

St Nicholas Marston: Disability Assessment and Policy

St Nicholas Church, Marston

Disability Assessment and Policy

Issue 2

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St Nicholas Parochial Church Council

Preface

St Nicholas is a historic parish church which serves the parish of Marston in Oxford. It provides the traditional physical and spiritual hub to a very diverse community. The original building dates back to the late 12th century but has been enlarged and modified over succeeding centuries to meet the changing needs of the community.

Average attendance at Sunday worship is about 120. At Christmas and other special occasions there are many more and much additional seating has to be packed in. A large proportion of the regular congregation are retired people, but there are also a number of families with young children. There are three Sunday services which cater for different styles of worship, and daily offices throughout the week. In addition to the services of worship, St Nicholas is host to various community groups; Coffee Pot, Over 50s, Women's Institute, baby and toddler group, and an annual week-long children's holiday club which takes place in the church and neighbouring church hall. During the week, the church is used for practice by bell ringers and choir.

The church is always open during the daytime and attracts many parishioners and visitors for a moment of tranquil meditation and prayer.

A substantial proportion of church members and visitors have some form of disability, including limitations to mobility, sight, hearing, chronic physical or mental illness. Many, though not all, of these disabilities are associated with the infirmities of age.

General Statement of Policy

We will do our utmost to welcome and include people with disabilities in the whole mission and service of the church, whether as visitors, members of the congregation or in leadership roles.

This policy will be implemented by means of the arrangements set out below and will be reviewed by the Parochial Church Council at least once every five years.

Signed by Tony Price (Vicar)

1 Legislation and Guidance

The key legislation in the UK is the Equality Act 2010. This extends the previous Disability Discrimination Act. It defines disability as:

“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on an individual's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

This includes the many “hidden” disabilities, for example epilepsy, arthritis, deafness, dyslexia, diabetes, autism (to some extent), and also many different conditions which cause significant levels of pain.

The government has published a summary in: Equality Act 2010: What do I need to know? Disability Quick Start Guide.

The diocese of Oxford has published more detailed guidance for churches in the document "Welcome, Inclusion, Respect: A Commitment to a Church open to all" and our policy is based on its recommendations.

2 Diverse needs at St Nicholas

We use the term “people with disabilities” as a shorthand, but it needs to be understood very broadly. “People with disabilities” are all very different, all very individual. People with the same impairment will have differing needs and views. Within the last decade members and visitors at St Nicholas have included people with the following impairments:

- mobility, some using wheelchairs and many having some degree of difficulty in walking, standing or sitting eg due to arthritis, stroke or other illness
- vision, some being blind and many suffering from impaired vision making it difficult to read
- hearing, many with impaired hearing
- mental health, including effects of stroke, dementia, mental illness and inborn disabilities

In addition there are people with less obvious chronic conditions, including diabetes, heart disease and allergies, and specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. The total proportion of church members with disabilities of some sort almost certainly exceeds the proportion of 20% in the general population.

We also need to consider and accommodate, so far as possible, the potential needs of visitors and new members which may be different from these.

3 Accessibility

3.1 Getting to church

St Nicholas is reasonably accessible by public transport; there is a bus stop opposite the church which is served about once an hour. However, the times are such that members coming by bus may have to wait up to 30 min. There is a shelter with a seat on one side of the road.

Car parking is on the street; there is no special provision for disabled access and in many places access is difficult due to high kerbs. A marked drop-off point with a dropped curb is kept clear at the entrance to the church. There is a dropped curb on the corner of Elsfeld Road with Church Lane

3.2 Within the church

Due to the historic nature of the church, accessibility is not ideal within, but some provisions have been made. A step at the main entrance has been removed with the path regraded to provide a smooth ramp. There are two other doors which are much less suitable for wheelchair or disabled access.

The church is fitted with traditional wooden pews and these place significant restrictions on accessibility. Some have been removed to provide an area near the front of the North Aisle where wheelchairs can be positioned, though there is a small step up to this space. There is good visibility of the service leader at this point.

