360 Accessibility Audit

Accessibility quick wins

Making your church more open and welcoming of the participation and belonging of disabled people is not something you can achieve with a few tweaks and minor changes. Rather it is a long process of cultural change, theological reflection, and reimagining what an inclusive church community really is.

See the information, guidance and downloadable material available on the Diocese of London [disability ministry webpage](#).

You can begin this process by setting out on the 360 Accessibility Audit journey and giving it the time and commitment needed to do this properly. See the Diocese of London Disability Ministry webpage for more information about this. However, there are a few things you can do to make immediate and significant changes to your welcome and inclusion of disabled people. These are listed below (although this is not an exhaustive list), but beware, these steps will not make you a truly welcoming church. These are just the start of something that needs much more of your time and attention if you want to become a more complete representation of the Body of Christ today.

Contents

1. Access area on your website

No matter how easy or difficult it is for disabled people to access your building and participate in your worship, it is good to provide information that can be easily accessed through your website. This should include pictures and descriptions of your entrance, worship area, seating, wheelchair spaces and toilets. Information about any hearing loop, large print, Braille and other sensory provision.

A description of what it will be like before, during and after your service. And any other information that will help disabled people know how easy it will be to access and participate in worship. You need to be honest. If access is difficult or you do not have accessible facilities, say so. Disabled people need to make informed decisions. See the 'Creating an accessibility area on your website' guidance downloadable from the Diocese of London disability ministry webpage.

2. Your noticeboards.

Your internal and external noticeboards should have information about accessibility and how to find out more. All your boards should display clear, simple information that is positioned at heights and in places that wheelchair users can access, as well as those who stand but need to get close. Information should be in large print with good contrast.

3. General

a) Talk to disabled people in your congregation and find out what small changes could make things more accessible for them. Maybe organise a lunch after a service and invite anyone who is finding access difficult, or has suggestions about improvements that you could make, to come along.
b) Provide basic disability awareness training for your welcome team/wardens etc.
c) Move clutter and stored items that might be a hazard.
d) Review your emergency exit routes and make sure these are unobstructed and accessible to all.
e) If you have an accessible toilet, do not use it as a storeroom as well. Ask a wheelchair user to provide feedback on how accessible your accessible toilet really is.
f) Review the signs and notices in your building and make these clear, simple, understandable and pictorial where possible.

4. For those with hearing loss

a) Can some of your welcome team learn a little Makaton or BSL and be prepared to offer a welcome? (This can be done online).

b) Test your hearing loop if you have one and set up a regular testing programme (at least once a month). Include information about the hearing loop in your publicity.

c) If you don't have a hearing loop, install one.

d) Make sure all who lead/speak use a microphone connected to the loop. (Do not let anyone claim their voice is loud enough not to need a microphone, not even during the notices)

e) Put up clear signs about your hearing loop, how to access it, and information about any places in the building where it works best and/or doesn't work.

f) Adjust your lighting so it clearly lights the faces of leaders for those who lipread.

g) Identify chairs/pews from which leaders faces can best be seen and provide information about where these are.

h) Identify chairs/pews from which your sound system can be heard most clearly and provide information about where these are.

i) If you have a projection system and show video clips, make sure these have subtitles, as soundtracks with speech and music are difficult to hear via a hearing loop.

j) Post a downloadable copy of your liturgy and song words on your website 24 hours before the service so anyone interpreting for a Deaf or deafblind person can prepare.

5. For those with sight loss

a) Provide all your printed materials and/or information that is displayed on a screen on cream or pastel colour paper in a minimum of 18 point font.

b) Post a downloadable copy of your liturgy and song/hymn words on your website 24 hours before the service so it can be downloaded and converted to accessible formats (Braille, audio etc) or loaded onto an iPad for viewing in large print and high contrast.

c) If you use a projection system, explore if tablets can be connected to your system via Bluetooth so the display can be viewed close up in the pew and buy some tablets for this if it is possible. Alternatively, load the liturgy and song/hymn words onto a few tablets and have these available for those who might need them.

d) If you use a central front screen, think about installing a few monitors around the Church that people can get closer to.

e) If you use PowerPoint during sermons, make sure all text is read out and illustrations described.

f) If you show video clips, see if you can find versions with audio description.

g) Make sure there is space between pews or chairs for a guide dog to settle and provide a rug and a bowl of water.

h) Designate an area of grass in the churchyard that dogs can use and provide information about this to people who bring assistance dogs.

i) Talk to blind and partially sighted people in your congregation about whether they would like assistance to receive Communion or would like to receive in their pew. (Don't make the announcement 'catch the stewards eye if you would like to receive in your place.')

j) Post your news sheets and other leaflets online so screen reader users can access them.

k) Review your website/Facebook page for screen reader accessibility and for ease of low vision access. Can font sizes and colours be customised?

l) If you use 'Instagram' or other social media platforms, talk to those in your congregation with sight loss to see if they have the technology to access these.

