



FREE GUIDE · STREAMING AND VIDEO

Accessible Online Worship Guide

Make your church's online worship inclusive with guidance on captions, BSL, audio quality and neurodiversity.

We try hard to get everything here right, and every guide and template shows when it was last reviewed. But they are free, they are general and things change: the law, prices and the tools themselves. We cannot guarantee they are complete, current or right for your church, so check anything you rely on and take professional advice where a decision matters.

Accessible Online Worship Guide

Who this is for: the person who runs your livestream or posts the service online, and the church council or leadership team who have asked whether it is accessible.

Accessible online worship means captions and subtitles on every video, clear audio rather than echo, a BSL option where you can offer one, and a service structure that doesn't overwhelm people who are neurodiverse or anxious - covered area by area below, from captions through to a simple audit checklist at the end.

Why Accessibility Matters

When your church went online - whether during the pandemic or since - you opened your doors wider than ever before. But if your online worship isn't accessible, some of those doors are still closed.

Accessible online worship isn't just a nice-to-have. It's about making sure that every member of your community can participate in worship, wherever they are and whatever their circumstances.

Who Benefits from Accessible Online Worship?

- **Housebound members** who can no longer travel to church due to age, illness or disability
- **Deaf and hard of hearing** congregation members who rely on captions, subtitles or BSL interpretation
- **Visually impaired** members who need audio descriptions or screen-reader-compatible materials
- **Neurodiverse** congregation members (including those with autism, ADHD or sensory processing differences) who may find in-person worship overwhelming
- **Carers** who can't leave the person they care for but still want to worship
- **People with social anxiety** or mental health conditions that make attending in person difficult
- **Parents of young children** who may need to watch from home
- **People in rural areas** with long journeys to their nearest church

Making your online worship accessible isn't about ticking boxes. It's about saying: *you matter, you belong and we want you here.*

1. Captions and Subtitles

Captions are one of the most important accessibility features you can provide. They benefit not just deaf and hard of hearing viewers, but also people watching in noisy environments, those for whom English is a second language and anyone who processes written words more easily than spoken ones.

YouTube Auto-Captions

YouTube automatically generates captions for uploaded and live videos. They're free, and they're a good starting point – but they're far from perfect.

Common auto-caption errors:

- Names of people, places, hymns and Bible books are frequently wrong
- Theological and liturgical language is often mangled ("Eucharist" becomes "you crust")
- Accents and quiet speakers cause more errors

How to review and correct YouTube auto-captions:

1. Go to YouTube Studio
2. Select the video
3. Click "Subtitles" in the left menu
4. Click the auto-generated captions
5. Click "Duplicate and edit" and correct the text
6. Click "Publish"

How long this really takes. Correcting captions for a full service is realistically **two to four hours**, not fifteen minutes – roughly two to three times the length of the recording, because you play, stop, retype and re-sync. It is worth doing, and it makes an enormous difference to people who otherwise cannot follow the service. But it is a weekly commitment of most of a morning, and a volunteer who is promised half an hour will do it once and never again.

If that isn't sustainable – and for most churches it isn't – do the smaller thing well. Correct only the readings, the sermon and the prayers, and leave the songs (the lyrics are usually on screen anyway). Or correct one service a month rather than all four badly. Consistency matters more than completeness here.

Manual Captions

If you have a volunteer with time, you can upload your own caption file (SRT format) for perfect accuracy.

- Free tools to create SRT files: **Descript** (free tier, good for short videos), **Kapwing** (free tier, videos up to 4 minutes)
- Or simply write them in a text editor following SRT format

Live Captioning Options

For live-streamed services, consider:

- **YouTube Live auto-captions** – available in real time, same caveats as above

- **Otter.ai** - AI transcription that runs alongside your stream (free for limited minutes per month)
- **Google Meet captions** - if you run hybrid worship via Google Meet, captions are built in and free
- **Zoom captions** - free auto-captioning available in Zoom meetings and webinars

Caption Formatting Best Practice

- Use sentence case (not ALL CAPS - this is harder to read)
 - Keep captions to two lines maximum on screen
 - Use correct punctuation to aid readability
 - Identify different speakers where possible: *[Minister]*, *[Reader]*
 - Include descriptions of significant non-speech sounds: *[organ music]*, *[congregation singing]*
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2. Audio Quality

Here's a truth that surprises many churches: **clear audio matters far more than video quality**. People will happily watch a slightly fuzzy video, but they'll switch off in seconds if they can't hear properly.

Microphone Positioning

- **Use a microphone.** Your phone's built-in mic will pick up echo, background noise and mumbling. Even a cheap clip-on lapel microphone (£15–25 from Amazon) makes a huge difference.
- Position the microphone **close to the speaker's mouth** - 15–20cm is ideal for a lapel mic
- If you're using a lectern mic, speak directly into it rather than to the side
- Test audio levels before the service starts

Reducing Echo in Church Buildings

Church buildings are beautiful, but they're acoustically challenging. Stone walls, high ceilings and hard floors create echo that microphones amplify.

