NSW UNITING CHURCH ACTION PLAN

ENDORSED BY THE NSW SYNOD OF THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

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UNITINGCARE AGEING AND DISABILITY SERVICE

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PREFACE:

Since its inception, The Uniting Church in Australia has displayed an inclusive ethos. In 1977, when the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches amalgamated to form the Uniting Church in Australia, the Basis of Union was written. The Basis of Union discusses membership, gifts, ministries and functions of people within the Church. Membership has been recognized as people who were members of the three Churches formerly mentioned, and of those "baptized into the Holy catholic Church in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (http://nat.uca.org.au/basisofuniton/Basis1992.htm 09.02.02) Commitment to faith rather than ability levels is the important factor in membership. The Uniting Church recognizes the gifts of all members contribute to making a stronger Church and wider community.

> *"It acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift with out its corresponding service. … The Uniting Church recognizes the responsibility and freedom which belongs to councils to acknowledge gifts among members for the fulfillment of particular functions."*
> (http://nat.uca.org.au/basisofuniton/Basis1992.htm 09.02.02)

Despite having an inclusive ethos for many years, only recently has the Uniting Church in NSW taken more formal steps to ensure people who have disabilities and the elderly have equality of access. In 1995 the NSW Synod (the state council of the Uniting Church) endorsed a disability policy for inclusion of people with disabilities in Church life and worship. In 1997 the Disability Education and Services Committee wrote the Disability Education and Services Policy. In 1998 two people with disabilities and suitable qualifications were employed as Disability Education and Service Officers. In 2001 a Disability Access and Education Officer was employed to work with congregations to identify barriers to inclusion of people with a variety of disabilities, to work through solutions, to make a plan to address the problems, and to address the education needs of the congregations to facilitate awareness of disability issues. People with disabilities have been encouraged to participate throughout the project. Access consultants, from Access Australia, have consulted with the congregations and have performed building audits.

The National Church Life Survey of 2001 showed that in the Uniting Church the percentage of people over 60 years of age is 56%. The exact percentage of people over 65 years old is not known, as in the data gathering the nominal scale used was 60-69. The percentage of people with disabilities in the NSW Uniting Church is unknown, however it would be reasonable to assume that it is commensurate with the National and NSW rate of 19% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001. pp.7-12.). Out of the people who have been identified in NSW as

having a disability there are: “18% [of whom use] communication aids, and 12% [of whom use a] mobility aid.” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001. p.30.) Disability is defined by the World Health Organisation as “any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001. p2). Rates of mental health disorders in the NSW Uniting Church may be comparable with the national rates which are: “1.5% [of people] suffer from major mental illness and approximately [20%] have, or will develop, some form of mental disorder.” (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. 1993, p.13) The NSW Synod embarked on the project to work towards providing an equitable environment for current and potential members of the NSW and ACT Uniting Church who are affected by disability. (ACT Uniting Churches fall within the ambit of the NSW Synod.) Access guidelines, which consider timeframes and cost, will be developed. These are for use by the Synod and congregations, with a view to improving church facilities, activities and processes over time.

The outcomes that the project proposes to achieve are varied, and are enumerated below:

1. Planning by congregations and Synod for modifications and maintenance of buildings, to improve access for people with disabilities. Estimates of financial costs and time frames will be included in the planning process.
2. To enable people with disabilities to access the Church environment and activities, by breaking down physical/architectural, perceptual, procedural, social and attitudinal barriers.
3. To be able to quantifiably assess the actions taken to improve access.
4. To provide for the educational needs of congregations regarding issues and needs for people with disabilities. Increased understanding and awareness by congregations will facilitate an empathic ability to create an equitable environment, and meet the needs of people with disabilities within the congregation’s worship and other activities.
5. To promote the ability of congregations to act in a proactive and practical manner to solve problems (or potential problems) of access as they arise.

POLICY:

The NSW Synod has developed a disability services policy. The scope of this project however, is based on Uniting Church congregational needs (worship and activities) rather than Uniting Church institutional and welfare services. The ensuing policies therefore, relate to congregation based needs.

