



Accessible Technology

Accessible Technology in Community Life

In today's world, technology has great potential to make it easier for persons living with disabilities to participate in the body of Christ. That potential can be compromised, however, if congregations overlook the problems technology can present for people who see or hear less well than average.

The Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthian church, writes, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable." People with disabilities may seem weaker to those who do not know them, but the gospel truth, as Paul suggests, is that they are indispensable to our faith communities.

As you implement these suggestions, remember to ask individuals with disabilities in your congregation what would be most helpful for them.

Website accessibility

☐ Make church website text high contrast on a plain background. Using off-white instead of bright white reduces glare. Red is often the hardest color for people with vision impairments to see.

☐ Provide text captioning on videos. If you are using videos that you have created, use a captioning program such as one provided by YouTube.

☐ Use text descriptions on electronic documents to make visual content available to people with vision impairments by using a screen reader. Provide all photos and images with alternate text descriptions.

☐ Provide a text-only alternative for visually presented interactive formats on your website (e.g. maps, drop-down menus).

Technology in print

☐ Many congregations have begun to offer worship bulletins in large-print format for those with vision disabilities. What about newsletters and meeting agendas? Large type is defined as font size 18 point or larger. A sans serif font such as Arial (used in this article) has highest visibility.

☐ Offer alternate formats for newsletters and church bulletins, as needed. Common alternate formats include large print, Braille, audio and E-text. Add a notice in standard-format materials stating that alternate formats are available.

☐ A text file of the worship bulletin or meeting agenda sent in advance can be read on an iPad or other electronic device. This enables people with low vision to make the text as large as needed. It is also useful in low light conditions like candlelight services.

Sound technology

☐ Encourage a congregational culture that assumes all speakers in medium-sized and large group gatherings need amplification, regardless of how loudly speakers talk or how self-conscious they are.

☐ Provide FM assistive listening devices. Post signs to let guests know they are available. Headphones rather than earbuds are preferable since they can be used without removing hearing aids. Test equipment regularly and keep it in good repair.

☐ Alternately, consider installing hearing loop technology that allows persons with receiver-equipped hearing aids to receive the audio stream by direct broadcast.

☐ Offer print or E-text copies of sermons and spoken elements of worship to those with hearing impairments, so they can follow along.

Projection technology

☐ Plan for accessibility in any gathering in which a projector is used: worship, meetings, etc.

☐ Turn on captioning for videos, when it is available, so that the audience can both see and hear the words. Add captioning to videos you create.

☐ For projected text, use a plain background and high contrast text with a sans serif font. Off-white is preferable to bright white for reducing glare. Lay out words in meaningful chunks of text, 15 to 20 words per screen, 50 to 80 point font.

☐ Offer alternate formats for those who find it difficult to read from the screen.

☐ Consider reserved seating in front for people who need to be close to the screen.

Resource Suggestions

Inclusion Handbook, Terry DeYoung and Mark Stephenson, eds., www.faithaliveresources.org.

Church website accessibility: www.umdisabilityministries.org/2702.html.

Low vision resources: www2.crcna.org/pages/disability_compworship.cfm.

Hearing resources: www.hearingloop.org, www.hearinglossweb.com/tech/tech.htm.

Congregational Accessibility Network, www.accessibilitynetwork.net.

Questions? Call 574-343-1362 or 877-214-9838

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