

Accessibility Best Practice Recommendations For In-Person Worship:

(In no particular order of importance except the first two.)

If your church has a website, list accessibility measures on your site in a way that's easy to find. Also, make it clear that people with questions or accommodation needs not addressed in that list can contact someone, ideally by both phone and email.

Always ask people *if* they need or would like assistance. *Never* assume prior to asking, and *always* respect people's answers even if you think they've misjudged!!

Prioritize the front couple of pews/rows for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Low Vision people so they have the clearest sight lines to the activity of the service.

Let people know if/that there are those radio headsets available so those who wish to can listen to the service on headphones to hear what's said more loudly and clearly.

Order large-print versions of the hymnal, salter and other relevant service books, and make sure people know they are available.

Create a large-print (18 pt font or higher) version of the leaflet/order of service. And/Or, let people know that they can receive the leaflet/order of service in electronic format, because with that they can adjust the font size to their own needs.

Let people know that a Braille version of the hymnal (Common Praise) does exist and can be ordered.

Let people know that the Book of Alternative Services and other relevant service books are available in e-text, and put a direct link to where they can be downloaded - <https://www.anglican.ca/about/liturgicaltexts/> - on the parish website so they can be found easily. This both allows people to adjust the font size as needed and makes them accessible to users of screen-readers. Make sure people know the names of the books they need to download for worship in your parish as new members, and especially new Anglicans, may not be familiar with the different liturgical texts.

On that note, be aware that people using mobile devices during the service may be using them to read along in accessible format, and that this may even involve having an ear bud in one ear for those listening to screen-readers.



Ask people *if* they would like to go up to the altar to receive communion or have it brought to them, also ask *if* people who want to go up to the altar would like assistance. *Do not* assume without/before asking, and *always* respect people's answers!!

Let people know if ASL interpretation and/or live captioning is available, which it should be if at all possible!! Let people know which services it's available.

Let people know if/that there is a ramp up any steps to the chancel and/or altar.

Ask people what accommodations they would need in order to serve as servers, readers, deacons, incense-bearers, etc, or to participate in the choir. Do not assume the role people are best suited to based on their Disability!! Ask what role they would like to have and figure out how to accommodate their needs from there.

Ask attendees to please refrain from wearing scented products (perfumes, scented deodorants, etc), because these can cause serious illness for people with chemical sensitivities.

Keep the use of incense to a minimum so that those with chemical sensitivities can stay far away from it. Don't cense the congregation.

Be aware that folks with chemical sensitivities may come wearing masks, and make sure they aren't stared at or otherwise singled out or treated as weird.

Also, since COVID remains a concern, masks should be required for all attendees, both congregation and those with service roles, so that those with heightened vulnerability can attend and participate with greater safety.

Make sure people know that standing during the singing of hymns, the reading of the Gospel, etc, is optional. Many people are not able to for various reasons, and not all of those who cannot will obviously look the part.

Be aware that there may be those who are not able to sit quietly for the entire service. People may make noise, or even have to leave and come back or leave altogether. Help the congregation understand that this is not disrespect, just people attending to their physical and mental needs.

Have ushers who are trained to assist someone in emotional or mental distress. Have a procedure in place for if someone is in mental and/or emotional distress during the service. Do not involve the police unless the person has a weapon, as calling the cops can be extremely dangerous or even fatal to Black, Brown, Indigenous, Trans, and unhoused people!!

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Accessibility Best Practice Recommendations For Zoom Meetings/Services:

Be aware that people using screen-readers may mute the chat so their computer isn't constantly jabbering at them while they're trying to listen to presenters. Thus, they may miss information shared in the chat because it won't be read out to them in real time. So, it's important to send any vital information shared in the chat - links, email addresses, etc, - out later by email.

At the same time, some participants may find it easier to participate using the chat than verbally, so some one should have an eye on the chat to make sure their input is not missed. And it must be made clear to all participants that this is a perfectly acceptable mode of participation.

Be aware that screen-readers can't read the contents of a shared screen. If a video or audio-file is playing, that will be heard. But, if it's just slides with text and images, the screen-reader won't detect and read that content - which isn't a bad thing, as then it would be constantly talking over the presenter. But, that means it's important to send notes or your slide show to participants afterward by email.

That said, it is a good idea to have a slide presentation that parallels what the presenter is saying in text and images, as this helps those who take in information better visually than verbally.

