

**We want to make our church buildings and worship service welcoming for people with and without disabilities, but we don't know where to start!**

*Start by recognising that disability comes in many forms - visible and invisible. Disabilities can include but are not limited to: Physical, Visual, Hearing. Cognitive and Psychological.*

**Ok great, got it. So what gets in the way of people feeling welcomed?**

*People with disabilities often cannot get into or around the church building. Structural barriers include a lack of accessibility and usability... like is there a weird step in the kitchen that I might trip on if I am sight impaired or is there a space I can go if I get overwhelmed by noise or people?*

*So this can be as obvious as wide enough doorways for wheelchair access, or as subtle as an energy or culture which makes folk feel unwelcome if they don't conform. Maybe, for example, a person with a disability might talk more loudly or make a noise in a quiet moment of worship and there will be a feeling of annoyance in the room.*

**Like people saying shhh?**

*Yeah like that, or just tensing their shoulders or staring and glaring at me.*

**What else?**

*Well structure is the most visible barrier and can be the most expensive to fix but it is also the easiest to solve, aim to fix it properly, and don't find excuses..*

**What are the other main barriers?**

*Communication! People with disabilities may not be able to enter into the spirit of the worship or the message, because they cannot hear it, or understand it. This can be because of the complexity of the message or the way the message is shared.*

**So wait, do I have to make everything super simple?**

*No, not everything, just remember that worship can be (should be!) a multi sensory experience..times of silence and laughter and art offering and, and, and...*

**Yep, ok, that doesn't sound too hard. Anything else?**

*Most importantly, check with individuals what would make a difference. This might include:....*

*Print materials that are easy to read, such as with large text and clean fonts;*

*Hearing loops or captioning technology;*

*Programs, events, or groups that support individuals with disabilities and their family members.*

*Designated parking spaces for people with disabilities;*

*Wheelchair ramps.*

*Accessible toilets.*

*Learn some simple sign language.*

*Clearly written name tags.*

*Oh and one final thing*

**Yes?**

*A deep warm theological understanding that we are all made in the image of God and that there is a place for everyone around the table!*

**Got it!**