Justice** has been used by the Methodist Church since 2000, when the Gender Justice Committee was formed. The phrase is used when possible in this report.
- **Ageism** is 'Stereotyping and prejudice against individuals or groups because of their age' (T. Nelson (ed), *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice against Older Persons*, 2002). Discrimination on the grounds of age is illegal in relation to employment, but not the provision of goods, services and facilities.

District Disability Advisers (DDAs)

Most Methodist Districts now have an appointed District Disability Adviser who helps to raise disability issues within the local church communities. Recently a job description was created in order to set down the main priorities and objectives of what DDAs are hoping to achieve. DDAs are supported in their work through the Pastoral Care Office in the Connexional Team and the Methodist Property Committee who send regular mailings.

See a report about the [Church of England's Disability Advisers' Day](#) which took place on 7th April 2008 from the District Disability Adviser for the Beds, Essex, and Herts District.

Through the Roof (<http://www.throughtheroof.org/>) is a Christian charity working with disabled people in the UK and overseas.

Ministry among Deaf People

Under the Disability Discrimination Act, churches have a responsibility to work to enable Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people to participate in worship and the wider life of the church. This can be done by:

- Installing a loop system AND ENSURING EVERYONE USES IT
- allowing and encouraging people with hearing impairments to sit near the front.
- Good lighting
- Ministers / Preachers facing the congregation
- In meetings, allowing only one person to speak at a time and indicating they are about to speak by putting their hand up
- Whilst it is difficult to do anything about it, it is worth noting that 'wild' moustaches and / or dark glasses both make lip-reading very difficult

The needs of profoundly Deaf people are very particular and are rarely catered for in most churches. They will be able to participate little in any act of worship without BSL, their first language. However, BSL users are only a small minority of the overall number of people with hearing impairments in the UK: 100,000:8,500,000. It is not enough for services to be interpreted into BSL all the time.

Whilst Churches are finding that both funds and human resources are declining, less support is now available for Deaf people.

In most Anglican and Catholic Dioceses in England there is a chaplain among Deaf people. Each of them has various levels of BSL ability. Most of the work they do is with the Deaf Community — i.e.

those who use BSL as their first or preferred language. This is because they are a linguistic and cultural minority and usually find it much more difficult to participate in worship with everyone else. Many of these chaplains will work ecumenically as many Deaf Christians, regardless of denomination, prefer to worship in their first language.

In Scotland, The Church of Scotland has a number of part-time chaplains among Deaf People as do the Roman Catholic Church.

In South Wales, there are some Anglican and RC chaplains while in North Wales, there is a new ecumenical chaplain who works half time with Deaf people paid for by the Diocese of St. Asaph and the Presbyterian Church in Wales.

(The information above was provided by Church Action on Disability—0870-243-0678, Birmingham B14 7Y0)

For useful advice and information about Deaf issues, please contact the following addresses:
Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID), 19-23 Featherstone Street, London,

EC1Y 8SL Tel: 020 7296 8000

- **UK Council on Deafness (UKCOD)** , Westwood Park, London Road, Little Horkeley, Colchester CO6 4BS Tel: 01206 274075

Organizations working with Deaf People

- **Catholic Deaf Association** , St. Joseph's Service to Deaf People, Henesy House, Sudell Street, Collyhurst, Manchester, M4 4JF.
Telephone: 0161 834 8828
- **Committee for Ministry Among Deaf People**, Church House, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3NZ.
Telephone: 020 7898 1424
- **The Deaf Christian Fellowship** An evangelical group who meet for worship in various parts of the country. They may be contacted through: Christian Deaflink UK, The Olive Tree Centre, First Floor, 69, High Street, Rayleigh, Essex, SS6 7EJ.
- **The Christian Interpreters Network**, supported by Signs of God, is a nationwide list of people with signing skills to at least BSL level 3. many of them are also trained interpreters. The list can be made available to churches and organisations requiring interpreters. Signs of God is a training organisation committed to raising the standard of BSL in Christian settings. For information about their workshops and training days, contact the administrator, Gill Behenna, 1 Saxon Way, Bradley Stoke, Bristol BS32 9AR. Tel/fax 01454 202483 E-mail: info@signsofgod.org.uk website: www.signsofgod.org.uk).
- **Visible Communications** is an organisation working to put the Bible onto video in BSL. At present, they are working through Luke's Gospel and have recently produced an animated version of David & Goliath.

from THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

PRESENT CHURCH PRACTICE AND THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT

<http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/extranet/xga/downloads/gareports06missiondisciplesup/pdda.txt>

Other resources available from Church of Scotland website

from THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Offering a welcome for all: church accessibility guidance updated 17 April 2009

A thoroughly updated guide on how to make church buildings as accessible as possible to people with disabilities has been reissued this month.

Widening the eye of the needle helps those responsible for church buildings understand legal principles and the practical steps necessary to comply with all the relevant access and disability-related legislation. The re-publication of the guidance is a timely reminder of the need for churches to consider such issues, particularly if they are planning to reorder their buildings to accommodate more worshippers or extend their use as venues for community services such as art exhibition space or evening classes.

Following a major update to reflect the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, changes to the Building Regulations in 2004 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, the book includes illustrations and a range of forms and checklists to ensure churches are meeting the needs of those who have special needs when attending services and other events. The book includes a pro-forma to assist in conducting a detailed 'access audit' of existing church buildings or plans for a new build or extension.

Writing ten years ago, the then Bishop of Hulme, Rt Revd Colin Scott, wrote in his

introduction: "One of the striking characteristics of the Gospel narratives is Jesus' concern for people with disabilities, but sadly the Church has, in the past, given little attention to their needs... Our responsibility as a Christian community, reinforced by our legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, should make us determined that all members of the community can attend and participate in services easily and with dignity. I hope that this publication will assist congregations and their advisers as they seek to make this possible."

Last month (24 March) the Government and the Church of England published guidelines to help religious groups identify funding and support for faith groups that will enable them to adapt their buildings for community use and build on their capacity to engage at local and regional level.

Janet Gough, Director of the Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division of the Archbishops' Council, comments: "This book is part of a wider jigsaw that will help give local churches the big picture when they are considering reviewing their physical space. The Church is entrusted with some magnificent architectural gems, and we have to strike a delicate balance between protecting that inheritance for future generations while ensuring that churches' physical environments are suitable for the diverse range of activities of the modern Christian life. Ensuring that our buildings are as accessible as possible is an essential consideration as part of reaching that balance."

***Widening the eye of the needle**, priced £16.99 (ISBN 978-07151-4061-1), is available from Christian bookshops*

from THE CENTER FOR RELIGION AND DISABILITY (<http://www.religionanddisability.org>)

Resource Packet: Includes resources to help your community of faith get started with disability education for members, leaders, teachers and others. *Free shipping!* Send check for \$55 U.S. to our address on the "Contact Us" page.

Textbook for theological educators: *Graduate Theological Education and the Human Experience of Disability* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2003). Use this text with any existing course to provide students with a contextual understanding of people with disabilities, theology, and the congregation's ministries.

Also available from The Center for Religion and Disability:

A Place for ALL: A Curriculum Guide for Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Faith Communities. *FREE with your order of one book (below) or the resource packet (above).* Produced and distributed in partnership with Alabama Council for Developmental Disabilities and the Civitan International Research Center (Birmingham).

God Plays Piano, Too! The Spiritual Lives of Children with Disabilities. Webb- Mitchell, Brett. (\$19.95 + S/H)

Unexpected Guests at God's Banquet: Welcoming People with Disabilities Into the Church. Webb-Mitchell, Brett. (\$15.95 + S/H)

Different Members, One Body: Welcoming the Diversity of Abilities in God's Family.

Kutz-Mellem, Sharon (Editor). (\$5.00 + S/H)

Surprising Grace: People, Disabilities, Churches. Presbyterians for Disability Concerns.

15-minute video, ideal for group teaching. (\$5.00 + S/H)

See also **National Organization on Disability** at www.nod.org (American)

BOOKS AND JOURNAL ARTICLES

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