



How to ...

make your church more accessible during the pandemic

The Covid 19 Pandemic has seen a mushrooming of virtual ways of being church spring up in a very short time. This has challenged many of us to explore new skills and experience. Because of the speed of this provision has largely been aimed at the majority and those on the margins who may have challenges in accessing technology have largely been forgotten. Just as our regular church worship often presents barriers and challenges to disabled people being fully included this is also the case in our new ways of being church.

Jesus again and again goes out of his way to draw those on the margins into the heart of his ministry. This is something that needs to be remembered and embraced as we all adapt our way of being church under Lockdown. It is also worth mentioning, however, that for some disabled people life has changed very little for them and many are used to accessing church remotely as physical access has become too difficult. Much can be learnt from some of the ways of being church that the disabled community have developed. This short blog from Fiona Gosden from Through the Roof is entitled 'What Disabled People Have Always Known' gives a moving sight into this.

<https://www.facebook.com/TTRchangeslives/videos/219362709284399/>

The Office for National Statistics Survey of Internet use in 2019 shows that 7% of families do not have access to the internet. A disproportionate number of these families include one or more disabled people. Although the overall numbers of disabled people regularly accessing the internet have increased to 78% this still leaves 22% who have no regular access. Alongside this there are many disabled people who can only access the internet with additional tools such as subtitles or screen readers. These two facts together mean that churches do need to be considering how they can broaden and improve what they are offering both on-line and in other ways.

This guide has attempted to gather together some practical advice and ideas to assist you in making your church more accessible in this time. As it is an area that is rapidly developing and changing there will inevitably be things that have been missed or are not covered. So please get in touch with the Diocesan Disability Adviser if you have any examples of things that are going well or any specific questions.

Church on the Internet

Structure and knowing what is going to happen is really important for many people and this is especially important when church is being done in a new way. Providing a clear structure and time frame for you service is good practice and can help reduce anxiety and confusion.

AbilityNet have produced a number of free guides on technology and disability including a webinar on how to run accessible meetings for disabled people. These can be accessed here: https://abilitynet.org.uk/news-blogs/abilitynet-live-free-events-about-technology-and-disability?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=AbilityNet-Newsletter-April-2020&dm_i=3SCI,14CLF,39YGI5,3XWU6,1

Many people find speaking in a large group difficult and as a result many churches are using Zoom's breakout rooms for a virtual coffee time after the service. Breakout rooms can be activated by logging into your Zoom account on-line. If using these is it good to set some ground rules and make people aware of how long the group will be together and how to leave. It is also good practice for people to introduce themselves and not assume that everyone is able to read their name on the screen. It is also worth considering the size of breakout groups – for instance if using Zoom on a mobile phone the maximum number of people that can be seen at once is four.

When speaking remember that many people lip-read so don't speak too fast and make sure that your face is visible.

Text formatting

If you are putting up words for songs and/or liturgy please follow the normal clear text guidance:

- Sans serif font such as Arial
- Leave plenty of space between lines of text – at least 1.25pt
- Use sentence case not all capitals
- Use left aligned text
- Show text on a plain background with good contrast such as black on white, yellow on dark blue
- Don't put too many words on a page. Remember some people will be watching on phones or tablets which will make the font much smaller. If you are unsure look at Zoom on a mobile phone and make sure that the font is the equivalent size of Arial 12pt minimum and ideally larger.
- If possible send out any liturgy, song words and readings in advance so that people can download and print hard copies if they need to.
- Avoid using pale print on pale backgrounds – ensure that print contrasts with its background.
- If emailing out text to people please send it in an editable format and not as a PDF as this does not work with screen reader programmes used by people who are blind or have difficulty reading for other reasons.

Subtitles/Captioning

The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) estimates that in the UK there are almost nine million hearing impaired people. Approximately 28% of people who are hearing impaired are between 16-60 years of age, and 72% are over 60 years of age. So subtitles are crucial for a significant number of people and need to be viewed as

essential not an optional extra. They are also helpful for people who may be joining from an environment where there may be a lot of background noise.

Adding subtitles does take a little extra time especially if you are doing it for the first time but like any new skill gets easier the more you do it. If you are live streaming through Facebook Live or YouTube then you will probably be putting your live stream together in programmes like OBS or Otter, the software allows you to manage the resources you will stream and show those resources at the time you want to show them. You can then add subtitles. This YouTube clip shows how:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR0BgUFJD8o>

Zoom has a similar facility to do this and when you log into your account on line you can access tutorials on this.

