

SEND, disability and belonging at St George's Tufnell Park

Children's Church

Our Children and Families Worker, Steve, has given a lot of thought and care to making our Children's Church group on a Sunday more accessible:

- the group uses a visual timetable which follows the same structure each week:
Welcome and Snack, Game, Story, Craft, Prayer
- the sessions include movement activities and flexibility for children who find it hard to stay seated
- stories are told in an interactive way using concrete objects and hands-on involvement from the children
- we can use simple signs eg Makaton to help communicate with children who are non-speakers or partial-speakers, and ask parents and carers to teach us simple signs to use which their children are familiar with
- parents and carers are invited to participate alongside their children and adapt group activities in whatever way their child needs

Please email Steve with any queries you might have.

Autism Acceptance Week and Easter

During Easter we hosted an 'Autism Party and Egg Hunt' to celebrate Autism Acceptance Week coinciding with Easter.

We set our church space up as a network of activities designed to be sensory-inclusive and socially flexible, i.e. activities which could be enjoyed both alone and with others.

Activities included a sensory equipment zone (with crash mats, therapy balls and a trampoline), a Play Doh zone, a Lego corner, sensory trays filled with coloured rice and pasta, a bubble machine, and several quiet breakout areas.

Party invitations contained a visual story to help our autistic guests know more of what to expect, and it was a delight to welcome a mix of over 40 children and their families to the party, including children with a variety of disabilities and none. This included autistic children, ADHDers, neurotypical children, and Deaf children, and it was a joy to party together without any requirements to fit a particular mould.

The party ended with a giant Easter egg hunt in the Vicarage garden, set up with an autistic twist to honour the passion for justice which is common to many autistic people: the children gathered the eggs individually in traditional style, but then brought them to a central basket and pooled their finds. The eggs were shared out equally to give everyone a fair and full goody bag, regardless of their skill or speed at finding the flashes of foil hidden around the garden.

We were thankful for the opportunity to express God's welcome, and to declare God's celebration of our differences. We know there is space in God's house for us all.

Accessibility Working Group

The PCC is committed to making St George's increasingly accessible and a place of belonging and participation for all people, which is central to our values as a church. An Accessibility group, chaired by Hatty Crabtree, exists to pursue this end.

During the year, we were grateful to receive input from the Revd John Beauchamp, the Diocesan Disability Ministry Enabler, who came both to preach, very powerfully, and to offer helpful guidance to the PCC. We have agreed to undertake a trial of the Diocese's 360 degree accessibility audit, which initially involves gathering a group of people with lived-experience of disability, who can help shape the changes that the church makes.

Alongside this audit, Cloudesley launched an access funding stream, which offers an accessibility audit from the Centre for Accessible Environments, as well as grants for churches looking to make their buildings more accessible, in response to the findings of the audit. These parallel audits are being undertaken.