



United Methodist Committee of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ministries

STARTING A DEAF MINISTRY BRIEF RESOURCE GUIDE

God has called you to start a Deaf Ministry at your church. Where do you find help or resources? Below is a list taken from the book: *Deaf Ministry: Ministry Models For Expanding The Kingdom Of God*, by Leo Yates, Jr. (2016) to help get started.

“Praying About the Ministry”

- ❖ Prayer is the best place to start. Pray for God’s wisdom for yourself and for discernment for leaders in your church.
- ❖ Ask God to call people to serve in the ministry and to bring, Deaf, hard-of-hearing, or Deaf-blind people from your community into the life of our church.
- ❖ Be faithful in prayer. Prayer helps us remember to put God first in all that we do. It reminds us to rely solely on the Lord for wisdom, guidance, and strength.
- ❖ In prayer we can ask God to help us view others through Gods eyes instead of our own.
- ❖ Pray that your church will recognize the need to welcome people who are d/Deaf, hard-of-hearing, late-deafened, and Deaf-blind.
- ❖ Pray for opportunities to develop friendships with individuals who are d/Deaf, hard-of-hearing, late-deafened and /or Deaf-blind.
- ❖ Pray for each member of the group that is setting up a Deaf ministry. It’s interesting to note that Jesus took time to pray to the Father before selecting the 12 apostles.
- ❖ Pray that God helps you to work well as a team. (Read Matt 9:38). Ask God to move the hearts of people to serve in the Deaf ministry.
- ❖ Pray that your church’s Deaf ministry would serve as a role model to the surrounding community.
- ❖ Pray for the people whom the ministry will be serving, both those from within the church body, and those from the community.

“Having a Ministry Team”

- ❖ A team is at the heart of any successful ministry. Gather a core leadership team to oversee the ongoing development of the ministry.



United Methodist Committee of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ministries

- ❖ Pray that the Lord will provide a team with a diverse range of spiritual gifts, skills, and talents to meet a wide variety of needs.
- ❖ Leadership support must be obtained for a strong Deaf ministry. It is vital to stay connected with your minister(s) and any governing boards for their support and commitment.
- ❖ Review your churches mission statement. Ask the question: how does a Deaf ministry fit the mission of your church.
- ❖ Define the purpose and goals. Will you focus solely on;
 1. d/Deaf people
 2. Hard-of-hearing
 3. Late-deafened
 4. Deaf-Blind people
- ❖ Do you want to start a Deaf fellowship having a weekly dinner? Or have a weeknight bible study at a group home? Clearly stating your purpose and goals will help you determine what kind of volunteers you need.
- ❖ Write a brief list of “jobs” along with a brief description for each one. When you’re ready to talk to potential volunteers, you’ll have a better idea of the abilities and skills that are needed.
- ❖ Search for Deaf ministry team members by asking for recommendations from other church leaders, placing an announcement in church bulletin, making announcements in Sunday school classes and at the worship service.
- ❖ Develop a prayer team and invite participants who have a burden for people with disabilities. A prayer team can serve two important purposes for your Deaf ministry.
 1. By sharing prayer request with others in your church, you can increase Deaf awareness.
 2. By having such a team, you create a spiritual support.

“Learning American Sign Language”

American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual-gestural-spatial language composed of hand shapes and hand movements. This language also includes facial expressions and body language as integral parts of the communication process.

Generally, signs have a tendency to be context specific, and in order to produce the appropriate sign, a user of ASL will need to understand the concept and not just the word to be conveyed.



United Methodist Committee of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ministries

The best way to learn ASL is conversing with Deaf and ASL users or in a formal educational setting and immersing oneself in the culture.

Offer a sign language class at your church to be more inclusive of d/Deaf, hard-of-hearing, late-deafened, and Deaf-blind people. Ideally, have a d/Deaf, hard-of-hearing or Deaf-blind person teach it since it is his or her language.

Enthusiasts have the option to learn ASL, online at a website such as ASL University at www.lifeprint.com. Some community colleges offer basic sign language classes.

For interpreted ministry, the interpreter is part of the worship team. The interpreter's role is as important as that of others who preside over the worship service.

In order for the message to be understood, analyzed, and delivered to consumers, working interpreters must have fluency in ASL and English. A few helpful resources for interpreters working in religious settings are as follows:

- ❖ 1. *American Sign Language Dictionary: Unabridged Edition* by Martin Sternberg. (1998)
- ❖ *SO YOU WANT TO BE AN INTERPRETER? 4th ed.* By Janice H. Humphrey and Bob Alcorn (2007)
- ❖ *Interpreting at Church: A Paradigm for Sign Language Interpreters, 4th Edition* by Leo Yates, Jr. (2016)

To locate a sign language interpreter for a Deaf-blind individual, consider contacting the following:

- A local or state interpreting agency (go to www.rid.org/search-tools/ to locate an agency)
- By contacting a local or state aging and disability office (go to www.adrc-tae.acl.gov/ and click ADRC tab)
- Contact a college interpreting education program to see if an interpreting student might be available or need practicum hours.