YouTube can also transcribe and add subtitles however it is worth checking the transcript afterwards editing any odd words it has used.

Many churches are providing words for liturgy and music but not for sermons. If you are struggling with the technology it would be worth considering whether you can send out the sermon in advance to anyone you know will need.

Live Transcribe is an app which allows an Android device to capture speech and sound and see them as text on a screen. This means that someone could be joining a Zoom service on their laptop and receiving subtitles for in on their phone for example. Transcribe Live is the Apple alternative to this.

Visuals

If you are using visuals for example film clips during your service please consider how someone who is unable to see the screen can action these. If someone is watching with someone else you could ask them to describe what is happening. If not possibly someone could speak to them on the phone at the same time and describe what is happening.

Don't put up text without someone reading it out so that those who are unable to read know what is there.

Socialising

Meeting with our church family is important to many of us during this time. This can be difficult with more than a small number of people and particularly problematic for people with neurodiversity. Zoom has a facility for putting people into small breakout rooms which allows people to talk to just a small number of people. These can be redone after 5-10 minutes so that people can meet with a different group. This facility needs to be activated in the user settings when logging on on-line.

Backgrounds

When filming for your service whether it be live or pre-recorded consider what can be seen in the background. Many people, and especially some of those living with neurodiversity find busy backgrounds distracting. If you don't have a plain wall you can film in front of then consider hanging up a sheet as a temporary backdrop,

Providing for British Sign Language Users

The Church of England is producing a service every Sunday at 9am and these should all now have interpreters. <https://www.youtube.com/user/ArchbishopsCouncil>

The BSL Church Worship Facebook Group is the best place to look for information about what's on offer:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BSLChurchWorship/>

Here, you will find information about signed services and other events and worship material created and posted by our own members. Some of the Chaplains are livestreaming services or reflections so worth checking this group.

The group is also on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/BSLChurchWorsh>

For those who do not have access to Facebook, there are resources on YouTube and many of the livestreamed services appear there.

BSL Church Worship: many of the resources that appear on the Facebook Group also appear on YouTube. For more detailed information please contact Rev Canon Gill Behenna Chaplain with the Deaf Community.

Church for People who are Unable to Access Technology:

Even if they don't have a computer or tablet most people will have some sort of phone. The Church of England has just launched the 'Daily Hope Line.' The line – which is available 24 hours a day on 0800 804 8044 – has been set up particularly with those unable to join online church services during the period of restrictions in mind. Daily Hope offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line.

Zoom has a facility for people to dial into sessions from a telephone so that they can hear what is happening. If you have people who you know are accessing services in this way you may want to find a way of getting an order of service to them in advance.

You could think about making your sermons accessible in a different format. Some churches have phone lines where you can call in to here last Sunday's sermon. Another possibility is to put the sermon or even the whole service onto a CD or DVD or to provide people with sermon notes or full transcriptions.

Some churches have delivered packs of materials to people they knew would struggle to access church via technology. These have included things such as bible readings and reflections and books of prayers. If this was done a number of weeks ago it would be worth considering sending out a pack of new materials.

Some churches have set up buddy systems where people will keep in touch with someone who is unable to access technology by regular phone calls or socially distant outdoor meet ups. These allow people to still feel connected and can also be a time to pray together

Church for People with Additional Needs

Some people living with dementia or learning disabilities may have very limited access to technology and may also not be able to read. Many of these people will also be living in care homes and so as well as being cut off from Church will be cut off from family and friends. Some groups are keeping in touch with their members through phone calls or through sending out newsletters but for many of this group there is a need for something less word based. Where people are unable to access YouTube it may work to send them a DVD of resources

Further resources for this group are currently being developed by a number of people including:

Christina Gangemi has produced a number of resources specific to this time:

<http://www.kairosforum.org/space/>

The Additional Needs Alliance have resources on their website for children with additional needs that could easily be tweaked to be meaningful for adults:

<https://additionalneedsalliance.org.uk/>

Books beyond words have some free downloadable resources to help learning disabled people understand what is happening: <https://booksbeyondwords.co.uk/coping-with-coronavirus>

From Lynne McCann: <https://includedbygrace.wordpress.com/2020/05/03/2nd-accessible-service-at-home/> and <https://www.reachoutasc.com/churches-organisations/links-and-resources>

Makaton worship songs and prayers on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwuaOT47jb0mS71qLqsRFWg>

Livability have produced a resource called Dementia Inclusive

Church and COVID-19: Responding to challenge with compassion

<https://livability.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Dementia-Inclusive-Church-and-COVID-19.pdf>

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