

Is your Church including the Hearing Disabled?

I recently received the following “yesterday was a red letter day for me! After the 9.30 service John Smith [name changed] came up to me with a smile across his face to say that for the first time in years he heard the service perfectly!!”

Was this a healing service miracle that released John from years of loss of hearing? No, on the face of it much more mundane. John had been speaking to the hard-working congregation member who looks after the Church Sound System. John is one of the many members of our congregations using hearing aids to combat hearing loss, often age-related. John’s church has a good sound system to try to make sure that wherever they sit, all the congregation can participate fully in worship by hearing whoever is speaking. The sound system operator can hear with his own ears whether the sound from the loudspeakers is clear, undistorted and at the right volume. But this wasn’t helping John. His aids help a lot in most of his life and to some extent in church, but because of the acoustics that are so good for music, and the voice and diction of those reading or leading intercessions may not be all that clear, the aids don’t solve it. What made the difference for John was fixing the sound loop that had not been working properly for “years”.

If you don’t have hearing loss, you may not even know what a sound loop is, let alone how much it can matter. Sadly this can apply to the Sound System operator. If the sound coming out of the loudspeakers is fine, won’t the loop be working too? Not necessarily. The sound system installer should have set the loop up and tested it correctly, but things go wrong. Over the years letters to the Church Times frequently highlight the distress of would be worshippers who cannot participate fully because, even if there is a loop, it’s not working.

So, does your church have a hearing loop, and is it working? Please, would every church that has a sound system install a loop if at all possible? Ask the DAC team for help if needed.

If you do have a loop, please make sure it is working and continues to do so. Loop amplifiers need to be switched on, and they normally include indicators to check the signal level is right. The manual should tell you how. The installer should have marked the settings at the proper level, so don’t change them unless you really know what you doing. There are testers for normal hearers to use, but the economy one at John’s church fooled them into thinking it was working, when it wasn’t for real aids. If your church can find a congregation member who understands and can confidently use their loop setting, a regular check by them is a good solution.

A hidden hazard that can render a perfectly working hoop more or less unusable is badly installed lighting or other electrical work in the church. A wrong design can cause interference to loop users that neither the sound system nor the aid can do anything about. A church local to me installed a new LED lighting system with dimming. This has caused interference that cannot be fixed without scrapping and replacing expensive brand new parts. Please make sure that you discuss this risk with the DAC advisers for any new electrical faculty application.

Please, there are a good many of us in our congregations for whom a good working loop is a healing miracle.

Revd Martin King, Dec 2023

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