Please be aware that it can take folks using some kinds of accessibility software, such as screen-readers, more time to navigate the screen than it does for sighted/able-bodied folks. So, things like finding the mute/unmute button, finding the buttons to join break-out rooms, navigating between the chat and main meeting windows, may require extra time.

If at all possible, it's good to send a recording of the workshop as well as the slide presentation to participants afterward. This allows people to go back over the information at their own pace, pausing as needed, which can be helpful to many learning styles and kinds of neurodiverse folks.

Make it clear to participants that it's fine to turn their cameras off. Because, many neurodiverse folks and folks with different learning styles find it helpful to be able to look away from the screen or move around while



listening in order to better take in the information, but being required to be on camera can inhibit this.

Let participants know ahead of time if ASL and/or live captioning will be available, which it should be if at all possible! Note, Zoom's auto-caption is still very hit or miss in terms of its accuracy, especially if there's any distortion or someone speaks with an accent. So, live captioning done by a real human is preferable if at all possible. Also, on Zoom, though I assume other platforms have a similar function available, spotlight the ASL interpreter so they're always visible regardless of who's speaking.

If you're showing images in your presentation, verbally describe them. It doesn't have to be super granularly detailed, but you do need to give someone who can't see the image a good sense of what it's about. Also, caption them in your slides so that, when you send the slides out to participants later, people's screen-readers will be able to read a concise description.

If your slides contain quotes or other such supporting information, read them aloud as you show the slides. Because, remember, people's screen-readers won't read them aloud for you in real time from a screen-share.

If the host/presenter themselves is Disabled, it should be possible for them to have a tech person on hand in the workshop to handle things like admitting people from the waiting room (because that Zoom feature can be inaccessible), monitoring the chat, assisting with running the slide presentation, etc, so they can focus on presenting their material. Though, this one will likely be useful for many non-Disabled presenters as well. But, it's even more important for Disabled folks because of the added accessibility challenges involved in the technical side of things. Note, ideally the presenter and tech person should be able to meet in advance of the workshop to coordinate what is needed.

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Reading list on disability

Primarily theological

- Amy Kenny, *My Body is Not a Prayer Request*, Brazos Press (Baker Publishing Group): this is a very good introductory book for people who are coming to the topic for the first time. The writer is Disabled.
- Thomas Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*, Brazos Press (Baker Publishing Group): more academic than Kenny, but really good theological work. The writer, who teaches at Emmanuel College at U of T, doesn't identify as Disabled, but has a Disabled child.
- Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Towards a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, Abingdon Press: originally published in 1994, this is a classic in the field of Disability theology. A new revised edition will be published soon. The writer is Disabled.
- Sharon Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement*, Fortress Press: Another challenging theological text. The writer is Disabled.
- Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*, Baylor University Press, and *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, Eerdmans: Interesting in part because the author is a Pentecostalist, a denomination which is rarely part of these discussions, but also very interesting theology. The writer is not Disabled but has a brother with Down Syndrome.

Reflections on inclusion in churches

- *Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice*, ed Nancy Eiesland and Don Saliers, Abingdon Press: A collection of essays on topics including liturgy, Biblical exegesis, and case studies in inclusion
- Benjamin Conner, *Practicing Witness: A Missional Vision of Christian Practices*, Eerdmans: although Disability isn't mentioned in the title, this is about the writer's work with Developmentally Disabled adolescents, and how it inflects his thinking about missional theology. The writer is not Disabled, but also does not try to speak for Disabled people, but about how his relationship with Disabled people has affected his thinking.
- Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Beyond Accessibility: Toward Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*, Church Publishing, New York: A look at the changes, mostly in attitude and theology, required for real full inclusion. The writer is not Disabled but clearly has relationships with Disabled people and has learned from them.



Memoir/Theology

John Gillibrand, *Disabled Church – Disabled Society: The Implications of Autism for Philosophy, Theology, and Politics*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers: The writer is the father of a Non-Verbal Autistic person. I am not wholly comfortable with his attempt to define his son's experience, but there is interesting material here.

A few on-line resources (there are many more)

- Disability-inclusive language guidelines from the United Nations:
<https://www.ungeneva.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Disability-Inclusive-Language-Guidelines.pdf>
- Barrier-Free Belonging resources from the Church of England:
<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/barrier-free-belonging>
- Equal Access to Church Buildings, Church of England
https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/Equal_Access_to_Church_Buildings.pdf

The Reverend Canon Maggie Helwig

