

# Make Room at the Inn: Full Transcript

## Intro:

Hi, I'm Rev'd Chantal, the National Coordinator of the Inclusive Church Network.

Welcome to 'Make Room at the Inn'. Considering how we make our churches and community events more inclusive and accessible can at times feel overwhelming and kinda complicated, there are some changes that are indeed expensive and difficult. It doesn't mean they're not good things to aspire to!

But perhaps some little wins might be where you are at right now, and little ones can add up to making a big difference.

No effort is wasted.

We hope that this set of short videos from Inclusive Church will offer you some ideas for things you might be able to incorporate in your practice...

Remember, if you don't plan for new people to come, you won't get new people.

## Mental Health & Anxiety

Christmas can be a pretty tough time for those that struggle with their mental health, as there is often a pressure to be seen to be 'happy'. And actually the festivities can underscore existing feelings of loneliness or grief.

Just showing an awareness of this can help people to feel safe and understood.

You can do this by including a mention of it in your prayers or going further and offering **quiet** spaces with music and candles to light. You could even offer a more formal 'Blue Christmas' service which is focussed on being gentle and undemanding.

If you do this, it's really helpful to share a description of the service in advance, what it will involve and how long it will be, as that can help people to prepare, people who have anxiety, limited capacity or family responsibilities.

For people who may not have been to your church before, it can be really useful to let them know if you've got **parking** nearby or **toilets** in the facilities.

Are they signposted in a way where anyone could easily find them without having to ask?

Buy, and provide, extra **toilet rolls**. This might sound odd but seeing extra toilet rolls can help reduce anxiety for guests. It's also not uncommon for someone who is struggling to have not prioritised this area and have been going without.

It's possible that some of these extra toilet rolls might disappear and make their way home with guests. You might struggle with this, but think of it as a simple, inexpensive way to be generous.

For some, managing addictions can be harder in the winter months, if you have an alcohol-free site, why not mention that subtly in your publicity so that those who need to know can be aware.

Having contact details for local and national support groups or organisations like the Samaritans, Crisis team, gambling lines etc detailing who to contact in case of concern, can be really helpful.

## Disabilities and Accessibility

Having drama or softly spoken readers can reduce accessibility for those who rely on lip-reading and/or are hard of **hearing** or have **visual impairments**.

Please consider making a **transcript** available and also give people the chance to practice in the space, speaking slowly and clearly.

Making sure those transcripts are printed in a font not smaller than 14 on A4 paper in a font like Ariel or Calibri will also help. Keep your margins wide and if possible use a line spacing of 1.5 (or above).

If using a screen to **project** words, keep the contrast high, avoiding fussy backgrounds and stick to static text in a clear, large font.

Provide written descriptions of images.

If you have a **loop system** installed, please make sure it is used, that the microphones work and have fresh batteries available!

Sign language interpreters are always the best option to make room for deaf people coming to your church. But there are also lots of other resources out there. Christian BSL.com is a great free resource which has all sorts of signs that are Christian signs, church signs and loads of Christmas carols. Why not try learning one or two of them? Children will love it.

It all goes to show that you are inclusive for deaf people and making room for them.

If you've got an accessible toilet then as well as having a wheelchair on there, why not have a sign mentioning hidden disabilities? Again, a subtle way to be welcoming.

If you need to open a different door to allow a motorised scooter, wheelchair or pushchairs to access your building, make sure someone in your team knows how to do this.

Having a **space** already prepared for those who are using wheelchairs or scooters can make people feel anticipated and included from the start.

And clearing away any bag handles or trip hazards from the aisles will be appreciated by everyone, not just those with visual impairments or wheelchairs and buggies.

Make sure that somebody on the team knows to do that and let's make sure that they're really on guard, ready, looking out for when that's needed.

## Scran and Brass

It's possible you'll have more visitors at this time of year that are cold and hungry.

Rather than just doing hot drinks and maybe a biscuit, could you offer soup and a roll?

Soup is relatively cheap and easy to make, it's really cheering too.

Maybe people in your congregation or in your community would be happy to help make it.

Maybe you've got a local supermarket nearby that's got some extra food or would be prepared to make some donations which you could offer as part of your refreshments.

Offering more than a biscuit or a mince pie can make a really big difference at this time of year.

Make it clear if there is a charge or expected donation to be made for an event so people know beforehand and they can plan accordingly. It can be tempting to assume that everything should be offered free of charge, but it is also important not to make that choice for people.

For some, it can be a point of pride to be able to offer a donation or contribution.

You can also be flexible with how contributions are offered, perhaps there are people who don't have lots of available money, but would love to contribute by litter picking the church yard, or sweeping the path. These are valuable offerings too!



If you're on a **bus route**, why not include that information? It will show that you are locally aware and embedded in your community.

## Building Considerations and Facilities

Making sure that the entrance to your church building is clearly signposted is a very simple thing to do, but the vast majority of churches that I visit don't actually do this. We're not a private club. We want people to know how to get in.

In winter months, ensuring the way in is well lit and people can feel safe, will also make a huge difference. And who needs more of an excuse to rig up some fairy lights or festoon lighting around the place?

What about toilets?

**Toilet** facilities are often overlooked as a source of unequal provision and unnecessary division, but they offer multiple ways to demonstrate a broad welcome.

For example, keep the access to them clear of obstacles, and make sure you aren't using them for random storage!

Designate them as gender-neutral. Part of this includes providing nappies, sanitary protection and covered bins in all toilets. This can help remove additional awkwardness for your guests and demonstrates an extra level of care and welcome.

Making sure that baby change facilities are available for parents of any gender, carers of any gender, can also be really really helpful.