- **Soft furnishings help:** cushions on pews, carpeted areas, curtains
- **Close windows and doors** during recording to reduce external noise
- **Use a directional microphone** (cardioid pattern) rather than one that picks up sound from all directions
- If echo is severe, consider recording the sermon in a smaller room and editing it into the service video

Audio-Only Options

Not everyone wants to watch a video. Consider providing:

- A podcast feed of your sermons (free to set up via Spotify for Creators or Acast's free tier)

- ☐ Audio files uploaded to your church website for download
 - ☐ A phone dial-in option for live services (see Section 10)
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3. Visual Accessibility

Text on Screen

If you project lyrics, Bible readings or other text during your livestream:

- ☐ Use a **minimum font size of 24pt** for projected text (larger if possible)
- ☐ Use **high contrast** - white or light text on a dark background, or dark text on a light background. Avoid mid-tone backgrounds.
- ☐ Use a **sans-serif font** (Arial, Calibri, Helvetica) for screen readability
- ☐ Avoid placing text over busy photographic backgrounds - use a solid or semi-transparent overlay
- ☐ Leave text on screen **long enough to read** - at least 3–4 seconds per line

Colours

- Avoid relying on colour alone to convey meaning (e.g., don't use red/green to indicate different responses - use labels too)
- Check contrast ratios using a free tool like [WebAIM Contrast Checker](#) - aim for a ratio of at least 4.5:1

Describing Visual Content

For congregation members who listen but cannot see the video:

- Verbally describe what's happening: *"We're now lighting the Advent candle", "The children are coming forward for their talk"*
 - If you show images or video clips during the service, describe what they show
 - If you display Bible readings on screen, also read them aloud in full
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4. BSL Interpretation

For Deaf congregation members whose first language is British Sign Language, captions alone may not be sufficient. BSL is a distinct language with its own grammar - it is not simply "English in signs."

Finding BSL Interpreters

- **Convo** (formerly SignLive) – an on-demand BSL video interpreting service, useful for a one-to-one conversation rather than a service. For an interpreter at a service, book one through the NRCPD register. convo.io/uk
- **Local Deaf organisations** – your regional Deaf association may be able to recommend interpreters
- **NRCPD** (National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People) – search for registered interpreters in your area at nrcpd.org.uk
- Some Deaf churches have members who are qualified interpreters and may be willing to help

BSL on Livestream: Picture-in-Picture Layout

If you have a BSL interpreter at your service:

- Position the interpreter's video in a **picture-in-picture box** in the corner of the screen (typically bottom-right)
- Make the box as **large as possible** – at least a quarter of the screen. Too small and the signs are unreadable.
- Ensure the interpreter is **well lit** with a plain, contrasting background
- The interpreter should be visible whenever anyone is speaking, including during hymns if lyrics are being signed
- If using OBS Studio, this is straightforward to set up as a scene with two video sources

Cost

BSL interpreters are professionals and should be paid fairly. Typical rates are around £145–£190 for a half day and £275–£375 for a full day depending on region, London at the top (these are the medians from NUBSLI's fee survey, so ask for a quote). Three things to budget for that catch churches out: interpreters book in **half-day or full-day blocks**, so you pay the block whether the service runs an hour or three; **travel time and mileage are usually charged on top**; and **Sunday work may attract a premium** at the interpreter's discretion, so ask when you book. Many interpreters follow the NUBSLI fee guidance, which is published and worth reading before you negotiate. Some churches apply for grants to fund this (try your local Deaf association or denominational accessibility funds).

5. Hearing Loop Integration with Livestream

If your church has a hearing loop (induction loop) system, you can connect it to your livestream audio feed so that hearing aid users watching online also benefit.

How It Works

- Your hearing loop amplifies sound for hearing aid users in the building who switch to the **T-setting** (telecoil) on their hearing aid
- The same audio feed that drives the loop can be routed to your livestream encoder (computer, camera or streaming device)
- This ensures the online audio is the same clean, amplified sound that loop users hear

Practical Steps

- ☐ Check that your hearing loop is working and properly maintained (test it regularly)
 - ☐ Connect the loop amplifier's audio output to your streaming computer or camera using an appropriate cable (usually 3.5mm jack or XLR)
 - ☐ Include a reminder in your livestream: *"If you're wearing hearing aids, please switch to the T-setting for the best audio experience in the building"*
 - ☐ For online viewers with hearing aids, note that the T-setting only works with a physical loop – but the clean audio feed will still benefit them through speakers or headphones
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6. Service Sheets and Liturgy

