

A Church of England priest has won a national award for her outstanding contribution to work on helping make funerals more accessible for Deaf people.

Canon Gill Behenna, Chaplain with the Deaf Community in the Diocese of Bristol and the Church of England's Deaf Ministry Adviser, was named Funeral Minister of the Year at The Good Funeral Awards, with Rev Kate Bottley runner-up.

Canon Gill won the award in recognition of her outstanding and ground-breaking contribution to the funeral experience of Deaf people.

The organisers of the awards said: "Gill strives to make the final goodbye to a member of the Deaf community accessible so that hearing and Deaf people can communicate freely in their own language and experience a funeral service that meets their needs.

"Gill ensures that everyone feels welcomed, understood and can play their part."

Canon Gill said: "My passion is to make sure that Deaf people have full and complete access to all the important events in life - and that includes saying goodbye to somebody when they have died.

"It was a surprise to win, but I was very glad to accept the award and hope that my winning might help to raise awareness of the need for Deaf people who use British Sign Language to be able to access the important ceremonies that mark the end of life."

The Church of England conducts around one in three of all funeral ceremonies and in some parts of the country that will be much higher.

A Church of England led funeral is underpinned by generations of experience and reflection, as well as skills and training, that ensures that each and every funeral tells the story of a unique human being alongside the story of God's loving presence to give hope and courage for the future.

Rev Canon Dr Sandra Millar, who leads the Church of England's work on funerals, said: "Being part of the Good Funeral Awards is important.

"It's a fantastic day that recognises the depth and excellence in every part of the funeral world, and as the choices around death and funerals increase, it is great that the Church of England is able to share its very particular experience and expertise."

The Church of England also sponsored the best new funeral director award, recognising the importance of the relationship between local church and local funeral director. The award was won by Dandelion Funerals, headed by Judith Dandy, a new business in West Sussex.

Notes to editors

The Good Funeral Awards have been awarded annually since 2012. This year's awards took place at Porchester Hall in London.

Rev Canon Gill Behenna, a qualified and registered BSL/English interpreter, is the Diocese of Bristol Chaplain with the Deaf Community. She was appointed Church of England National Adviser for Deaf Ministry in 2013.

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