

**APPENDIX T**

**WORKING GROUP ON DISABILITY**

**REPORT 2008**

**Membership**

Miss J McGaffin (Chairperson)  
Mrs JM Bruton  
Mr J Clarke

Mrs M Mann  
Rev Canon WA Murphy  
Mr I Slaine

**1. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Standing Committee in March 2005 established the Working Group on Disability to address issues concerning disability that affect the Church of Ireland and to consider the implications of legislation and proposed legislation on disability in both jurisdictions. The Church of Ireland is periodically invited to comment on consultation documents, white papers and draft legislation. It was envisaged that a working group with expertise in this area would be in a position to prepare considered responses on behalf of the Church.

**2. CHAIRPERSON AND MEMBERSHIP**

The Working Group acknowledges the sound leadership and immense contribution made by the Rev Robin Harris as Chairperson of the working group since its inception in 2005, prior to his resignation from the Working Group in November 2007.

Miss Judith McGaffin was appointed Chairperson in place of the Rev Robin Harris.

Mr Ian Slaine was invited to become a member of the working group, which facilitates the very useful relationship that the Group has with the Board for Social Responsibility (NI).

**3. SUMMARY**

- Audit of access to churches and other buildings
- Training in the dioceses
- Disability Awareness Sunday
- Ministry to deaf people

**4. POLICY STATEMENT**

The challenge for the Church is to be an inclusive Church and to conform to the law in each jurisdiction and to implement a policy to make all aspects of Church life and worship accessible to all. The Working Group accepted a statement determining the Church's policy, which was approved some years ago by the Standing Committee. However, the statement is currently under review by the Working Group in the light of current thinking and practices. The policy statement is as follows:

- The Church of Ireland recognises that each person is entitled to participate fully in the life of the Church;

Standing Committee – Report 2008

- The Church is committed to keeping policies, practices and procedures under review to ensure that people with disabilities are not treated less favourably;
- The Church aims to encourage members, employees and others acting on its behalf to promote practices and attitudes which do not discriminate against people with disabilities.

**5. DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY**

Raising awareness on disability issues continues to be one of the first priorities of the working group. Part of this process has been to designate the third Sunday in November as Disability Awareness Sunday. Disability Awareness Sunday in 2008 will be held on 16 November, which will be the fourth such designated Sunday.

In advance of the event, all parishes will again receive an information pack which will include publicity posters, facts on disability and an evaluation sheet. The continuing support of the Archbishop of Armagh and the diocesan bishops is much appreciated by the Working Group, which has received much encouragement to continue their work from both clergy and lay people.

**6. AUDIT OF ACCESS FACILITIES IN PARISHES**

The working group commissioned an audit of access facilities in all parishes throughout the Church of Ireland and was very encouraged by the excellent response from parishes. The audit followed up on an audit of church buildings carried out in Northern Ireland some years earlier.

The working group is very grateful to those parishes that responded to the questionnaire. The overall response rate was just under 44% and the following table shows the percentage of questionnaires returned for each diocese.

<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Armagh	50	87	57.5
Cashel and Ossory	74	150	49.3
Clogher	29	71	40.8
Connor	56	116	48.3
Cork, Cloyne and Ross	31	74	41.9
Derry and Raphoe	70	121	57.9
Down and Dromore	63	118	53.4
Dublin and Glendalough	48	107	44.9
Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh	23	98	23.5
Limerick, Killaloe and Ardfert	10	66	15.2

Standing Committee – Report 2008

Meath and Kildare	21	59	35.6
Tuam	7	31	22.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>1,098</b>	<b>43.8</b>

A professional analysis of the questionnaires resulted in the production of the *2006 Audit of Disabled Access; Opening Doors*. The Report was referred to the RCB Property Committee. The group is considering the Report and, based on their deliberations and inputs from the Property Committee, will decide what further action should be taken to encourage parishes to facilitate people with disabilities to fully participate in the life of the Church.

**7. DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING**

Training officers or other appropriate staff from each of the major organisations that have an interest in disability were invited to a seminar on 7 June 2007 in the Dromantine Conference Centre. Twenty-two people attended, representing a number of major voluntary organisations on both sides of the border. Diocesan representatives were also invited to attend, however only six dioceses were represented.

Following the seminar, it is proposed that a training pack for parishes will be produced, in consultation with Disability Action and the Through the Roof organisations. The other organisations that attended the seminar, will be asked to quality assure the training pack.

We recognise that the key to changing attitudes will be training at local level. The implementation of this policy will depend on support from the central committees of the Church.

**8. CHURCH OF IRELAND MINISTRY TO DEAF PEOPLE**

The Working Group is reviewing the needs of deaf people and the wider disabled community and having discussions with the Presbyterian Board for Social Witness concerning ministry to deaf and hearing-impaired people.

**9. INFORMATION ABOUT THE WORKING GROUP**

The working group has an information page on the main Church of Ireland website at [www.ireland.anglican.org](http://www.ireland.anglican.org)