Operational procedures of the Uniting Church in Australia are outlined in the *Constitution and Regulations,* updated in 2001. Specific regulations regarding inclusion of people with disabilities at the congregational level are not stated in this document. The worship and other activities of congregations in different states may differ, therefore it is more appropriate to create individual policies surrounding inclusion of people with disabilities in separate documents. The *Constitution and Regulations* outline the recognition of and duties of many people including: ministers, youth workers, congregations, church councils, elders, lay pastors, parish missions. The nurturing and inclusion of all people is inherent in the duties outlined. For example:

> *" Preaching the Word…providing for other persons to preside at worship and/or preach within the pastoral charge…empowering young people [in the case of youth ministers] for participation in the community and in the Church…building up the members and adherents in faith and love [and]…hope…equip [all members and adherents] for engagement in worship, witness, and service in the world as they participate in the mission of Christ…encourage [all] to participate in the life of the congregation and endeavour to provide opportunity for that participation."* (Uniting Church.2001, pp.19-53)

The NSW Synod is committed to including people with disabilities in the life and activities of all Uniting Church congregations. It is committed to extending a sense of welcome, providing accessible buildings, and developing worship spaces and worship processes that are inclusive of the ministers, current members and potential members of the Uniting Church.

It is dedicated to providing access for the general public to the church run activities, such as literacy programs, Christian Bookshops, and meal places.

The NSW Synod undertakes to ensure that the congregations and ministers have an understanding of the general needs of people with disabilities, and an understanding that people with disabilities and those who are elderly have a right (ethically and legally) to be included in worship, activities, and decision-making processes. It hopes to ensure that concerns or complaints raised about equity and access are considered with sensitivity and are acted upon, when deemed appropriate.

When changes occur to church buildings or processes of worship or activities, the Uniting Church will provide people with disabilities the opportunity to be involved in consultation processes.

When new facilities are under consideration, the Uniting Church is committed to ensuring that relevant design standards are met, to facilitate access to all buildings. It is deemed desirable that people with disabilities will be included in the consultation phase of new buildings.

VISION:

1. That the Uniting Church buildings, worship and activities will be welcoming and accessible to all people, particularly those with physical, mental, intellectual and perceptual disabilities.

2. That all ministers in the NSW Synod, and congregations have access to information on disabilities and how to create a more accessible environment.

3. That people with disabilities are provided with opportunities for an active role in Church life, activities, and decision making if they wish to take such a role.

EXPECTATION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK.

The inclusive ethos of the Uniting Church and its moral obligations set an expectation that access and a sense of welcome is extended to all people.

Secular society also has a framework of expectations that are covered through legislation. The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 enforces rights for people with disabilities. In this act the Uniting Church would currently be classed as a voluntary body due to it being "a body (whether incorporated or unincorporated) the activities of which are not engaged for the purpose of making a profit." (DDA (1992) Com s.4, p.7)

The NSW Synod however has chosen to follow the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, resulting in the action plan for congregations to follow. The NSW Uniting Church therefore has both moral and legal obligations to creating access for people with disabilities.

The Action plan is intended for all congregations, including those whose buildings are heritage listed. The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 does apply to heritage buildings because "heritage issues can be taken into account in determining whether barriers to access are unreasonable. … If alterations to premises to provide full and equitable access would involve the destruction or removal of significant heritage value, in some circumstances making these alterations could be found to involve unjustifiable hardship. [However] organizations which occupy or are responsible for heritage buildings need to ensure that they have looked closely at alternative means of providing equal access which are not prevented by heritage considerations." (www.hreoc.gov.au)

Discrimination:

Discrimination occurs in two forms: direct and indirect.

Direct discrimination occurs when 'a person treats or proposes to treat (a person with a disability) less favourably than [they] would treat a person without the disability." (DDA (1992) Com s.5, p.7)) An example of direct discrimination in the church context would be if a person with a guide dog were refused entry to the church.

Indirect discrimination is when the person with a disability has "to comply with a requirement or condition: a) which a substantially higher proportion of people of persons without the disability comply or are able to comply, and b) which is not reasonable having regard to the circumstances of the case; and c) with which the aggrieved person does not or is not able to comply. (DDA (1992) Com s.6, pp.7-8)

Examples of indirect discrimination within the church context are as follows:

1) Conducting a service without hearing augmentation, as it would discriminate against people with hearing impairments.
2) Only having stair access into the church which prevents (discriminates against) people who use wheelchairs from entering the church building.

Reasonable adjustments:
To enable access to the church buildings and activities some changes will need to be made. "Changing rules or requirements, premises or equipment so that indirect discrimination does not occur is often referred to as making *reasonable adjustments*." (www.hreoc.gov.au)

Examples of reasonable adjustments in the church might be the following:

1) Provision of a Braille Hymn book for someone who is blind.
2) Installation of a hearing loop or an FM hearing system for people with hearing impairment.
3) Installation of rails to the sanctuary so everyone can access this space as required.
4) Providing communion at the pews rather than requiring people to mobilise to the sanctuary.

