



United Methodist Committee of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ministries

A BRIEF GUIDE TO SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING

This brief working guide will assist church leaders working with sign language interpreters. Sign language interpreters are a part of a long-standing profession that have provided services to Deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, Deafblind, and hearing people. Below are some insightful considerations when working with interpreters.

Acquiring Interpreters

Often, individuals who do not work within the Deaf community are unfamiliar with Deaf resources, such as sign language interpreting agencies. A few ideas for acquiring interpreters are:

1. Contacting sign language interpreting agencies in your area. It's expensive, but can be helpful in a pinch.
2. Contacting the state vocational rehabilitation (V.R.) office to ask for recommended resources (they will likely have a directory).
3. Contact the state Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission/Office/Coalition (they often have a list of resources or referrals).
4. Research colleges and universities in your state that offer sign language interpreting programs, as students need practicum hours. Some professors or department chairpersons may be familiar with Deaf-related resources.
5. Go to the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf ([RID](#)) website and search for interpreters on their online directory (it's best search by state as some interpreters do not mind traveling).
6. Do a [Google](#) search and type "sign language interpreters in (insert your city or county)".
7. Contact other Deaf ministries in your area to see if they can recommend someone.
8. Ask the Deaf or Hard of Hearing person at your church as they may know of potential resources.

Interpreter Preparation

Interpreters will need preparation materials in order to deliver better quality interpreting services for the worship service. Often, they will want the following:

1. Scriptures to be read
2. Music or hymns
3. Special music
4. Sermon notes or outline
5. Bulletin (for additional information about the service)
6. Additional information about your church's need (e.g. How many Deaf and hard of hearing people are there? Someone needs close vision interpreting).
7. The name of a contact person so the person can show the interpreter where to go.
8. A music stand (interpreters cannot hold hymnals while signing the music).



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Volunteers Versus Paid Interpreters

Every church context is different. Most sign language interpreters are professionals working in their communities and thus should be paid, at least an honorarium or stipend. If the organ or music director are paid, then the interpreter should also be paid. Some interpreters may offer discounted prices. Volunteer interpreters may or may not have the experience as paid interpreters (it's very individualized). Paid interpreters are expected to be there and are accountable for such. Having a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place can be helpful for either status. Sometimes volunteer interpreters are just as skilled (if not more) as paid interpreters and feel they are providing important services to their faith community. If having paid interpreters is preferable, then it's helpful to have a line item in the budget to ensure funding is in place.

There is a debate among interpreters for whether the interpreter should have a Christian or religious background (or even be from the same denomination) in order to interpret proficiently. Interviewing the interpreter is helpful and asking if he or she feels adequately prepared without having a Christian or religious background would be in line with staff hiring practices. In general, we should not discriminate on one's religious affiliation (or lack thereof).

Funding for Interpreters

Generally, Deaf and hard of hearing people do not pay for the interpreters, the church does. Some churches have funding for needs such as this, while smaller churches or churches with small budgets may struggle to pay for interpreters. Fundraising ideas for your Deaf ministry include:

1. Having a spaghetti dinner fundraiser (every 6 months or annually).
2. Taking up a special offering one or more times a year.
3. Applying for a grant for new Deaf ministries through the [United Methodist Committee on Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ministries](#).
4. Checking with your annual conference director of connectional ministries to see if there are other grants to apply for.
5. Consider having a youth group sell candy bars.
6. A few churches reallocate the deaf member's offering or tithes toward the Deaf ministry budget.

Interpreting Interview

Some interview questions that may be helpful when acquiring an interpreter include:

1. What kind of experience do you have working in a church service?
2. Do you have any references, either interpreter colleagues or Deaf consumers?
3. Can you explain some aspects of Deaf culture?
4. How did you become an interpreter (i.e. training)?
5. Might you be able to find a substitute if you need to take a Sunday off?
6. Can you explain the role of an interpreter to me?
7. What materials do you need a head of time?
8. What are your rates? Do you provide discounts, say if we can pay you within a week of date you provided your services?

Add any other questions that are specific to your church.