It is likely that some people might like to **read** in church but are not comfortable or confident doing so, and or need time to practice. Providing text in advance, printed



clearly and in an accessible translation are simple ways to increase the accessibility of your services.

You could also offer to record a **voice memo** of the reading for them that can be sent by WhatsApp so they can hear the words in advance and have been given pronunciation guidance.

It is not uncommon for churches to feel intimidated or reluctant to use technology to 'complicate' matters, but reframing this as **increasing the welcome** you are able to offer should help explain why it is important.

If you can **record or stream** your services online then that will allow those who can't get into church, maybe they're housebound, or lone parents, or people doing shift work, they can participate as well.

## Language and Labels

Language matters, words matter.

Families come in many different forms, so avoiding routinely using words like wife and husband can make people feel much more included and part of what's happening.

Using words like spouse, or partner, household or family can go a long way to do this.

When talking to children, not assuming that the adults they're with have parental responsibility. So rather than saying mum or dad, say your grownups.

Space matters. What does your physical space say about your welcome? Are there toys and children's books available? Are they in a tidy and welcoming space? What about the quality of the books and toys? Are they somebody's rejects from the 80s or are they warm and inviting?

Are the children relegated to the back of the church or the space or is the designated area somewhere where children can still see and be included in what's going on?

Are there soft spaces for children who might feel overwhelmed?

Quiet matters. Offering a quiet space alongside busier events can help people regulate.

Communication matters. If you've got groups for children or young people, are you clear about the ages that they're for? Are you clear about the location, registration process and whether an allocated adult needs to stay?

If a parent brings a child with additional needs, how might you ask what they need?

How might you reassure them? Training all volunteers and your regular congregation to smile, to encourage and not to judge is vital.

Have leaders include their **pronouns** on a name badge or when introducing themselves or, even better, both. Asking leaders to share their pronouns like this is another subtle way of demonstrating an awareness of and openness to difference. It's important to realise that this is often done for those listening, not those providing the information. And it can make a bigger difference than you may ever know.

## Race, Gender and Representation

Having **women** 'up front' reading, leading prayers, serving, presiding, preaching and having **men** in the kitchen helping with refreshments, serving tea and coffee, working in the kitchen can be really powerful and much appreciated.

As I was thinking about inclusion and accessibility as it comes to Advent, I think one of the most important things is to realise our wording. It's a hard thing because, as you know, the Bible has a lot of wording about darkness and light as it comes to the Advent and the coming of King Jesus. But be aware that that understanding of darkness and of dark and bad and whiteness and gleaming can also alienate people of Black and ethnic minority communities.

We deal with lots of self-esteem issues as it is to come to grips with us being children of the Most High God. And sometimes that language during Advent can be really uncomfortable for us.

Using translations of hymns that avoid overly patriarchal or male-dominated language about God or people. Can also be really important. The words of hymns can be altered if needed, especially when they're being printed out (or put on a screen).

Think about the images you use.

How representative are they of your community? Of the people you want to welcome?

Who is shown in your pictures?



Visuals matter.

No one needs a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, white baby Jesus.

Siblings in Christ, be aware of our language as we go on in this Advent season to be a church truly for everyone.

## Think Differently

The most important thing I discovered was to pause and think.

Many students, find returning home during university holidays can be unsettling as the independence they've become used to while away, has shifted. Having space for people to process and work through that can be useful.

It's possible that there will be students, who are unable to return to their 'home home' over Christmas, if there are members of your church community who might be able to invite them round for a meal or to go out for a coffee during this time, it can help them feel less isolated.

People communicate, learn and pay attention in different ways. For some people, being able to be still and quiet is important. For others, being more **interactive** is best.

Wearing **headphones**, drawing, crocheting or using a phone does not always imply rudeness or lack of interest. It can be a technique that is being used to manage health needs and/or pain relief. (When I am crocheting or drawing, that's when you can know that I really am concentrating on everything else that is going on and invested in the event or service that I am at.)

Things people can touch or fiddle with can help with pain, soothe anxiety and manage distractions. Perhaps you could have a box with things like cushions, sensory toys, drawing supplies, prayer beads, holding crosses, clearly available for people to use if

they would like to. (One church I know, has a box full of half-finished knitting that one person can start and another finish)

Ensure directions are clear, but also consider whether they are really necessary. Is it important, for example, for people to sit and stand during particular parts of the service, or would it be better to enable people to use their bodies in the ways that work best for them?

Ensure people know that **communion** can come to them, and tell them how to indicate that. Don't assume that these things are immediately obvious.

Make sure your welcome to neurodivergent people is explicit and clear.

We are so used to being seen as a problem that we might assume that we are one unless we are explicitly made welcome. By welcoming us, you will experience the gifts of our creative insights and unnoticed abilities.

If you're a church that uses incense or bells, loud noises or flashing lights making sure people know in advance so they can prepare themselves or move away if needed.

## Conclusion

Let's all seek to 'Make Room at the Inn' for each other, and those we haven't yet met, this Christmas.

By ensuring we make the time, to ask the questions around inclusion, we'll do a much better job at making room for everyone, not just at Christmas, but all year round.

Siblings in Christ, be aware of our language as we go on in this Advent season to be a church truly for everyone.

If this video has been helpful, please head across to the Inclusive Church website where there will be a full transcript of the video, and also infographics and videos you can download to continue your learning.

Have a great Christmas everyone.

Thanks to all our friends, members and trustees who helped 'Make Room at the Inn'.

- IC Trustees – Alex F, Allie, Meredith and Sarah
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Collated by Rev'd Chantal Noppen, National Coordinator of Inclusive Church,

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