How to...

Write an accessible document

Much of the literature we use in our churches is inaccessible to many people. People can struggle to read materials for a variety of reasons including visual impairment, dyslexia and learning difficulties and disabilities. By not providing accessible written materials we are not following the law as laid down in the 2010 Equality Act, but more importantly we are creating barriers which exclude people from our church communities.

Just because someone hasn't asked for something doesn't mean they don't need it. Many people will, if they find a church inaccessible, either not return or sit quietly unable to fully engage with the service but not wanting to create a fuss. Literature that is in clear print is easier for everyone to read, not just those with visual impairments, and usually leads to cleaner, smarter documents.

Top 10 tips for clear communication:

- Use a sans serif font such as Arial. For body copy, 12pt is minimum – it's best to add pages and increase white space than to cram the text in. always have large print versions available. For large print copies use a font size of 16pt to 18pt or even 20pt. Photocopying up to A3 makes printed material difficult to hold, and can embarrass the individual by drawing attention to them so consider whether you can use the same size of publication but increase the number of pages to allow for a larger font.

- Avoid the use of italics and underlining or text in all capitals. All of these can be harder to read. If you need to identify different voices or headings try using bold text, different size font or a different font.

- Always have a distinct contrast between the font colour and the paper. Avoid blue ink it can be harder for older people to read. Large print with little contrast is more difficult to see than ordinary sized print with good contrast.

- Ensure there is enough space between the lines on the page it should be a minimum of 1.15pt and ideally more. If possible extend the space between letters by 0.2.

- Even spacing between words is important. Using left-side aligned text rather than justified or centred text allows people to easily follow from line to line, avoid centred or justified text.

- Allow plenty of clear space on the page around text, photos, charts etc. This allows people to locate the different things on the page. Print captions above or below photos rather than on top of them.

- Try and keep all text horizontal; vertical text can be confusing and difficult to read for many people.

- Use cream or off-white non-glossy paper to reduce glare. For those with visual impairments, use uncoated paper weighing over 90gsm (photocopy paper usually weighs 80gsm). If the text is showing through from the reverse side, the paper may be too thin.

- Do not use shadow graphics or images behind text.

- Keep words simple and to a minimum.

Further information

Always have a small number of large print copies available of all literature. For learning disabled and many elderly people a minimum 16-18 point font is required. Ensure that large print copies are out and available for people to pick up alongside regular print ones so people don't have to ask.

Some churches invite congregations to download services onto their phones to save wastage on paper. This works for many people especially if they are available to download the orders at home so that they are able to load them on to a device that works for them and adjust the font appropriately. However, there will always be people for whom reading a service order on a screen is problematic. For example for some the eyestrain caused by reading from a screen can be painful. In addition there are many people who are unable to afford a phone or the data to needed download. So some hard copy versions should always be available.

Be prepared to provide materials in a larger font or in alternative formats such as braille if requested. Some disabled people, including those who are visually impaired, require material such as news sheets and PowerPoint presentations to be made available to them electronically in advance of an event, as this enables them to read it using their preferred method such as iPads or tablets and use specialist access software where appropriate. If you are providing materials in advance please avoid sending documents as PDFs or jpegs as these are hard for people to adjust.

If you need any further advice or help in providing literature in additional format, please contact Alice Kemp, Diocesan Disability Adviser.

Further resources:
- **'How to... Produce a great church notice sheet'**
- **'How to... Create an accessible service order'**

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