

Press Release June 2021

Making Churches more inclusive- Disability Sunday 20 June 2021



The Disability, Spirituality and Faith Network Aotearoa New Zealand marks Disability Sunday this year by launching “Creating Welcoming Churches” e book version and a “Stand or sit?” campaign. The nationwide launch will take place on zoom at 2pm.

The “Creating Welcoming Churches” book was first launched in 2014 in Auckland and Wellington. A large print version was launched in Dunedin in February 2016. Now we are celebrating the launch of the e-versions of “Creating Welcoming churches: a disability resource for faith communities”. This resource has been created by disabled people and allies who are active members of faith communities. Many people have commented how accessible and useful it is for churches who want to become more inclusive.

“Stand or sit?” is a campaign to encourage conversations in churches about standing and sitting in worship. The practise of asking the congregation to stand during worship can exclude people who use wheelchairs and those who find standing difficult.

Phrases such as “Stand if you are able” might sound sensitive to people who cannot stand however only highlight the issue for people who find it difficult to stand or can’t. It would be good to be able to get to the stage where it is acceptable to just say “Stand or sit”.

Some people who go to a particular church regularly may feel comfortable and even encouraged to sit when others are standing. Churches are encouraged to have conversations about standing and sitting and do what is comfortable for people. While some people may be comfortable to be told they do not need to stand, others may see this as patronising and would like to be asked for suggestion about wording.

Many people will only go to church occasionally and as church we are to welcome the stranger and the alien (Leviticus19:34). Imagine how unwelcoming it feels if the first thing you are told to do is to stand when you find it difficult or unable to?

Often it is tradition that dictates practises such as standing in church cannot be changed. However, our practises and traditions do change over the time. Many churches now see kneeling as optional where once it was seen as compulsory. The process of greeting has been radically altered in the last year due to Covid.

There may be good theological reasons for standing however these need to be weighed up with being inclusive of all people. We encourage every part of the church to participate in this discussion and come up with some creative ways round standing and sitting.

Join us on Disability Sunday June 20 at 2pm on zoom, to celebrate making churches more inclusive, the zoom link is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87598244423?pwd=YTZUWXlRN0lpTVFBcUJ6UHhyZ1Z5Zz09>

Rev Vicki Terrell