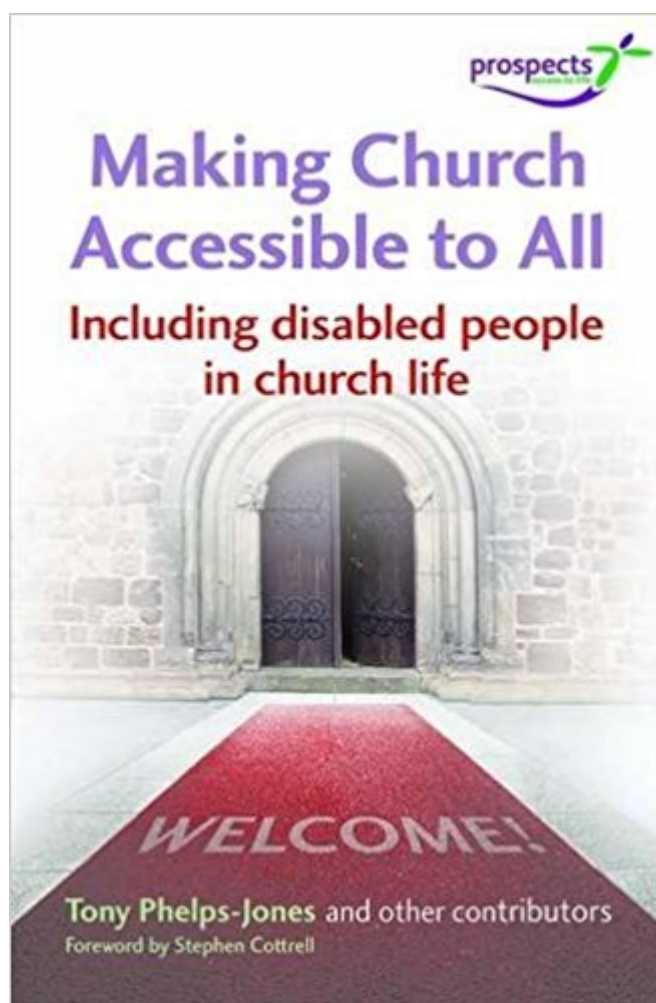


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# Making Church Accessible To All: Including Disabled People In Church Life



## Synopsis

Most churches are 1) largely unaware of the presence of people with learning disabilities in their community and their needs, 2) unprepared to welcome people with learning disabilities and ill-equipped to teach and disciple them in the Christian faith, and 3) unaware of how much including people with learning disabilities will enrich the church experience for all church members. This book will address all these issues.

## Book Information

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: BRF (The Bible Reading Fellowship) (February 1, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0857461575

ISBN-13: 978-0857461575

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.4 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: Be the first to review this item

Best Sellers Rank: #500,791 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #307 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Disabled](#) #25792 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living](#) #100216 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality](#)

## Customer Reviews

From the Church Times - 21 June 2013 As I prepare to write this review, I am trying to take care over the language I use. Unless I use simple vocabulary, short sentences, active rather than passive verbs, and avoid jargon and abstract concepts, I may, unintentionally, be excluding some intelligent, educated, and competent people who take an interest in church matters. This is how we exclude people who think in pictures or who take words literally. This applies particularly to many people on the autism spectrum, but may also apply to others with learning difficulties. This book reminds us that there are many more people who will feel excluded from church life by the language we use, or the way that we communicate, than by the presence of steps or narrow doorways. It is presented in two parts: part one makes the theological case for access (to buildings) and inclusion (of people); part two offers practical guidance on including people with a variety of disabilities, including mental-health conditions, and families with children with additional needs. It is this second part that is particularly helpful, with its description of a wide range of different disabilities and the nuances and variations within each one. For example, six levels of hearing loss are listed, with the