There will however be times when adjustments are not reasonable in which case unjustifiable hardship may be recognised.

Unjustifiable hardship:

Unjustifiable hardship might be considered in the following circumstances: "technical limits; topographical restrictions; The effect…on other people on providing the required level of access; … Safety and design and construction issues; the benefit for people with disabilities; and the cost involved in providing access." (www.hreoc.gov.au)

All circumstances are weighed up when considering whether unjustifiable hardship exists. The factors taken into account are:
"a) The nature of the benefit or detriment likely to accrue or be suffered by any persons concerned; and b) the effect of the disability of a person concerned; and c) the financial circumstances and the estimated amount of expenditure required to be made by the person claiming the unjustifiable hardship; and d) in the case of the provision of services, or making available of facilities – an action plan given to the commission under section 64." (DDA (1992) Com s.11, pp.9-10)

Considering options:
When standard access solutions are deemed unviable, other avenues of providing access need to be considered. It may therefore be possible that other solutions that are deemed viable do not fit into purist standards. If access is

created in a safe and dignified manner through other means, the lateral solutions should still be considered and implemented when possible.

PROCESS:

Early in 2001, a brochure "Building Bridges," designed by the Disability Officers from Uniting*Care* NSW/ACT Ageing and Disability Service was sent to all congregations in NSW and ACT. The brochure discusses methods of enhancing congregation involvement for people with disabilities, through creating an accessible environment. An accompanying letter was sent inviting congregations to share with the Disability Officers, how they include and welcome people with disabilities. Replies were received in June 2001. They have been analysed, and recorded in tabular form, which contributed to the project by providing some idea of what is already being done across the NSW Synod congregations. Concerns and questions pertaining to access that were raised in the responses have been answered in writing.

In October 2001 the Disability Access and Education Officer was employed by Uniting*Care* NSW/ACT Ageing and Disability Service*,* to undertake the pilot project on access and inclusiveness for people with disabilities, with regard to the Uniting Churches in the NSW Synod. Eight pilot congregations were chosen to form the basis of the pilot project. This sample of congregations was chosen based on the type, size, location of the buildings and the activities of the congregation. It is judged they are a representative sample of those within the NSW Synod.

Focus groups commenced in November 2001 and finished in June 2002. These were jointly run with access consultants from Access Australia. Congregation members were invited to these groups; Elderly people and people with disabilities were encouraged to provide input into these groups. Focus groups allowed in depth discussion of issues regarding access to the church buildings worship services and other activities.

Access audits were performed on the relevant church buildings, by Access Australia consultants. A problem-based list was compiled and solutions were prioritized as: 1) immediate, 2) short term, and 3) medium term. Priorities were made by considering: safety, equity and dignity, and the likelihood of an incident occurring.

The problem and solution list was very comprehensive with even the minor details considered. When developing the action plans however, The Uniting Church is re-prioritising the recommendations, based on information from all the different research tools, the way in which the congregations use their building, and the limits placed on the church in financial terms. It would not be possible to action all of the solutions recommended in the audit reports, because focusing on the small details will be detrimental to fixing the larger problems.

One of the research tools was a questionnaire using Likert scales and open-ended questions was developed by the Disability Access and Education Officer with the assistance of the Associate Professor of Community Medicine at The University of Sydney. Use of a questionnaire allows the congregation to respond to a wider range of issues, albeit in less detail than the focus group. The respondents were assured anonymity and confidentiality, which may have freed the articulation of views. The questionnaire was be used as a pre test tool. Congregations have been provided with post-test questionnaires that have been formulated to target their specific issues. Its design is not complex and will allow the congregations to administer and analyse post-test results independently. The post-test questionnaires are aimed at measuring the effectiveness of interventions and awareness groups.

The pre test questionnaire addresses:

- The age of the respondent.
- Whether the respondent has a disability, and what type of disability they have.
- Attitude toward people in the congregation with physical disabilities.
- Attitude toward people with mental disabilities.
- Process of the worship service.
- Can the individuals hear, see and use the worship materials.
- Suitability of the seating arrangements.
- Activities in which they are included and in which they would like to be included.
- Whether their language needs are met.
- Whether they are given time to express themselves.
- Help that is available and help that is needed for carers.
- Aspects of disability about which they would like to have more information.

Draft action plan documents were made by compiling the results from all of the aforementioned processes, with the exception of the post -test questionnaire. These were then discussed with congregation members to ensure that they consider that the recommended actions are practical and workable, and to determine how they intend to act upon and monitor the solutions.

