

**Te Taura
Whaikaha Mihinare**



**The Anglican
Disability Network**

A theological statement on Disability in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia

As Anglicans, we believe that each person is made in, and bears the image of God. We believe that through our baptism we are all ministers of the Gospel as members of the Body of Christ. As human beings, we all live within the diversity of humanity, yet by God's grace we are given gifts for building up the Body of Christ and building the Kingdom. Because disability is part of our human experience, disabled people also bear the image of God, and by virtue of baptism, are partners in the mission and ministry of the church.

In Scripture we see that personal impairments need not be a barrier to answering God's call. For example, when Moses protested to God about his calling, citing his speech impairment as a barrier to ministry, he was supported in his calling by Aaron (Exodus 4:10-17). The story of Moses challenges our assumptions about independence and autonomy in relation to ministry and reminds us that impairment need not be a barrier to it. In the incarnation, Jesus' humanity, in his life, death and resurrection, challenges and gives hope that, in vulnerability as well as in strength, we are called to be bearers of the Gospel and full participants in the Body of Christ.

We recognise that some understandings of disability can create stigma and ultimately exclusion from full participation in the life of the church. We also recognise that the concept of healing can be challenging in the context of disability. When Jesus healed in the Gospels, it always included people being restored to their community. We affirm that healing can be experienced as full inclusion in the life of the community of faith. Healing can also come from being loved and accepted for who we are, in all our diversity in the community of faith, and being invited as full members to contribute to the ministry of that community. The community becomes whole when we all work together, and thus reflecting the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity.

We affirm that we want to live out the Gospel in ways that are mana-enhancing for all. As a church we therefore commit ourselves to the principles of manaakitanga as we foster a culture of full inclusion. We are committed to pathways of education and advocacy to nurture a culture of *faka'apa'apa*/highest respect and

tauhi va'/healthy relationships for our mutual flourishing. Manaakitanga is expressed not just in our community life, but also extends to the way we structure our environments to be accessible to all. The need for physical access is understood as a matter of hospitality and inclusion for all people.

In the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia we commit ourselves to offering space to learn from the experiences of disabled people. Disability reminds us of the diversity of our humanity and our need for one another as the people of God. We affirm the mana of all people, regardless of their experience of being human. We are committed to the full inclusion of all people as God's image-bearers and full members of the church, that together we may become more fully the Body of Christ.