Providing Accessible Documents

- ☐ **Large print** – provide service sheets in at least 16pt font, with a clear sans-serif typeface. Have copies available at church and as downloadable PDFs.
- ☐ **Digital versions** – email or upload service sheets before the service starts, so people can follow along on their own devices
- ☐ **Screen reader compatibility** – if you create PDFs, use proper heading structure and alt text for images. A Word document saved as PDF usually works better for screen readers than a designed layout from Canva or Publisher.
- ☐ **Advance sharing** – email service sheets to regular online worshippers the evening before or first thing in the morning, so they can prepare

Tips for Screen Reader Friendly Documents

- Use the built-in heading styles in Word (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) rather than just making text bold and bigger
- Add alt text to any images (right-click > Edit Alt Text in Word)
- Use real tables rather than spaces or tabs to align columns
- Avoid text boxes – screen readers often skip over them

- Test by turning on the Narrator (Windows) or VoiceOver (Mac) and listening to how your document reads
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7. Interactive Elements

Online Communion

This remains a theological conversation in many denominations, but if your church offers online communion:

- Give advance notice so people can prepare bread and wine/juice at home
- Speak the words of institution clearly and slowly
- Allow pauses for people to participate at their own pace
- Make it clear that participation is optional and no one is excluded if they choose not to partake

Prayer Requests

- ☐ Provide a **simple form** (Google Forms is free) for people to submit prayer requests before or during the service
- ☐ Make sure the form is accessible: labelled fields, keyboard navigable, not requiring a Google account
- ☐ Offer alternative ways to submit prayer requests: email, phone call, text message
- ☐ Be clear about what will be shared publicly and what will be kept confidential

Chat Moderation for Online Congregations

If your livestream has a live chat (YouTube Live, Facebook Live):

- ☐ Assign a **named moderator** who is not leading the service
 - ☐ Welcome newcomers warmly
 - ☐ Remove inappropriate comments promptly
 - ☐ Encourage interaction but don't pressure people to type
 - ☐ After the service, briefly summarise chat messages for the minister if relevant (prayer requests, pastoral concerns)
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8. Mental Health and Neurodiversity

Online worship can be a lifeline for neurodiverse congregation members – but only if you design it thoughtfully.

Cameras-Off Options

- Make it clear that **cameras-off is always acceptable**. Say it explicitly: *"You're welcome to have your camera on or off – whatever feels right for you."*
- Don't single out people with cameras off or pressure them to turn them on
- In Zoom-based worship, disable the "gallery view" default if it causes anxiety for some participants

Predictable Service Structure

- **Publish the order of service in advance** so people know what to expect. Surprises can be distressing for some neurodiverse worshippers.
- If something is going to be different from normal (a guest speaker, a change of format), mention it in advance communications
- Keep timings reasonably consistent week to week

Sensory Considerations

- Warn in advance if the service will include loud music, sudden changes in volume or flashing images
- Provide a **quiet stream** option if possible (a separate feed without music, or with reduced volume)
- For hybrid worship, designate a **quiet space** in the building for people who need to step away

Routine and Ritual

- Familiar liturgy, responses and hymns provide comfort and predictability
- If you're introducing new elements, explain them clearly and in advance
- Consider providing a "worship guide" that explains what will happen and when, especially for newcomers

9. Technology Barriers

Not everyone has access to a fast broadband connection, a modern smartphone or a computer. Truly accessible online worship considers those on the wrong side of the digital divide.

Phone Dial-In

- **Zoom** offers phone dial-in on paid (Pro and above) accounts with the Audio Plan add-on; check your plan before promising it. Share the dial-in number and meeting ID in your weekly communication.
- This allows people with only a landline telephone to join worship by audio
- Test it yourself to make sure it works and the audio quality is acceptable

Low-Bandwidth Options

- Offer an **audio-only** stream or podcast as an alternative to video
- If uploading videos to YouTube, ensure they're also available in lower resolutions (YouTube does this automatically, but check)
- Keep your church website **lightweight** so it loads on older devices and slower connections

Offline Options for Housebound Members

For members who don't have internet access at all:

- ☐ **Post DVDs** of services to housebound members (a volunteer can burn DVDs from YouTube uploads using free software like DVDStyler)
 - ☐ **Post USB drives** pre-loaded with service recordings (cheaper and easier to post than DVDs)
 - ☐ **Print and post** service sheets and sermon transcripts
 - ☐ **Phone tree** - arrange for a volunteer to phone housebound members each week to read the sermon or pray together
 - ☐ **Local radio** - some community radio stations will broadcast church services. Explore whether yours will.
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10. Accessibility Audit Checklist

Use this 15-point checklist to assess your current online worship accessibility. Be honest - the goal isn't to score 15/15 immediately, but to identify where you can improve.

