

Hearing impairment reflection from Rev'd Pat Jackson 22 nd June 2020

These are strange times in which we all find ourselves ministering within the Anglican Church. We all have our own individual challenges, and carry with us our own baggage into each situation we find ourselves part of. This doesn't of course mean we are worse off than any other, just that we have different experiences and challenges ahead of us. Like myself, not many people living with hearing impairment use sign language, because we do have limited hearing, but some of us have had to learn a certain amount of lip reading (even if it is very limited)

As a self-supporting minister I have part time hours and do not live in the parish I serve. This means that at the beginning of LOCK DOWN I could not take a walk and even wave to members of the church. Not being able to do this left me feeling very isolated and somewhat detached from church family.

Many of our church family are hearing impaired, elderly and live alone, so the need to communicate with them was extremely important both for them and for me! Internet is for many of them something completely alien to their understanding and skill set. I myself am not internet savvy so I really do understand where they are in this. I use internet of course but beyond emails and fact finding I am not tech minded and panic at the thought of it! STRESS, complete stress I'm afraid.

The most distressing thing for those living with hearing impairment is that we are now in a situation where severely affected people are less able to use a telephone successfully, and even if a person is standing in front of them at 2 metres, they cannot see people's faces when facial coverings (masks) are worn.

I understand fully why they are worn, but for me personally, security guards wearing face masks at the entrance of supermarkets bring more challenges. Not only is the sound of their voice muffled by the mask but obviously I cannot see a facial expression or the shape of the words they are speaking. When you tell the assistant in a pharmacy that you cannot hear them they just don't understand that even using a hearing loop isn't helping as much as it should - because the mask is muffling the sound.

I have visited church members where it's been possible, always outside, and the delight I've seen on those faces has been incredible... even when they've struggled to have a conversation. Contact is vital and I do feel that due to this experience ...wearing a visor will give a clear image of a person's face, rather than a face mask, and of course it can be washed and disinfected regularly. So I ask youwhat do you think about this. Shouldn't we all as ministers be wearing them?

Thank you
Pat