

# Including Deaf people in church

The Revd Susan Myatt

## Audio file

[Susan Myatt audio 1.mp3](#)

## Transcript

00:00:09

My name is Suzanne.

00:00:14

I am a Deaf Baptist minister. I also work for the Diocese of Litchfield.

00:00:22

One day a week.

00:00:26

It's a question of barriers.

00:00:30

There are many.

00:00:35

One example is.

00:00:41

When we're lipreading someone, it's difficult because.

00:00:45

We only get 30% of the information.

00:00:49

Which is really hard, and what's worse is if someone is speaking and then walking up and down we.

00:00:55

Can't lip read them. We rely on body language and some people have very expressive faces and other people don't and they are very hard to lip read.

00:01:07

That's why we become tired.

00:01:09

It's not easy.

00:01:12

Another problem we have is that.

00:01:16

We want a normal conversation with someone if we haven't understood something, we'll ask them to repeat and say what did you mean in the sale. It doesn't matter. It's not important, and I'll tell you later.

00:01:28

And they forget.

00:01:30

And that becomes painful and you feel confident, sapped, and you feel thick and.

00:01:38

Like the church doesn't value you.

00:01:42

And that's a big problem. We see that happening there.

00:01:48

Another issue that happens again and again as the labels people use. They might say oh they're deaf and dumb.



**DIOCESE of OXFORD**

*A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world*

00:01:55

That's not acceptable now or they're stone deaf again.

00:02:01

That's not right. We have the appropriate correct terms. There's deaf, deaf, and hearing and hard of hearing. That's all. We don't need these other labels.

00:02:14

It's interesting that there are some songs that have.

00:02:18

Old words there that just make my skin crawl they're not good.

00:02:24

Another issue might be.

00:02:27

To do with prayer, which is tricky.

00:02:30

People say we'll close our eyes and pray. And of course, we've got to keep our eyes open and watch the interpreter.

00:02:39

And then there may be responsive prayers.

00:02:42

And we're always three or four sentences behind.

00:02:47

And it's difficult for us. We never quite.

00:02:52

Catch up whenever at the right time as we're trying to process things.

00:02:57

At the same time, to match the actual prayer and that is definitely tiring.

00:03:03

It's not easy.

00:03:06

Another issue would be a video clip without subtitles.

00:03:11

That means we've got to watch the interpreter and we miss information on the screen because it's impossible to watch the screen in the interpreter at the same time.

00:03:21

Another problem would be sermons that go on for a long time. Our eyes get tired because we're watching the interpreter and taking on the information and processing it all the time.

00:03:33

That's exhausting.

00:03:35

So there are lots of barriers.

00:03:42

Additionally, if you want to go to a Bible study and there's no interrupt provided you feel.

00:03:49

The language is.

00:03:52

Difficult to access and for me personally with some English words.

00:03:57

I don't understand the meaning. I feel stupid asking someone for what does this word mean?

00:04:04



**DIOCESE of OXFORD**

*A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world*

Your confidence is lost and you feel you just want to withdraw. But if you go to a deaf church, really it's a deaf space with deaf culture, deaf identity, you can feel a real connexion as you share together memories or whatever, and we're using a visual language together.

00:04:25

We rely on visual resources.

00:04:29

And you feel more of a connexion with each other and with God.

00:04:34

And for me.

00:04:36

The sermons are shorter, they're visual and afterwards.

00:04:41

Yes, it's different. There's a style of things, but church is accessible for us. We can have conversations together and you feel.

00:04:50

A real sense of empathy there.

00:04:54

It boosts confidence.

00:04:57

Faith grows.

00:04:59

As we are together and with the Lord.

00:05:05

I won't see deaf people in power to become leaders.

00:05:08

God calls anyone.

00:05:11

To become a leader.

00:05:13

Why not?

00:05:19

When we talk about the Bible and the English use there and how difficult it is for us to understand, there are metaphors that are really tricky that go over our heads.

00:05:30

But soon there will be a new website.

00:05:33

For the Birsal Bible translation project.