corresponding variety of communication needs, and varying degrees of sight loss and the factors affecting them are described. So we have a picture of the individuality of each "disabled person" rather than the idea of a homogeneous group of "disabled people". The book is also full of practical tips to promote inclusion: how to guide a blind person; how to make websites accessible; how to use a BSL interpreter; and a variety of ways in which churches can offer support to families with children with additional needs. The authors remind us of the under-used resource of the experience of disabled people themselves, and encourage us to be creative and imaginative in working out how we can use their skills and gifts to the benefit of everyone. Perhaps most important of all, they remind us of the mantra "Assume nothing - always ask." The final chapter, "Walk with me", gives us a timely reminder of the struggle of people who are dependent on disability benefits or who have been rejected or abused because of their disability. We are left in no doubt that we could and should do more to include disabled people in church life as a matter of social justice, as well as for the benefit of the mission of the Church. Reviewed by Wendy Bryant, disability adviser for the diocese of Oxford From Evangelicals Now - June 2013 I once interviewed a 96-year-old who was dismayed that she could no longer go to church. Her old legs could no longer navigate the three feet of cobbles on the path in front of the entrance. She had been an active member and was known to many, but only one person visited, once a month, to give communion and to collect her tithe. Amazed, I telephoned the pastor. About the sparse monthly visit he said, sadly, everyone was so busy these days. Yes, it was true the cobbles were a feature of the path, but they were only a few feet wide and no one had thought about it. Encouraging churches to think, with issues to consider, takes up the first part of Tony Phelps-Jones's book. Churches are unconsciously excluding a huge part of the population. One person in six in the UK has a disability, and by not including them we are depriving ourselves: God designed us to live in relationship with each other, and our lives are not complete without each other's contributions. We need to know people for what they can do, not for their disabilities. Judy Divall describes a boy who was always apart, unable to socialise with others, but who became her silent shadow, empathising deeply with her grief on the death of a favourite uncle. 'Without words or touch, he was just there' (p.18). Tony Phelps-Jones joined Prospects, the charity that helps people with learning disabilities, in 1987. This book encompasses people with physical, as well as learning disabilities. The second part of the book gives practical advice. I loved the jargon-busting on p.48. It illustrates how we develop mindsets that prevent us thinking outside our particular rut. This is an easy-to-read book, reflecting years of experience and will make believers begin to think about including those with disabilities. Louise Morse, MA (CBT), is Media Manager with The Pilgrims Friend Society For REFORM Magazine May 2013 The word 'inclusive' is

double-edged. On one hand it is about enabling belonging, but it can so easily be about 'being like us'. In churches, 'welcome' too easily carries the implicit qualification of 'doing things our way'. The challenge of being inclusive of people with disabilities is that we are called to welcome them 'as they are'. Indeed, any change needed is within ourselves, both in terms of attitude and in practical approaches. Such inclusiveness is the challenge of this book, and it spells out the challenge by assisting our thought and reflection, and offering practical wisdom. An inclusive church group of people with disabilities used to sing: 'There is no one else like you, there's no one else like me. Each of us is special to God, that's the way it's meant to be.' The cherishing of individuality and the avoidance of a 'one size fits all' approach is what comes across clearly in this book, which aims not only to give pointers to the of disabilities, but also to indicate how church can change in order to include them. Here, the word 'church' needs to be read as 'people following Christ' before considering the practical actions which reveal true 'following'. An implicit message in this book, behind the knowledge and experience of what is practically helpful, is that we need an open and Christ-like attitude towards any who wish to share in our fellowship. Biblical teaching underlies much of what is offered here. 'If you want to learn something, go to an expert,' is a good adage. In the matter of how a church may be more accessible to people with disabilities, Tony Phelps-Jones carries that expertise. He is director of ministry for Prospects and part of Churches for All, a broad consortium of Christian disability organisations who are always willing to offer further advice and support (the book is full of links). Voice is given in the book to the experience of others working in the fields of disability - hearing, sight, mobility, learning, autism, children and mental health; together they offer challenging advice to all of us, if we are willing to accept it. Mark Fisher is a United Reformed Church minister based at Christ Church URC in Solihull, West Midlands

Tony Phelps-Jones has been helping people with learning disabilities to engage with worship and Bible teaching since joining Prospects in 1987. Other contributors: Gill Behenna (Signs of God), Jonathan Clark (Premier Life), Ann Memmott (autism accessibility consultant), Kay Morgan-Gurr (Children Worldwide), Mike Townsend (Torch Trust), Tracy Williamson (author), Tim Wood (Through the Roof). Prospects supports churches throughout the UK in their mission outreach, discipleship and inclusion of people with learning disabilities, raising awareness of issues of language, attitude and inclusive practice. Prospects provides training for church leaders and ministry teams and publishes resources to make many aspects of pastoral care, worship, Bible teaching and celebration more accessible.

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