



The Church of England's General Synod has given unanimous backing to a call for people with Down's Syndrome to be welcomed, celebrated and treated with dignity and respect.

A motion affirming the dignity and full humanity of people with Down's Syndrome was passed after a debate at the General Synod meeting in London.

It comes as a new form of prenatal screening, Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT), is set to be rolled out in the NHS to women deemed to be at 'high-risk' of having a child with Down's syndrome.

The motion welcomes medical advances and calls for the Government and health professionals to ensure that women who have been told that their unborn child has Down's Syndrome are given comprehensive, unbiased information on the condition.

The Bishop of Carlisle, James Newcome, the Church of England's lead bishop on healthcare, told the General Synod that the Church's belief is that every human being is made in the image of God and is of unique and equal value.

"That includes people with Down's Syndrome, and has massive implications both for the welcome we offer in our church communities" and the support we provide for parents with Down's Syndrome children, he said.

"This is a call for love" and practical assistance, and on countless occasions the Christian Church has demonstrated its ability to provide both.

He added: "People with Down's Syndrome are complete human beings, made in the image of God, deserving full inclusion in both Church and Society. It is imperative that every step is taken to ensure that they are welcomed, celebrated and treated with dignity and respect.

General Synod members contributing to the debate included Rachel Wilson from Rochester Diocese, who described her own medical records as a "catalogue of disaster".

"This should not just be a commitment to be kind and benevolent, but recognition that as a Church we are called to provide a place where disabled people can actively participate.

"It is not for me to dictate to any parent what choices they make when facing a diagnosis of Down's, but I do think that we need to remove the link between capacity and whether life is really worth living.

"What I do know is that being born with disability is not a disaster. I know myself to be wonderfully made in the image of God.

Other speakers included the Bishop of Ely, Stephen Conway, who said: "I believe passionately that disabled people have much to teach us about living in the truth and working for inclusion and genuine diversity.

The amended motion was passed by the General Synod with 284 votes in favour and no votes against and no recorded abstentions.