



How to ...

Make a return to in-building worship accessible

As the Lockdown eases churches are beginning to re-open their buildings and hold services of collective worship. During the Pandemic many people who had found accessing church challenging found that they could now join church services online. Research by Tearfund shows that 24% of British adults have accessed church online during Lockdown. A summary can be found [here](#). Anecdotally we are aware that this includes many disabled people who had been unable to access physical church. This 'How to... guide' sits alongside the guidance published by the Government and the National Church and aims to help you think about how disabled people can continue to be an active part of your church community as you return to using church buildings.

The Lockdown has been a challenging time for a large proportion of the population. Research by the Office for National Statistics, found [here](#), shows that it has been even more challenging for disabled people and has had a detrimental affect on their physical and mental well-being. Consequently, it is important for churches to consider how to offer pastoral and practical support to disabled people alongside continuing to find creative ways of enabling them to be active members of their churches.

Online Church

As church communities return to using their buildings it is important to consider whether there is a possibility of offering a mixed mode of service delivery so that online church can continue for those who are only able to access church this way. There are a number of ways this might be done including livestreaming services from your building or including an 'online only' service within the range of services offered.

You might consider asking people who are not able to be physically present to record a reading or the prayers to be played during the service to ensure that those watching online can still have an active involvement in the service. What many have found positive about online church is the ability to meet with others in a more informal way before and/or after services, so you might want to consider continuing to have a coffee time on a platform such as Zoom at a time once everyone has returned home. If you have been offering midweek online groups you might want to maintain some of the online ones. A full exploration of this and advice on technology use and other considerations can be found [here](#).

If you are able to continue with an online church presence then please remember to follow the guidance in '[How to make your church accessible during the pandemic](#)' about how to make your online services accessible.

Worshipping in church buildings

As you return to worship in your church buildings think carefully about how any changes you are making in order to maintain social distance will affect disabled people. It can be easy when we are all so focused on keeping people safe to forget about general accessibility.

It is important to have clear signage that everyone can read and understand. Clear signage will:

- have good colour contrasts
- have a sans serif font of an easily readable size
- be written in simple language and sentence case
- be on a plain non-reflective background
- include text and widely recognized symbols

Think carefully about the route you plan to use around the church and how different people will be able to access it. For instance, if you are using a one-way system with separate in and out doors are they both step free? If not is there clear guidance for wheelchair users and those who cannot manage steps. Consider whether the route for moving around your church is easy to understand – have you tried it out on a few volunteers, are there any places where the route is confusing and might need extra signage? It may also help to have people offering direction along the route who should be encouraged to use clear hand gestures as well as speech to help those who can't hear. You might like to think about making a short video showing the route around your church to put on your church website.

If you have anyone who requires physical assistance to attend a church service it is advisable to contact them to ask if they wish to return to worship in the church building and then plan with them a safe way for them to do so within the guidelines. However, there may be some circumstances where this isn't possible. Finally, it would be worth getting in touch with anyone you know who is likely to have concerns about attending a physical service to see if there is a way that you can help them to safely attend services.

Masks and Face Coverings

The guidance around wearing masks is changing so make sure that you are following the most recent guidance [here](#). When masks are required to be worn, ensure that stewards are aware that some people are exempt from wearing them due to illness or disability. Government guidance on mask wearing and exemptions can be found [here](#). Masks can pose problems for people with hearing impairments as covering the mouth prevents lip reading as well as generally lowering the volume and clarity of the voice. It is possible to make or buy face masks with clear panels which can help with lip reading. This page on the [National Deaf Children's Society](#) has some useful tips on communication when wearing a facemask and links to several ways of making masks with a clear panel. There are also a few completely clear masks available online and it is expected that more will become available over time. However, these do not fully resolve the problem especially when people are 'listening' from a distance as the masks still cover part of the face, can mist up and may reflect light. Washing-up liquid rubbed into the plastic part of the mask can help with the misting up of masks. It is important that there are other ways of assisting people with communication alongside masks. In one to one conversations this could be as simple as writing things down. In larger groups it is important to speak slowly and clearly and to use a microphone and hearing loop if at all possible.

Don't Forget

Please don't forget that there may be people in your church who are both unable to access the internet and also may have difficulty getting to church buildings due to changes in public transport and social support. Some of this group will also be unable to read. Consider whether there is a way that you can visit them safely and whether there is any other way that they could remain connected with church. 'Dial-a-sermon', telephone access to Zoom meetings and prayer and care phone calls or short doorstep visits are all worth considering.

If you would like any further advice or would like to use this time to explore making your church more accessible, please contact the diocesan disability adviser. Alice.kemp@bristoldicase.org
0117 9060100