6. Wheelchair users and those with mobility and other physical issues

a) Install temporary/portable ramps at any steps that prohibit wheelchair access. Do not see these as a lasting solution though. Plan for installing permanent ramps.

b) Create wheelchair spaces in the body of the congregation so people can sit with friends and family.

c) If there are steps that currently present insurmountable access issues for wheelchairs and others with mobility issues, make this clear in your website access information.

d) If you have steps that are difficult for some people with restricted mobility, see if you can install a handrail.

e) If you have chairs, make sure you have some with arms positioned around the Church.

f) If you have pews, make sure some have pew runners or cushions. Reserve these for people with arthritis and other issues if they want to use them and provide information about where these are.

g) If receiving Communion requires negotiating a step, either install a ramp or consider changing the way you administer Communion.

7. Autistic and Neuro Divergent

a) Create a predictable and calm environment before the service. Do not have loud music playing or rehearsals going on.

b) Encourage people to sit and settle 10 mins and 5 mins before the service either through announcements or information on a screen. Start the service on time though. Don't say that the service will begin in 5 minutes when it won't really start for 15 minutes.

c) Format all your printed material to be dyslexia friendly. See the Dyslexia friendly style guide on the British Dyslexia Association website.

d) Provide some adult pew activities for those who find these help to extend their attention span.

e) Create space where people could move or pace during the service if they need to.

f) Consider if you could provide a comfortable and quiet space for people who need to spend some time out of the service.

g) Think about your use of language. Give plain and simple instructions i.e. 'Please sit' rather than 'Please take a seat.'

h) Post a downloadable copy of the liturgy and song/hymn words on your website 24 hours before the service so people can read and process what will happen.

8. Dementia

a) Get some of your welcome team to do an online dementia awareness course such as on the Alzheimer's Society Learning Hub: www.alzheimers.org.uk

b) Recruit a small team of people who are dementia aware and ready to offer subtle and informal support to people who might need it.

c) Always include a good number of familiar things in your services, liturgy and hymns.

d) Consider whether you could provide a quiet space for people who need to spend a little time out of the service.

e) Have a small display of historic photographs, pictures of previous ministers, the Church and the local area, and other pictures and items that might be talking points for those with memory loss.

f) If you are concerned about a member of your congregation who you think is showing signs of dementia, do not be afraid to contact their family.

9. Intellectual disabilities

a) Explore how your church can be a place where people with intellectual disabilities can find real friendship.

b) Make sure you see and treat people with intellectual disabilities as people with spiritual insight and depth and whose perspectives are vital to the church.

c) Think about how you can include people with intellectual disabilities in your mission and ministry and in the social and community life of the church.

d) Consider whether you could create a space and worship experience for all abilities together. See 'WAVE for change' for useful information and resources

10.   Children and young people with additional needs

Ask your childrens and youth teams to review their ability to welcome and include children and young people with additional needs. See the information and training provided by Urban Saints.

Talk to the parents of children and young people with additional needs about how they and their children can feel more included.

11.   Use of language

a) Think about the language you use to make announcements or give instructions during a service. Do not give universal instructions like 'please stand' but rather something like: 'You are welcome to stand or to remain seated if this is more comfortable for you.' Don't say 'close your eyes or bow your heads as we pray' as Deaf people will need to keep their eyes open and heads up)

b) Make an announcement or have a slide displayed at the start of the service or include a couple of lines on your service sheet, saying something like: We want everyone to participate in our worship as is best for you. Please feel free to sit or stand or move about at any point in the service.

a) Say what you mean when you make announcements. (e.g. say 'please sit' rather than 'take a seat' as this is ambiguous for autistic people)

b) Look at the language you use in liturgy and songs/hymns. The language of disability can be used in ways that disabled people find upsetting and disturbing. (e.g. 'I once was blind but now I see' is far more acceptable as 'I once was bound but now am free.')

c) In preaching take time to explore how the language of disability is used in scripture and its historic context. (e.g. The association of epilepsy with demon possession)

d) Think about how the language of disability is used as spiritual metaphor and how this might make disabled people feel. (e.g. the use of blindness as a metaphor for unbelief and ignorance)

e) Explore the theology of disability and let this inform your preaching. (Visit the Diocese of London Disability Ministry webpage for a list of articles and books you could read and see the downloadable 'Notes for preachers')

f) Think about the metaphor and illustrations you use in preaching. Consider how they might be interpreted by people who think very literally or how they might impact people with a range of disabilities.

g) See the 'Making Worship Inclusive' guidance downloadable from the Diocese of London disability ministry webpage.

12.   Social and community

a) Think about the experience of disabled people during your moments of social gathering. i.e. Do people stand for coffee after a service? How do wheelchair users feel as people tower over them or bend down to talk to them? Are people who need to sit down left isolated in a corner of the space? Are people with sensory impairments left feeling isolated and excluded in a noisy crowd?

b) Keep your welcome team on duty after a service so they can be attentive to the needs and inclusion of disabled people.

c) Think, speak and teach about being a welcoming community rather than an insular cluster of like-minded friendship groups.

d) If you organise social activities, trips etc, think about how disabled people might access and take part in these. E.g. It's lovely to have an event in the churchyard or the church garden, but will this be fully accessible to disabled people?

e) Organise people to give lifts to others who would find getting to church and other events difficult.