The Board of Finance and Property was also consulted about the plan to determine whether other issues needed to be included and to determine what the priorities were regarding financial commitments. The latter step is particularly important because the action plan is intended for the NSW Synod congregations, not just the pilot project congregations. The NSW Heritage Office has also been consulted to seek their endorsement of the recommended actions in the plan. This is because most of the churches have or will have in the future some form of heritage significance, and one of the aims of the Uniting Church is to respect the heritage significance of the buildings. There are over 650 congregations in the

NSW Synod to consider.

Finally, education packages are being compiled to address commonly requested information and also information specific to individual congregations' needs. This is to increase the members' knowledge and therefore, ability to include people with disabilities.

SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE NSW SYNOD CONGREGATIONS:

All Churches hold worship services. The services vary from traditional, contemporary to informal.

The other services and activities of the congregations in the pilot study are as follows:

- Provision of meals for those in need
- Cafés
- Bookshops
- Educational support (literacy programme) for high school students
- Vocational training for long term unemployed people
- LifeLine
- Creative Living Programme for adults

Other activities and services that the NSW Synod congregations provide have not been included in the pilot study. Some are as follows:

Chaplaincy to the emergency services.
Childrens play groups
Lay teaching at primary school religion classes
Support services for older people

As previously described, the project only covers the congregations in the NSW Synod. The Uniting Church NSW Synod is administered through four Boards and the secretariat. These were not included, as the scope of the project would have been too large and unmanageable within the time frame. The different divisions and their functions will however, be briefly described.

The five areas are the Secretariat, Board of Mission, Board of Education, Board of Finance and Property, and Uniting*Care.* The secretariat is primarily concerned with facilitating the church to engage in God's mission. The Board of Mission deals with cross-cultural ministry, Aboriginal Ministry, new congregations and rural ministry.

The Board of Education advises on education policy and provides education across the board. Its facilities and services include: United Theological College, schools, conference centers, The Education of Lay Ministries Centre and the Exodus Tutorial Centre.

The Board of Finance and Property is responsible for many regulatory functions to do with property and finance Amongst many things it oversees property projects.

Uniting*Care* has three main areas of responsibility, these are chaplaincy, community services, and social justice policy. Some of its facilities and services include Burnside, Prison and hospital chaplaincy, medically supervised injecting centre, the Harris Centre,and UnitingCare Ageing and Disability Services which oversees nursing homes and hostels.

ACTION ALREADY TAKEN:

As previously mentioned, in June 2001 the responses to the "Building Bridges" brochure and letters inviting congregations to share how they include and welcome people with disabilities were returned to the Disability Officers at Uniting*Care* NSW/ACT Ageing and Disability Service.

It is not possible to apply the findings to the general population of the congregations within the NSW Synod as the sample size is small. Thirty-two congregations replied.

There were many forms of action already being undertaken. The action and the percentage within this sample of thirty two responses is represented below:

- Provision of an audio-loop: 20/32 62.5%
- Provision of audiotapes of services: 4/32 12.5%
- Provision of a transcript of the service: 1/32 3.13%
- Upgrading of the lighting: 3/32 9.38%
- Providing large print items of a general nature: 14/32 43.75%
- Large print hymn books: 11/32 34.38%
- Large print order of services: 1/32 3.13%
- Large print bulletins: 2/32 6.25%
- Large print communion sheets:3/32 9.38%
- Large print baptism sheets:1/32 3.13%
- Large print Bible: 1/32 3.13%
- Visiting people in need: 13/32 40.63%
- Visitation to hostels: 3/32 9.38%
- Visitation to nursing homes: 6/32 18.75%
- Provision of a bus service:4/32 12.5%
- Provision of transport:9/32 28.13%
- Daily provision of transport:1/32 3.13%
- Taking people with reduced mobility on shopping trips 1/32: 3.13%
- Storage for scooters and walking frames in the church 1/32: 3.13%
- Spare walking frame for those who need one:1/32 3.13%
- Designated Accessible car park spaces:10/32 31.25%
- Level entrance to the church:2/32 6.25%
- Provision of ramps:20/32 62.5%
- Installation of rails:11/32 34.38%
- Step for a person with dwarfism:1/32 3.13%
- Lift:2/32 6.25%
- Pew cut outs: 4/32 12.5%
- Moveable seats: 7/32 21.88%
- Pew chairs with arms: 2/32 6.25%

- Toilets for people with ambulant disabilities:1/32 3.13%
- Provision of accessible toilets:14/32 43.75%
- Fellowship for high needs disabled youth:1/32 3.13%
- Seniors Club:1/32 3.13%
- Respite for carers: 1/32 3.13%
- Midweek communion: 1/32 3.13%
- Welcoming and greeting: 4/32 12.5%

One congregation reported they had applied for a wheelchair accessible bus from the Olympic Committee of Australia and another reported they are planning to run an employment education service for people with disabilities.