00:05:39

They're working on the book of Mark, the Gospel.

00:05:43

So there will be some stories there, and it means that a church can download these stories.

00:05:50

And use them and that'll give deaf people huge confidence they can take on the information in their own sign language.

00:05:59

And things become clearer.

00:06:02

And that is vital.

00:06:04

For us

00:06:07



**DIOCESE of OXFORD**

*A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world*

And also sharing death stories that are so visual as well.

00:06:13

We want more of that.

00:06:16

We want to encourage each other.

00:06:19

With his grace.

00:06:25

I know some hearing churches, their hearts are so kind.

00:06:29

They're trying their best to help deaf people, and that's good that they're doing a fantastic job. But my question is, are deaf people growing in faith or are they stuck?

00:06:42

I want to tell you about.

00:06:45

Reverend Jill behenna

00:06:50

She is the.

00:06:52

Church of England national deaf adviser. She's incredibly knowledgeable and skilled.

00:07:01

And do contact her for advice.

00:07:05

And help she's got lots of resources.

00:07:10

To share that are so helpful, so valuable.

00:07:16

That can help the deaf church to grow their confidence to grow.

00:07:21

Which we want more of, don't we to be more creative?

00:07:27

God wants the church to grow as well. He wants anyone to come to him.

00:07:35

Many deaf people have suffered in the past at church and they're frightened. They don't want to go back to church because of the hurt and the rejection.

00:07:44

So now now.

00:07:47

Is a time to build new relationships to encourage them to look after them too.

00:07:53

Welcome them to church to a deaf space.

00:08:01

It is truly amazing how our work together has grown, particularly through lockdown. That's been accessible through zoom.

00:08:11

Facebook there's the Blair church worships page which has got.

00:08:18

Resources regularly uploaded there. There's been a.

00:08:20

Lot of change.

00:08:23



**DIOCESE of OXFORD**

*A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world*

But unfortunately there are still barriers in church and there's lots of stories there.

00:08:32

But we can help each other. We can learn from each other.

00:08:36

We can build bridges.

00:08:38

For his Kingdom.

00:08:41

Thank you for listening. I really hope that something has struck you.

00:08:47

This information

00:08:52

Thank you for your attention and.

00:08:54

May God bless you.

00:09:03

Thank you Susan for that fabulous video. UM, and for doing the BSL and captioning for us, which gives our interpreters.

00:09:14

A little bit of a stop.

00:09:17

I'm hoping that Susan is with us and available to answer any questions that have come in.

00:09:23

Which means that my friend Michaela will unmute herself and do voice over for me.

00:09:38

Michaela, you're very quiet.

00:09:42

You missed that comment. Can you just say it again please?

00:09:45

Of course, Susan. Thank you so much for your video for presenting in BSL, which I know is your native language, and for doing the captions for us, a real gift to our tech team.

00:09:58

Susan, one observation I have, of course, which most hearing people may not know, is that when we talk about deaf language and deaf culture.

00:10:09

We mean those who use BSL as their primary or only language and the identity is very clear.

00:10:21

And to be deaf in that context is not to be disabled. Would you like to have a comment on the difference between being a deaf person and being a disabled person and why the two are not necessarily the same thing?

00:10:38

Thank you, good questions.

00:10:44

For me, I just don't feel disabled. No, it's just my perspective.

00:10:50

Of deafness is completely visible. Invisible. You can't see that I'm deaf. I look normal so it's interesting. I was born deaf.

00:11:05

My family has.

00:11:06

UM generations of deaf people. So it's actually completely normal for us.



**DIOCESE of OXFORD**

*A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world*

00:11:11

So I don't know any different.

00:11:14

It was just.

00:11:15

The same as being born within a hearing family. I was born to a deaf family and people are always asking me what's it?

00:11:23

Like being deaf.

00:11:25

I'm not, I don't know.

00:11:26

It's just me. I've I've never experienced hearing.

00:11:30

So I don't know, I can't relate.

00:11:33

So I find it quite difficult to answer that question.