Audio

- ☐ We use a dedicated microphone (not a built-in device mic)
- ☐ Our audio is clear, without significant echo or background noise
- ☐ We offer an audio-only option (podcast feed or downloadable audio file)

Captions and Language

- ☐ Our videos have captions (auto-generated at minimum)
- ☐ We review and correct auto-generated captions before publishing
- ☐ We identify different speakers in our captions

Visual

- ☐ On-screen text uses high contrast colours and a minimum 24pt font
- ☐ We verbally describe significant visual elements for audio-only listeners
- ☐ Our service sheets are available in large print and screen-reader-compatible formats

Participation

- ☐ People can submit prayer requests or interact without needing to appear on camera
- ☐ Our live chat (if used) is moderated
- ☐ We publish the order of service in advance

Inclusion

- ☐ We offer a phone dial-in option for people without internet access
- ☐ We provide offline alternatives (DVDs, USB drives, printed materials, phone calls) for housebound members without broadband
- ☐ We have considered BSL interpretation for at least key services (Christmas, Easter)

Scoring

- **0–5:** You've got the basics in place. Focus on audio quality and captions as your next steps.
- **6–10:** You're doing well. Look at the areas you've missed and pick one or two to work on this term.
- **11–15:** Excellent. You're leading the way – consider sharing your approach with other churches in your circuit, deanery or area.

Getting Started: Your First Three Steps

If this all feels overwhelming, start here:

1. **Fix your audio.** Buy a clip-on lapel microphone (£15–25) and use it for every service. This single change will improve the experience for everyone.
2. **Turn on captions.** If you stream on YouTube, auto-captions are already available. Correct this Sunday's first and budget most of a morning for it (see the note under YouTube auto-captions). Only go back through older services if someone asks for them.
3. **Ask your congregation.** Send a simple survey or ask in the notices: *"If you watch our services online, is there anything that makes it difficult for you to participate?"* You might be surprised by the answers.

Sources

Figures in this guide were checked against the pages below on 3 September 2026. Prices and product names change; the date at the top of the guide says when they were last confirmed. Claims that rest on pages we could not reach at the time of checking are not listed.

- **WCAG contrast standard:** [Understanding SC 1.4.3: Contrast \(Minimum\)](#). Confirms the 4.5:1 minimum contrast ratio for normal text at Level AA.

- **WCAG captions guidance:** [Captions/Subtitles](#). Confirms that automatic captions need significant editing before they meet accessibility requirements.
- **Contrast checking tool:** [Contrast Checker](#). Confirms the free tool referenced in the colours section and its AA and AAA thresholds.
- **YouTube automatic captions:** [Use automatic captioning](#). Confirms auto captions on uploads and live streams at no cost, and the accuracy caveats about accents and background noise.
- **YouTube caption editing:** [Edit or remove captions](#). Confirms the YouTube Studio path for correcting automatic captions.
- **Zoom captions:** [Zoom's Auto-Generated Captions Available to All Free Users](#). Confirms auto-generated captions on free Zoom accounts and on paid meetings and webinars.
- **Zoom dial-in requirements:** [Joining a Zoom meeting or webinar by phone](#). Confirms phone dial-in needs a Pro or above host account and an Audio Plan add-on.
- **Google Meet captions:** [Use captions in Google Meet](#). Confirms captions are available to all users.
- **Otter.ai free tier:** [Otter.ai Pricing](#). Confirms 300 transcription minutes a month and a 30-minute per-conversation cap on the free plan.
- **Kapwing free tier:** [Kapwing Pricing](#). Confirms the 4-minute video length cap, watermark and 30-minute monthly export limit on the free plan.
- **BSL interpreter fees:** [Freelance fees for British Sign Language interpreters](#). Confirms median half-day and full-day rates, booking in half or full day increments, mileage charged separately, and the discretionary weekend and public holiday premium.
- **Interpreter register:** [NRCPD](#). Confirms the postcode search for registered sign language interpreters.
- **On-demand BSL interpreting:** [Convo, formerly SignLive](#). Confirms on-demand BSL interpreting and that SignLive now trades as Convo.
- **BSL legal recognition:** [British Sign Language Act 2022, section 1](#). Confirms BSL is recognised as a language of England, Wales and Scotland.
- **Hearing loops:** [Hearing loops](#). Confirms the telecoil programme, also called the loop programme or T-setting, and that most NHS hearing aids have a telecoil.
- **Large print sizes:** [RNIB product design guidelines](#). Confirms 16-point or larger as large print, clear sans serif type, a 4.5:1 contrast minimum and why blocks of capitals are harder to read.
- **Podcast hosting:** [Spotify for Creators](#). Confirms free unlimited hosting and distribution under the name Spotify for Creators.
- **Podcast hosting alternative:** [Acast pricing](#). Confirms the free Starter plan, limited to one show and five episodes unless the show is monetised.