

**APPENDIX D**  
**WORKING GROUP ON DISABILITY**  
**REPORT 2007**

**Membership**

Rev RR Harris (Chairman)  
Mrs JM Bruton  
Mr J Clarke

Mrs M Mann  
Dr J McGaffin  
Rev Canon WA Murphy

**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.

The composition of the group was considered in the light of experience since its inception and it was decided to continue with the present membership and bring in other organisations and consult with people with disabilities when the occasion arises.

**2. SUMMARY**

- Audit of access to church buildings
- Training in the dioceses
- Disability Awareness Sunday

**3. POLICY STATEMENT**

The challenge for the Church is to encourage dioceses and parishes, not only to conform to the law in each jurisdiction, but 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;

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.

**4. 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 a Sunday in November as Disability Awareness Sunday. Subject to confirmation, Disability Awareness Sunday in 2007 will be held on 18 November.

In advance of the event, all parishes will receive an information pack which included publicity posters, facts on disability and an evaluation sheet. The continuing support of 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.

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

The Board for Social Responsibility (NI) carried out an audit and follow-up process of access facilities in the Northern dioceses some years ago. The working group has carried out a similar audit of all parishes throughout the Church of Ireland and is very encouraged by the excellent response from parishes.

A professional analysis of the questionnaires is almost complete and the results will be published shortly. The group will consider the analysis, and based on the results, 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. This applies particularly in the Republic of Ireland where there is no legislation covering access to buildings other than to public buildings.

**6. TRAINING IN THE DIOCESES**

One of the long term objectives of the group is to develop a training pack on disability awareness and arrange for training sessions to be delivered to all dioceses. A training pack already in use by the Board for Social Responsibility in Northern Ireland is based on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and is not appropriate for the Republic of Ireland.

It is planned to consult the training officers in relevant organisations, such as the Mothers' Union, Disability Action, the Equality Commission (NI) and the Equality Authority (RI). The training officers will be asked to advise on the development of a training pack and to ensure ultimately that the pack is equality-proofed.

The group plan to organise the delivery of training to each diocese with a view to identifying two trainers in each diocese to ensure ongoing training and support to parishes. It is acknowledged that training must be ongoing as there will be new personnel involved over time.

**7. DEAF AND HEARING IMPAIRED**

The group is meeting with the Church of Ireland Mission to the Deaf and the Church of Ireland Association of Deaf People to consider a range of matters concerning deaf and hearing impaired members of the Church of Ireland. These matters will include the provision of a service and resources to meet the needs of deaf people.

**8. 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)