00:11:37

So I sort of always refer.

00:11:38

It around to like, well, what's it like being hearing?

00:11:42

You know, sort of send the question back to them and make them think and challenge them.

00:11:51

For me it's about communication. It's fat, it's just communication.

00:11:57

I've got the same brain. I have the same thought process. I just communicate through my hands.

00:12:05

I just can't hear the sounds like I can't hear them at all.

00:12:09

So you know it's still exist my hands, my lips and and that's just very visual and.

00:12:15

That's just what it is.

00:12:17

It's not an illness, no.

00:12:20

I'm just me.

00:12:23

And lots of people struggle with that.

00:12:26

They think I label myself as disabled and I I just don't.

00:12:32

I'm just God created me who I am and this is me.

00:12:37

Thank you.

00:12:38

Uh, a question about the relationship between Makaton and Besle, and I know within the deaf community there's lots of opinions about how useful they are and how different they are. Can you tell us a bit more technically about Makaton and BSL and how they're different?

00:12:58

OK makaton



**DIOCESE of OXFORD**

*A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world*

00:13:02

It's sort of 1 sign.

00:13:06

For example, milk, that's it.

00:13:10

In in BSL.

00:13:13

We can sign complete sentences, but interestingly.

00:13:22

In English you would say what is your name?

00:13:27

That would be English.

00:13:29

And in sign language.

00:13:32

His name what?

00:13:35

The questions at the end.

00:13:42

We start with the little word name.

00:13:46

So like live where.

00:13:50

Aibel where?

00:13:54

That's BSL and it becomes a visual. It doesn't follow the same English structure or the English word order, and it's impossible to find. You know, every English word.

00:14:09

And we use a lot of body language.

00:14:13

Facial expressions.

00:14:16

For example.

00:14:25

If you think in the past, so everything behind me and then future and then now is just in front of me.

00:14:32

So we we know where we're signing refers to when it happens.

00:14:40

And it's explaining lip pattern as well. It is very similar.

00:14:45

And then the signs. But it depends on the context as well.

00:14:50

One example.

00:14:58

The signs people learn sometimes where they're in the wrong context.

00:15:04

It's a hot dog, for example, and it's like.

00:15:07

Really hot dogs?

00:15:09

And now I've never seen a hot dog.



**DIOCESE of OXFORD**

*A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world*

00:15:12

They're not referring to the food they are referring to. A dog that's hot, whereas actually they mean food. So you need the correct context to actually make that make sense.

00:15:25

So BSL is a beautiful language. It's completely expressive. It's got facial expressions, sadness, happiness. The facial expressions are really, really important.

00:15:37

You can't sort of go. All that was really good news and looked miserable and sad and or, you know, reading something really motivational from the Bible and just be very monotone with it.

00:15:50

You have to have those expressions, but a lot of hearing people sort of almost fear those facial expressions, but we.

00:15:57

Rely on them.

00:15:59

I know I definitely do, it's really important.

00:16:04

There's a number of questions asking about integration, so I guess I'm asking whether is it better to have separate deaf churches that use BSL as their primary language with some English? Or should we try and train the hearing churches to USBL?

00:16:25

So it becomes more integrated. I personally.

00:16:29

Have a, uh, 1970s nervous twitch about the word integration from a disability point of view. So what would you say, Susan in terms of growing more deaf churches that use BSL as their primary language or integrating into hearing churches and teaching them BSL?

00:16:55

I agree I don't like that word integration either.

00:17:00

I totally understand what you're saying. From my experience in the past.

00:17:07

I just didn't realise about deaf church at all at the time and I was regularly going to hearing church and just facing barrier after barrier and I gave up.

00:17:21

So when I went back I was desperate.

00:17:24

To really engage with God and get that support from the here and.

00:17:27

Church, but it was just so difficult.

00:17:30

Lots and lots of suffering. Lots of emotional pain, lots of crying. I wanted to engage for God and I just found it completely impossible.

00:17:40

But the positive thing was I did learn from them.

