How to ...

Create accessible service orders

We all want our churches to be welcoming, inclusive places. We often put a lot of effort into making our buildings as accessible as possible but we also need to look beyond this to what happens in the church and in services. A good starting place is to create accessible service orders. How you use the suggestions made here will probably differ depending on whether you are creating a service book that is going to be used repeatedly over time or a service order that will only be used once.

Design

Font types can have a significant impact on how readable a document is. Around 10% of the population have dyslexia and research indicates that generally sans serif fonts are easier to read and italic fonts are particularly difficult. Good fonts are Helvetica, Courier, Arial, and Verdana. Ariel 12 point for the body of the text is generally considered to be the best minimum size. Different fonts are different sizes so you may need to increase the font size if it is a font which is smaller than Ariel. For example:

> Ariel 12 point
>
> Verdana 12 point
>
> Gill Sans MT 12 point
>
> Courier 12 point

You may find it helpful to develop a house style that all your service orders follow to assist people in keeping service orders accessible.

Almost as important as the font is the layout of the text – generally it's best to add pages and increase white space than to cram everything in to try and reduce the number of pages. Having adequate spacing between lines is essential – 1.15pt is the absolute minimum. Justified, right aligned and large blocks of centered text should be avoided as should the use of shadow images behind text. There needs to be a distinct contrast between the font colour and the paper, such as black text on white. For further detail see 'How to write accessible documents'.

Content

You may like to start your service order with some basic information about the church. This might include things like: you have a hearing loop, that large print copies are available, where the toilets are, etc. This can help newcomers feel welcome and a part of things.

Each church community will have its own traditions about things such as when to stand and sit and where and how communion is distributed. Often we assume that people will somehow know this. If you provide directions in the service order such as when to stand sit that can be really helpful for people.

Projected Service Orders

You may be in a church that projects all of its music and liturgy. This is fine but you need to be aware that a significant number of people have difficulty being able to read from a screen. This may be because they have visual or cognitive impairment or because they are unable to stand and so can't see over the heads of people. Dimming lighting, especially when showing video clips aids accessibility.

Consequently, some form of personal copy for people should be available. In the Equality Act 2010 we are required as churches to be anticipatory. Automatically providing a personal copy of projected words whether or not one has been requested would be expected of all churches. The format of this can be a print-out of the screen but there are also a number of new technologies that are making this easier. If your church us Wi-Fi then the Join me app allows up to three users to receive the presentation on personal tablets and more if you pay a subscription. Other churches have bought a number of Kindle fires or other cheap tablets and just emailed the presentation across.

Alternative Formats

You should always have a small number of large print copies of your service sheet available. These should be a minimum of 16pt. These need to be out, alongside the regular size sheets so people can see they are available. When creating large print copies think carefully about how they will be used. Blowing up A4 to A3 for instance might be the simplest option but it can also create an unwieldly document for people to hold. In addition it makes it evident that that person has a disability, and it can cause embarrassment.

Unless you are a large busy church or you know you have Braille readers in your congregation, you generally wouldn't be expected to provide formats such as braille or extra large print unless these are specifically requested. It is a common misconception that blind and visually impaired people use Braille, most prefer large clear print. However, if someone has a service order in an alternative format you do need to do your best to provide it. If you need any assistance with how to do this please contact the diocesan disability adviser.

Further Information

How to write accessible documents: https://www.bristol.anglican.org/documents/how-create-accessible-documents/
How to create accessible Powerpoint presentations:
https://webaim.org/techniques/powerpoint/dae3b2b3ef25
Guidance from RNIB: https://help.rnib.org.uk/help/daily-living/technology/accessible-documents

Written By Alice Kemp, Diocesan Disability Adviser.