

#5 ACCOMMODATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Moved by: Archdeacon Katherine Bourbonniere

Seconded: Linda Rouleau

Resolved that the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island will commit to supporting reasonable and appropriate accommodations that would enable Synod delegates whose disabilities prevent them from full participation in any meeting of Synod, effective immediately at this 152nd Session of Synod, May 23–25, 2025.

Commentary

Synod is an essential component of the business, communication and building of the community of God in our Diocese. This gathering regularly brings people together to share information, develop strategies, work toward common goals and celebrate successes.

The success of any Synod depends on the active participation of all eligible delegates. Inclusion enables every person to participate as a valued member. Our gathering is enriched by the addition of voices that would otherwise be silent. We lament the wisdom and insight lost by excluding the voices silenced by inaccessible pieces of our present process. Christ calls us to encourage the voices that are often excluded and silenced.

Given the amount of time, effort and resources spent on planning Synod, and the impact of Synod on the life of the Diocese, it is imperative to think of and organize our gathering in a way that supports full participation. This includes considering how we make Synod accessible for people with physical and mental health challenges (within the limits of our resources). Doing this work of seeking to provide appropriate accommodation, keeping in mind that people can face a variety of barriers, not all of them physical, ensures that everyone can participate and be meaningfully involved.

Accessibility in public speaking

Accessibility in public speaking is about physical access, making sure that the spaces where we gather are free of physical barriers, and about creating spaces where everyone, regardless of their ability, can communicate effectively. This takes into account that not all disabilities or challenges are visible.

The accommodations needed to make this possible can be varied. For some, this may mean having ramps or sign language interpreters. For others, it may be about making room for alternative ways of communication, especially for those who struggle with verbal expression due to anxiety, neurodivergence, or other conditions.

While some individuals may require assistive technology others might need accommodations that address cognitive or psychological barriers. For example:

- A person with autism might prefer written communication over verbal.
- Someone with a speech disorder might require extra time or an alternative format, such as pre-recorded responses.
- Some with severe social anxiety may need to present in a smaller setting or someone to read words that they have written. Anxiety is often misunderstood or dismissed, but it is very real, and for many it can cause physical distress, including symptoms like:

- Increase heart rate, dizziness, or nausea.
- Mental ‘shut down’ – where an individual physically cannot form words.
- Panic attacks or dissociation.

Reminder: What works for one person may not work for another, making it essential to have flexible capacity for personalized accommodations.

Preventative Measures to Manage Associated Risks

Unfortunately, any system designed for accessibility can be misused. In this case, someone might falsely claim an inability to speak publicly to avoid accountability, work, or responsibilities. This can undermine real cases of need and lead to skepticism about legitimate accommodation. To address this risk while maintaining fairness and working towards inclusion, we suggest the following measures:

- **Trusted Verification**
Having written confirmation of the individual’s disability and need from a medical professional such as a doctor, psychologist, or psychiatrist is the preferred form of verification, but we recognize that there are a number of potential barriers that an individual may face in seeing one of those medical professionals as well as in obtaining that written confirmation. In acknowledgement of that, an individual may provide their own confirmation, with an attestation that they faced significant barriers preventing them from obtaining a written confirmation from a medical professional.
- **Flexible alternatives**
Instead of outright exclusion from speaking due to disability, accommodation might involve recorded messages (audio or video), written statements, or an advocate speaker.
- **Consideration to Accommodate**
Once identified, every reasonable effort to accommodate the individual’s specific need will be made to allow them full participation.