The pews are not comfortable and can cause problems for people with back pain or restricted mobility. Some chairs are available but there are no special seating provisions.

There are steps to the chancel and this restricts the ability of people to go up to the communion rail. This is addressed by bringing communion to people in their pews.

In recent years the vestry has been extended and now includes a modern WC which is accessible for disabled and wheelchair users, as well as having a baby changing table. This is a substantial improvement on the previous provision.

The organ and ringing chamber are located on a balcony accessed by a narrow wooden stair. This is inaccessible for a wheelchair user or anyone with significant mobility impairment.

3.3 The churchyard

The churchyard has many visitors during the week, including a large number of elderly people who come to visit graves and memorials. Access has been improved by removal of steps, repair to paving slabs and straightening of paths so that the memorial garden is now reasonably accessible for wheelchair users and people with restricted mobility.

3.4 Summary

Provisions we have made	Things we could improve
Drop-off point at church entrance, dropped curb provided and road marked, flatter door mat	
Improved access to memorial garden	
Reasonable access to main entrance, no steps	Remove some pews to provide better space for wheelchair
Some space for wheelchairs within the church	
Reasonable access to modern WC with facilities for disabled	
Keep grass short in churchyard	

4 Visibility

We have two members who are blind; both participate in services, one is a regular bell ringer and the other reads lessons from his braille bible. We have a collection of the main hymn books and bible in braille. They require a sighted assistant to help with finding the correct book and the place in the book and this can be difficult when we use a mixture of hymns from different books or use the overhead projector to display the words.

A clear layout and type is used for service booklets produced in house., There is reasonable provision of large-print service and hymn books and a large-print version of the weekly news sheet is provided, but not all material is available in large print form.

Lighting levels were found to be inadequate after changing to low-energy light bulbs and additional light fittings have been provided. There are still some areas of the church where light levels are low for people with reduced visual acuity.

We have installed a projection system which is used in some services to display hymns, songs, readings and liturgical passages. This provides a good standard of visibility and clarity and eliminates the use of multiple books. It is not suitable for everyone and alternatives are made available when required.

Provisions we have made	Things we could improve
Bible and hymn books in braille stored in a purpose-made cabinet which is easily accessible	
Large print books and leaflets	Consider how images and artefacts used could be made accessible to those who cannot see them.
Improved light levels	
Good quality projection system	

5 Audibility

We have installed a good quality sound system with radio microphones for the service leaders. This provides a degree of amplification and makes the leaders audible throughout the church and vestry. There is also an induction loop for hearing aid users. In general there is a good standard of speaking and reading and we try to consider the needs of people with impaired hearing when music or drama is planned. We currently have no congregation members for whom signing would be needed and would need to consider how to provide should the occasion arise.

Provisions we have made	Things we could improve
Sound system with T loop; availability is advertised and individuals are trained in operation of the sound system	

6 Other methods of communication

Much of our church worship and teaching involves the spoken and written word. However, this may not be equally accessible to everyone and there are many other ways to communicate the truths of the gospel. We have a variety of different styles of services and different liturgies to try to provide for the needs of different individuals, including the use of images on the overhead screens and artefacts which can be seen and handled.

We have many musicians from varied backgrounds and we try to involve as many people as possible, irrespective of ability, in worshipping through diverse forms of music.

Due to the physical limitations of the building, the opportunities for drama or dance are limited, but we try to make use where possible of kinaesthetic communication which actively involves the congregation (eg signing, miming, sacramental actions).

7 Special needs

We have a rather small junior church with a high proportion of leaders to children. Some of the leaders have professional experience in healthcare or special educational needs. We therefore feel reasonably comfortable with our ability to welcome and include children with special needs into our activities, including junior church and holiday clubs and have done so as the need arose.

Provisions we have made	Things we could improve
High staffing ratio	Emphasise the welcome and accessibility in our advertising
Range of professional experience	

8 Dementia friendly church

A working party has carried out a survey of needs and is currently assessing the possibility of making improvements to help people suffering from dementia, their families and carers.