In the time between being provided with the draft action plan and the meeting to finalise the action plan with individual pilot congregations, many of them had taken steps to rectify the problems identified. Such steps include:

- Increasing the print and font size of the worship sheets and handouts.
- Linking the lapel microphone to the hearing loop system, instead of only having the lectern microphone attached.
- Fixing the hearing loop and delineating where the loop reaches in the church building more effectively.
- Purchase of an overhead projector screen (instead of using the wall).
- Purchase of a Liquid Crystal Display.
- Provision of chairs with arm rests.
- Creation of spaces within the seating arrangements to provide integrated seating for people who use wheelchairs.
- Provision of demountable ramps to allow access to some of the buildings and to the sanctuary areas.
- Installation of rails on both sides of the stair entrances.
- Liaison with local councils regarding provision of footpaths and or kerb ramps on government owned land adjoining church property.
- Provision of a car park with accessible spaces and signs to direct people to the accessible car spaces.

BROAD OBJECTIVES:

1) Eliminate the barriers to access, which will give members of the community choice with respect to where they worship and into which activities run by the church they would like to participate.
2) Maintain the ability of congregation members to participate in the activities and worship of their church, as their needs change. (For example in one of the pilot congregations, one of the members stated they are no longer able to attend the church because their mobility level had changed, this person had been a member of this church for 60 years.)
3) Create an action plan that can be generalized to all of the churches in the NSW Synod, despite the fact that only 8 Churches were studied in the pilot.
4) Be able to extrapolate costs of the recommended modifications in the pilot churches. This would enable the Synod to project the estimated cost of modifying all churches. This would allow for a loans system framework to be developed, to enable congregations to perform the more costly modifications.
5) Provide an action plan that is workable. If congregations feel they cannot achieve the solutions of the plan, it is likely to be relegated to the “too hard basket” which will not facilitate the improvement of access.
6) Encourage congregations to be the “drivers” of their own action plans. Congregations know how their buildings are used, therefore modifications are more likely to meet the needs of all of the users more effectively. For example: There are different methods of celebrating communion, which may influence if and how the sanctuary area is modified. The general flow of traffic through the building is known by congregation members, which will determine which entrance to prioritise when making modifications for access.

ACTION PLAN TABLE:

As previously described, the action plan table was developed from a compilation of the results from all research tools: the access audit, the focus groups and the questionnaire. Financial limits have also been considered when making the plan. To that end it was considered important to identify which churches would not be prioritized. These are churches where the use of the church is negligible (ie used once a month or less), and the churches for which modifications would cost more than the actual buildings.

Since it is not possible to address all the issues in the action plan on an immediate basis, the plan has been divided into three sections. The first section is categorized as: “Matters of highest priority,” the second is titled: “Matters of medium priority” and the third is called “Matters of optional priority at this stage.” The ensuing pages contain the action plan tables.

Time frames have not been specified in the plan, because individual congregations will have to define their own time frames. Every church has different circumstances. It is expected that changes considered minor will be instituted within months. Major changes that require building works planning and a large amount of funding will be done within five years. The matters of highest priority will be attended first followed by those of medium priority then the optional priority will be considered.

The Uniting Church NSW Synod
Action Plan Template for matters of highest priority:

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring:
ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE TO THE CHURCH: **Where there is not an accessible entrance into the church, people with poor mobility or people who use a wheelchair may not be able to access the church.**	An accessible entrance to the church will be provided to enable people with reduced mobility or people who use a wheelchair to enter the church easily.	Create a level entrance into the church. If a level entrance cannot be provided, install a ramp to the church. Where new ramps are being created, comply with the standards, AS1428.1. If space restrictions prevent installation of a ramp of 1:14 gradient, install a ramp of 1:12 gradient. If funding help is required, obtain a loan.	_____ Months.	Property committee or other committee nominated by the congregation.	A ramp or a level entrance will have been installed to provide access into the church. This will be checked by the Property committee or other nominated committee within _____ months.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring:
ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE TO THE CHURCH HALL: **Where there is not an accessible entrance into the church hall, people with poor mobility or people who use a wheelchair may not be able to access the church hall.**	An accessible entrance to the church hall will be provided to enable people with reduced mobility or people who use a wheelchair to enter the church hall easily.	If possible, create an access route to the church hall from the church. Where the church and church hall are separate buildings, create either a level entrance or a ramped entrance into the church hall. Where new ramps are being created, comply with the standards, AS1428.1. If space restrictions prevent installation of a ramp of 1:14 gradient, install a ramp of 1:12 gradient. If funding is required, follow due processes to obtain a loan.	_____ Months.	Property committee, or other committee selected by the congregation.	A ramp or a level entrance will have been installed to provide access into the church hall. This will be checked by the Property committee or other nominated committee within _____ months.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
PATH ACCESS: **A potential trip hazard is present for people with visual impairments or with poor mobility, where the paths around the church and church hall are not smooth.**	The paving around the church and church hall is smoothed out and not slippery to minimize the risk of people with mobility or vision impairment from tripping on the path.	Smooth out paths that are cracked and uneven. Remove slipping hazards, such as moss on paths. Remove/ trim back tripping hazards from the path, such as plants growing across any of the path. Remove overhanging tree branches that obscure the path of travel, or that obscure relevant signs. Where tree roots push	_____ months	The property committee or other nominated committee.	The paths will be smooth and there is not any planting obscuring the path of travel. This will be checked by the Property or other nominated committee within _____ months.

		up and crack the pavement, where possible, remove the paving, trim the tree roots down by approximately 400mm, and then re-lay the paving. Maintain the width of the path to at least 1000mm.			

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
ACCESSIBLE CAR SPACES: **In some churches the absence of accessible car spaces makes it more difficult for people with disabilities to access the building from the car park.**	An accessible car space will be provided to make it easier for people with disabilities to move from the car park into the church buildings.	Provide at least one accessible car park space. If there are more than 100 car park spaces, designate at least three accessible car spaces. Follow relevant standards from: AS2890.1 Ensure signs directing people to the accessible car space are visible from the street and from any significant change of direction. Follow sign standards from AS1428.1 Place horizontal and vertical car park signs at	_____ Months.	Property committee or other designated committee.	An accessible car space will have been provided. This will be checked by the Property committee within _____ months.

		the car park. Ensure there is a path of travel from the car park to church & hall.			

