

GUIDELINES ON WORKING WITH THE DEAF COMMUNITY

Mission Statement:

Love Jesus. Love People. Help People to Love Jesus.

AIMS

1. The following information is to help you to familiarise how best to engage with people with various levels of hearing loss within the church setting. To enable you to have awareness of their needs in terms of communication and situation.
2. It is aimed at members of clergy, lay people and the congregation.

INTRODUCTION

People who have a hearing loss differ in terms of their communication needs. Here are some examples below:

Deaf people

The term 'Deaf' (with a capital D) defines as those who are members of a culturally Deaf community.

British Sign Language is their primary language. This language is a distinct and visual way of communicating; the grammatical structure is completely different from spoken English.

Deafened/Hard of Hearing people

These people have a gradual or considerable loss of hearing during their lifetime. There are three groups who fall in this category:

1. Hearing loss at an early age. Some may have proficiency in using sign language but they use hearing aids daily. They can blend well with culturally deaf people.
2. Hearing loss at a later age. Some people cannot identify themselves as 'deaf' due to difficulty in admitting that they have hearing loss at this stage. They rely heavily on hearing loop system or amplified aids.
3. Deafened people. These are people who have become totally deaf in adulthood for various reasons. They cannot use hearing aids and probably cannot sign.

When communicating with any deaf people:

DO

- Always smile! Never show your nervousness.
- Face the person when talking to them as they need to lipread you
- Make sure that the light **must** be on your face so they can see your lips and hands.
- Always attract their attention **before** speaking so they are looking at you. It is often easiest to tap a person on the shoulder.
- Speak naturally and clearly, NOT babbling too fast.
- When you have a conversation, always start with the topic of the conversation so they can understand what you want to talk about.
- Use gestures if a deaf person doesn't understand you.

DON'T

- Be impatient if the deaf person cannot understand you
- Shout – remember that they are too deaf to hear you!
- Look away from the deaf person – they won't be able to see your face
- Talk with your mouth **FULL**. Not nice to do this!
- Cover your mouth when talking with the deaf person
- Assume that they will understand you straightaway
- Keep repeating the same sentence again and again. Think of a different way to say it.

Environmental Access

It is very important to make the church inclusive, especially in terms of communication access needs.

Please read the below recommendations:

1. Please ensure that your interior loop system is in good working condition by checking the system with a field strength meter.
2. The church environment should be workable in terms of good light and space.
3. Upon a deaf person's request, a fully qualified Communication Professional should be booked in advance before they visit your church for the first time. This could be a qualified or trainee registered British Sign language/English interpreter or a Lipspeaker. These professionals are often booked for church services.
4. Please ensure that the interpreter has a good knowledge of Christian signs and is familiar with the structure of the services.
5. If you do not know how to work with the Christian interpreters or the deaf community, please contact the Revd Neil Robinson (**his contact details are shown below**).

Useful Contacts for further support

Go! Sign (Christian Deaf Link UK)

Go! Sign Office, 5 Lyndale Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS2 4BY

Voice/SMS: 07383 613113.

Email: general@gosign.org

Signs of God (and Christian Interpreters Network)

Email: info@signsofgod.org.uk

National Register of Communication Professionals for Deaf People's (NRCPD)

To book a Sign Language Interpreter, please use the website: <https://www.nrcpd.org.uk>

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