00:17:46

And I valued that time. It was a struggle.

00:17:51

You know I'm deaf.

00:17:54

But how to look at it from a hearing?

00:17:57



Perspective and that.

00:17:58

Was very difficult.

00:18:00

And learning to adjust and it it made me look at myself a lot and what was wrong with me?

00:18:06

Why am I so different and how do I change to match them rather than them changing to match me? But I went on and on, but the first time I went to a deaf church.

00:18:18

I just cried, I cried, and I cried and cried. And it was the first time I felt really engaged.

00:18:26

I was like wow the community. The communication and sharing the same thoughts and the same processes. It was just beautiful and I just met God.

00:18:39

So I carried on going and I just really felt cool body theology.

00:18:46

And I thought, you know.

00:18:48

All the books.

00:18:48

Are from a hearing perspective and that again was a massive struggle. How do I understand this? How do I learn it? How do I take it on board?

00:18:58

So that I could actually give.

00:18:59

Back to the deaf church.

00:19:03

And we need each other.

00:19:06

Deaf and hearing need to learn from each other. That's the priority.

00:19:12

Mainstream integration that is a challenge.

00:19:19

Def want to be involved in church. They want to be involved in the worship.

00:19:24

But it's rare.

00:19:27

They sit and watch an interpreter and they don't really engage. And then deaf church were involved. We're leading. We're doing things and it would be nice to see that in a hearing church as well and have that more dynamic relationship.

00:19:44

But we need that first.

00:19:47

And we need to learn from each other and adapt from each other. And then you know what the future holds. I don't know, but that would be my aim. That would be the priority.

00:19:58

To encourage deaf, to learn and to encourage them in their faith and build their confidence so that actually when they you know come into hearing church, they've got that confidence and that knowledge already.

00:20:15



**DIOCESE of OXFORD**

*A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world*

At the moment or in the past, it's almost like death or spoon fed to the information and it becomes quite a submissive face, whereas, you know I grew up.

00:20:29

You can't do that. You can't do that. You can't do that over and over again, so it was almost like my brain was washed of the fact that this was my label.

00:20:41

And then to learn that through God I can do anything.

00:20:44

Was really difficult and I had to remind myself I can. I can I can and still it's painful still I face those back barriers but God gives me that face and that I can do attitude to get through.

00:21:01

So that's my own hope.

00:21:05

And just briefly for hearing people or going deaf people who would like to learn BSL, I know that someone who is deaf and uses BSL as their primary language is the best teacher. So where can we go to find more information about learning BSL for ourselves?

00:21:28

Good question.

00:21:36

Learn where to learn British Sign language.

00:21:40

You know, if you want to learn.

00:21:45

There's lots of information online about basic signs and things that there.

00:21:51

And then maybe you could join, you know deaf society or diasys that actually have deaf people within it and learn that way.

00:22:03

Or meet deaf people and say oh, how did you learn sign language? Ask them and get their advice and their help and their support.

00:22:11

Don't be frightened, you know, approach them. Ask them say, oh, I'm interested.

00:22:18

And then they'll be.

00:22:19

Really excited that actually someone's making the effort and wanting to learn and, and that's really important.

00:22:25

Brilliant thank you, thank you.

00:22:27

A quick advert then for the Oxford Dioces who have a number of good deaf churches.

00:22:35

They use BSL as their first and primary language for worship and away from pandemic times when everything is on zoom. They meet in Maidenhead.

00:22:45

And Newbury and reading. There is some bcel integrated into a church in Milton Keynes.

00:22:52

But we'll put the link in the chat in a moment for the Oedd website, which tells you more information about the deaf churches that meet across the Oxford diocese.

00:23:03



**DIOCESE of OXFORD**

*A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world*

Susan, thank you for being with us. If we have any more questions that come into the chat box, then we'll send them to you and work with you to make a short video.

00:23:13

Top tips for hearing churches. To make things better for everybody, but particularly those who are.

00:23:19

Deaf BSL users. Thank you.

00:23:24

Thank you bye.