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
UNISEX* ACCESSIBLE TOILET: **The absence of a unisex accessible toilet at each church facility may prevent people with disabilities from being able to use the toilet, or it may prevent carers of a different gender from being able to help the person with transfers or other related toileting tasks.**	Each facility will have at least one unisex accessible toilet, to enable people with disabilities and their carers to adequately use the toilet space.	If there is more than one block of toilet spaces, install a unisex accessible toilet at the most accessible toilet block. Install a unisex accessible toilet, and make sure paths to the unisex accessible toilet space are fully accessible. Follow AS1428.1 standards for creating an accessible toilet space. If funding is required, follow due processes to obtain a loan.	_____ Months.	Property committee or other nominated committee.	An accessible unisex toilet facility will be installed into one toilet block. This will be checked by the property committee within _____ months.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
HEARING LOOP AVAILABILITY: **If there is no hearing loop or FM system available to augment hearing, people with hearing impairments are not able to participate fully in the service or other activities of the congregation.**	An augmented hearing system will be provided to enable full participation of the people who attend worship services or other activities in the church and hall.	Seek a quote for installation of a hearing loop or of an FM system. Ensure the congregation understands how to use the system installed, and they understand how to use the microphone linked to the system correctly. Make sure a suitably qualified person installs the hearing loop, or sets up the FM transmitters and receivers to the same wavelength.	_____ Months.	Property committee or other nominated committee.	An FM system or hearing loop will be installed. This will be checked by the property or other nominated committee within _____ months.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring:
EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LOOP: **In many churches the hearing loop is reported not to work effectively, this may be due to using it incorrectly, or due to a faulty system. If the hearing loop does not work effectively, people with a hearing impairment are unable to participate fully.**	Short term: Within 12 months, people will deem the hearing loop effective through using it correctly. Long term: If the hearing loop is deemed to be ineffective after the 12 month monitoring evaluation, the loop will be assessed and fixed as required.	Make a brochure, including information on where the loop is, how to use the loop and the microphone/ PA system, as well as to use the "t-switch" on their hearing aids. Place signs in the building to delineate where the loop reaches. Evaluate whether the hearing loop is effective through a simple questionnaire. (If 20% of loop users identify it is ineffective. Arrange for the loop to be professionally assessed, and fixed as appropriate.)	Make local efforts to ensure the loop and microphone are used correctly. Within 12 months administer a questionnaire to check the loop is effective. 18 months fix the loop if necessary.	Property committee or other nominated committee.	12 months questionnaire administered by _____ committee. 18 months after professional check, follow up questionnaire.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
ADEQUATE LIGHTING: **In some churches the internal lighting has been identified as being too dim. This makes reading difficult and reduces the safety of mobilising in the environment.**	Lighting within the church will be upgraded to facilitate reading within 6 months.	Installation of more lighting outlets. Replace existing globes with globes of a higher wattage. Replace the types of globes if the lighting has not improved by increasing the wattage of the globes. If light shades are ineffective, replace the shades to a type that cast more light. Refer to lighting standards AS 4299	6 months.	The Property committee.	The Property committee will check that the lighting has improved by using the previously used strategies. This will be checked within 7 months.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
INTEGRATED SEATING IN THE CHURCH: **In many churches there are pews, with no pew cut outs to create integrated seating for people who use wheelchairs. This potentially isolates people who use wheelchairs.**	Pew cut outs will be provided to enable people in wheelchairs to sit amongst the congregation.	Make a pew cut out within the main church seating area. Make sure the pew cut out is easy to access and has the following dimension: Width: 850mm and 1500mm clearance from the back of the adjacent fixed seating.	_____ Months.	Property committee or other nominated committee.	A pew cut out will be present in the church. The Property committee will check this within _____ months.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring:
ACCESS SIGNS: **In some churches the signage to provide directions to accessible entries, the accessible car park and signs regarding augmented hearing are not well placed. This means that people with disabilities cannot make the most effective use of the facilities that are provided.**	Signs to show directions to accessible car spaces, the church and hall accessible entrances plus the presence and placement of a hearing loop will be placed appropriately around the buildings to allow people who have disabilities to use the building effectively.	Follow the standards for signage from the AS1428.1 and in the AS2890.1 Place a sign regarding the hearing loop and disability access on the church outside notice board, and on appropriate notice boards inside the church. In church information sheets and relevant handouts explain what is available with respect to disability access.	_____ Months.	The property committee or other nominated committees.	There will have been an increased number of signs regarding disability access around the church and in church handouts. This will be checked within _____months by the Property or other nominated committee.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring:
COMPLAINTS/ CONCERNS MECHANISM: **Many churches have no set concerns /complaints mechanism.**	There will be a process for complaints /concerns regarding disability issues within 3 months. Complaints will be followed up using the complaint procedure within three months.	Record complaints and action on the complaints flow chart. Identify various committees. Direct complaint to correct committee/s. Keep a diary to monitor the action. Keep a folder of the complaints to determine if there is a pattern. If the complaint is not successfully dealt with, discuss the complaint with the relevant Presbytery, to determine the best action to take.	Flow chart to be ready to be implemented within 3 months.	The committee that is nominated as the relevant committee to deal with the complaint.	Ongoing monitoring by the committee responsible, using the complaints flow chart. If appropriate, obtain feedback from the person who made the complaint.

The Uniting Church NSW Synod
Action Plan Template for matters of medium priority:

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring:
EXTERNAL LIGHTING: **Some churches do not have adequate external lighting. If the church holds activities in the evenings/nights, it will make it more difficult for people with visual impairments to negotiate the environment safely.**	The churches that hold evening/ night services and do not have external lighting will install external lighting so to make negotiating the environment easier.	Install lights/sensor lights at the car parks and on the paths to the church and church hall. If the lights are not sensor lights, ensure that someone turns them on before it is dark. Have accessible switches to the lights in both inside and outside.	6 months	Property committee or other nominated committee.	Within 7 months the Property committee will check whether the lighting has been installed at the car parks and at the external paths.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
LARGE PRINT: **There are not enough large print Bibles and Hymn books in many churches. Members of congregations tend to be ageing, therefore there may be an increasing need for large print format.**	15-20% of the hymn-books and Bibles will be in large print format to cater for the changing visual needs of the congregation members.	Obtain large print Bibles and Hymns books to 15-20% of the collection. (If purchasing new books plan for 15-20%, however if adding to existing books purchase only large print. Mark on the spine of all large print books, a symbol indicating they are large print. Eg. **LP**. (Mark the existing books in the church that have large print with **LP**.)	18 months.	Pastoral Care committee or other nominated committee.	15-20% of the hymn books and Bibles in the collection will be large print, within 20 months. This will be checked by the Pastoral Care or other nominated committee.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
STAIR ACCESS: **Many of the stairs to the church and church halls have only one set of rails, there are often no contrasting nosing strips or tactile indicators on the stairs. This hinders using the stairs by people with visual and mobility difficulties.**	Create two sets of railing on the stairs and install railings that comply with standards. (Some churches have heritage status, therefore only do this if the heritage significance is retained.) Contrasting nosing strips and tactile indicators will be applied to the stairs.	Check heritage order details of the church. Consider the stairs that are most commonly used to prioritise the modifications. Consider overall stair modifications with any other proposed building modifications. Install complying handrails on both sides of the steps. Apply contrasting nosing strips and tactile indicators to the stairs.	12 months.	Property committee or any other nominated committee.	Contrasting strips will have been applied to the steps within _____ months. Bilateral railing that complies with standards will have been installed to the stairs most commonly used, if heritage significance is retained, within _____months.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring:
SANCTUARY ACCESS: **Some churches do not have rails to the sanctuary creating difficulties for people with mobility impairments to receive communion if it is distributed at the sanctuary. Ministers with disabilities and lay preachers may have difficulty accessing the sanctuary to lead worship.**	Rails and contrasting nosing strips will be placed on the steps of church sanctuaries to facilitate access to the sanctuary space.	Install contrasting nosing strips and bilateral rails on the stairs to the sanctuary. If the church has heritage status, it may not be possible to install rails and nosing strips. If this is the case, consider other methods of distributing the elements. If stair access is not able to be used by the congregation or the minister, make a demountable or a permanent ramp to the sanctuary area.	12 months.	Property committee or other nominated committee.	The property committee or other nominated committee will check within 18 months that the appropriate modifications have been made to the sanctuary area.

The Uniting Church NSW Synod
Action Plan Template for matters of low priority at this stage:

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
ACCESSIBLE LIFT BUTTONS: **Some church properties have lifts, with no tactile indicators on the buttons to indicate the level that the person is nominating. This does not allow people who are blind to independently operate the buttons. Some lift call buttons**	The buttons of the lifts will be modified to allow independent use of the buttons by people who are blind and by people who are in wheelchairs.	Obtain quotes to determine the cost of re-installing lift buttons when the lift is scheduled to be overhauled/maintained. If the cost is not prohibitive, when the lifts are being overhauled/maintained, reinstall the buttons to the AS1735.12 standard. As an interim measure install Braille stickers indicating number.	Interim measures to be in place within _____ months.	Property or other nominated committee.	It will be checked that dowelling rod and Braille stickers are available within 6 months. This will be checked by the Property committee or other nominated committee.

are too high, preventing people in wheelchairs from reaching all buttons.		These are available from the Royal Blind Society Accessible information Service. The phone number is: (02) 93343524. The Braille stickers are made on clear contact, therefore can be placed over the existing numbers. The existing numbers can be seen under the stickers. It is recommended to purchase a few sheets of the Brailled numbers, so they can be replaced as necessary. Provide a dowelling rod with an angled end to be used to reach all lift buttons for people in wheelchairs.			

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
SEATING ACCESS: **Some church halls have a number of chairs without arm rests. If arm rests were available on the chairs, people with reduced mobility would find it easier to get out of the chairs, as they could also use the chair arms for leverage.**	10% of the chairs in the halls will have armrests to allow people to transfer in and out of the chair more effectively.	When purchasing new chairs for the hall, ensure that chairs with arm-rests are purchased.	_____ months	Property or other nominated committee.	Within _____-months the Property or other nominated committee will check that chairs with arm-rests have been provided.

Issue	Goals	Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility	Monitoring: Time, who & Measures
TOLIET FACILITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH AMBULANT DISABILITIES: **Many churches do not have toilet cubicles that are to the standard specifications for people with ambulant disabilities.**	Toilets for people with mobility difficulties will be provided to allow for mobility aids to fit in the cubicles whilst the person is in the cubicle.	Provide toilets for people with ambulant disabilities according to the AS 1428.1 standard. Encourage people with ambulant disabilities to use the unisex accessible toilet as these facilities also have the rails and the circulation space to accommodate the use of mobility aids within the cubicle.	_____ months	Property or other nominated committee.	Within _____ months the Property or other nominated committee will check that provision has been made for people with ambulant disabilities to use the toilet facilities.

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