

Disability Report to Provincial Standing Committee, September 2022

1. Introduction

At the Provincial Synod in September 2021 a resolution on disability was passed (see pp6-7 of the PSC First Agenda book for the text). In formulating the resolution and in working at implementing it a small group of interested people was formed. Being an informal “Church and Disability Working Group,” we included colleagues with expertise in this field from other churches. Over the past year we have shared stories and resources with one another.

In May 2022 the Provincial Executive Officer, Revd Dr Makhosi Nzimande, wrote on behalf of Archbishop Thabo Makgoba asking Andrew Warmback to convene the Disability Advisory Group, asking that the group should include Dr Cora Motale, Dr Marlene le Roux and that a theologian and two persons with disabilities be co-opted. We are grateful to the Archbishop for his initiative in this important sphere of ministry and to the PEO for her encouragement and support.

Our group is working at the establishment of a Disability Advisory Group. It is important that this work is led by persons with disabilities and that there is a consultative process in co-opting the remaining members of the Advisory Group. In terms of the theological dimension it is felt that the best way forward was to draw on the work of a range of theologians focusing on disability theology, particularly from our continent, to support this work.

What follows is the first report to PSC. It records some of the disability inclusion work that we have become familiar with; offers a framework for the way forward; points to a particular resource; offers a challenge to us all and finally asks for further contributions in this work.

2. Disability Inclusion initiatives around the Province

We shared stories of various disability inclusion initiatives in dioceses and parishes in ACSA. Josias Morobi shared his work at St Peter’s Chains, Katlehong, and we learnt of the “disability outreach programme” led by Shoki Kekana in the Diocese of the Highveld. She works closely with Albinism SA in the running of local support groups. A fruitful session on disability inclusion at the College of the Transfiguration was also noted.

There are two initiatives which members of our group are involved with and shared with us.

The first is that of the **Diocese of False Bay** and the second is **RampUp**.

2.1 Diocese of False Bay

The Diocese of False Bay is to be commended for its pioneering work as a diocese in the area of disability inclusion. It was initiated in 2014 by Bishop Margaret Vertue. Qualitative research was done through a survey on the status of persons with disabilities in the church. There are a number of resources they have produced and actions they have taken. Lucia Hess-April, who is a member of this group is part of their Diocesan Disability Task Team.

The **Diocesan 2014 Resolution 26** noted that: “In some ways disabled and non-disabled persons live in two separate worlds.” It went on to say that: “Barriers must come down and bridges built so that we can display warmth and hospitality to all who want to be a part of our fellowship.” The resolution included the following two actions to be taken:

“Encourage Parish Councils to wrestle with the issues in Church policy and exercise leadership in implementing action at local level using education and advocacy measures.

Encourage churches to have a disability awareness worship service as part of their annual planning.”

The Diocese has produced a substantial **Resource Pack for Disability Awareness** which contains the following resources:

1. Views on Disability: The Journey to a Church for Everyone
2. Principles for Developing an Inclusive Church
3. Tips for Becoming a Disability Inclusive Church
4. Practical aspects of accessibility
5. Disability Awareness Sunday
 - Steps in planning a disability awareness service
 - Activities for Disability Awareness Sunday
 - Disability Awareness Service Ideas
6. A Litany for Disability Awareness Sunday
7. Pledge for a Disability Awareness Service
8. Contacts and support

The work in this diocese is ongoing. It would be important for the Province to gather the “lessons learnt” from this diocese’s efforts in terms of a Provincial strategy.

2.2 RampUp

Two of our members are the prime movers in the RampUp initiative. RampUp is a web-driven organisation in South Africa (www.rampup.co.za) that raises awareness in all denominations for the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities.

RampUp provides resources for churches and church groups, promoting the following aims:

- Physical access to church buildings and worship services.
- A liberating Biblical view of disability.
- The active role of persons with disabilities by utilising their spiritual gifts in the church.
- Mature and reciprocal friendships between disabled and non-disabled people in the community of believers.

One may subscribe to their monthly newsletter by visiting their website.

3. A Framework for the way forward

Going forward we propose a framework for this work with persons with disabilities:

1. It is important to “mainstream disability inclusion” in the church rather than starting a separate “disability ministry.”
2. The emphasis is on full inclusion - spiritual, social, economic – and active participation in church and society.
3. The focus should be on empowering both disabled and non-disabled people.
4. We should work at creating contextually relevant and inclusive structures that support equal access to opportunities, particularly for young people.
5. A social model (viewing disability as a socially constructed phenomenon) rather than a medical model (viewing disability as a disease) of disability should be adopted.
6. Building relationship with disability supporting organisations is important.

7. It is the responsibility of the leadership of our church, including that of the bishops, to lead this important ministry.

4. Resources

We noted a number of organisations working in the area of disability both in Southern Africa and beyond and a number of useful publications.

A helpful resource to emerge from our Southern African context is ***The Church and Disability, inclusion and participation***, published by Cluster Publications in 2018. The author is Dr Louise Kretzschmar who previously taught at the University of South Africa, and has published widely in the fields of Theological Ethics, Christian Leadership and Spirituality.

The aims of the book are:

- To promote disability awareness among church members.
- To inspire members of the church to offer a sensitive and meaningful ministry together with persons with a disability in the church and in the communities around the church.
- To serve as a resource for church leaders on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the church.
- To provide a basic source for theological seminaries and Bible colleges that can be supplemented by other material.

The book is available from Erna Möller at erna@tlm.co.za . A new re-publication will be available soon.

5. A Challenge

Before the next Provincial Standing Committee each diocese is challenged to invite every parish to ask themselves two questions and respond to their bishop:

1. What do we do well in welcoming persons with disabilities and practising inclusive ministry in the church?
2. What could we easily do over this next year in order to improve?

In responding to these questions parishes can then set their own manageable targets and perhaps learn from one another about what is already working. In undertaking this reflection, parish councils should ask those in the parish who live with disability to help them answer the questions.

6. Contributions welcomed

We are aware that there are a number of creative responses to disability inclusion within dioceses and parishes. Please tell us of these. Also, if you would like to be part of this on-going Provincial work please get in contact with us, via the PEO at peo@anglicanchurchsa.org.za.

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