

# Ministry to and with People who are Deaf



## Ministry Challenges

- › People who are deaf may have supportive families and friends; however, they are often the only person in the family with a hearing disability. This may lead the person to feel alone, even among so many individuals. Ministry that invites and involves the community of people who are deaf can bring a sense of belonging to the deaf person.
- › Attending a hearing church brings difficulties for people who are deaf. Language differences between English and American Sign Language (ASL) can create a sense of not being welcome. Ministry that encourages and makes available sign language classes for its hearing members serves as a means to reach out to people who are deaf within the community and demonstrates there is acceptance and willingness to communicate with them in their language. Through the offering of ASL classes, people who are deaf realize that there is acceptance and a willingness to communicate in their first language.
- › According to the NIDCD, about 90 percent of infants who are born deaf are born to hearing parents. As these children grow up closely connected to the hearing world, the hearing church can make available Christian educational materials so that these children can know Jesus as their Savior.
- › Lip-reading (also known as speech-reading) is a skill that is sometimes naturally learned, while others need to be taught. For many people who are deaf, reading lips is very difficult and does not replace written or visual communication. At best, only 30-40 percent of speech is visible. Ministry that involves skilled pastors, deaconesses, teachers or lay interpreters will proclaim most clearly the Gospel message.
- › Accessibility in education, technology, transportation, employment and housing has increased the mobility of the deaf community. As a result, the population of people who are deaf has spread into metropolitan and rural areas. Ministry that reaches out to the community of people who are deaf will locate more individuals by expanding the geographical areas for evangelism contacts.



Students enrolling in American Sign Language (ASL) classes, from junior college to university levels, have increased from 1,602 in 1990 to 91,763 in 2009.

Source: Modern Language Association

- › Because of the increase of hearing loss, congregation members who are hard of hearing attend worship, Bible classes, fellowship activities and church meetings less frequently. Ministry that incorporates hearing accessibility in all aspects of worship and life together will enable greater participation by those who are hard of hearing, thus providing opportunities for continued strengthening of faith and spiritual growth.

17 percent of the U.S. population, or **53 million people**, have moderate to profound hearing loss.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders [NIDCD]



About **one in every 1,000** people in the U.S. became deaf before reaching 18 years of age.

Source: Gallaudet Research Institute



The unemployment rate for people who are deaf is estimated at more than **60 percent**.

Source: Gallaudet Research Institute



## Resources

- › *That All May Understand: Ministering with Persons Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing* by Debbie W. Parvin is a practical manual that explains how to bridge the gulf between hearing and deaf cultures and deliver the Good News in ways that empower both. Parvin offers an overview of deaf cultures, languages and issues, and she sets forward specific guidelines for starting and sustaining effective ministries with people who are deaf or hard of hearing. This resource is available from Christian Board of Publication, P.O. Box 179, St. Louis, MO, 63166-0179; 800-366-3383 or [customerservice@cbp21.com](mailto:customerservice@cbp21.com).  
*Note: This book may not appear on the website, but it is available by calling the toll-free number or sending an email.*
- › **Lutheran Friends of the Deaf**, a member of the Mill Neck Family of Organizations, offers many resources including a resource catalog, a variety of religious sign books, ASL alphabet posters and more. One resource, *Bible Story Books in American Sign Language and English Text*, is a growing series of Bible stories that includes both the Old and New Testaments. Each book includes one Bible story with color illustrations that is written in ASL pictures and text as well as English text and a companion DVD. It concludes with an activities page to help children understand the Bible story more clearly. Bible story books also may be used by Sunday school, preschool, day school or vacation Bible school teachers to teach their students the stories and how to tell the story by using American Sign Language. For a full listing of resources or for ordering information, visit [millneck.org](http://millneck.org) or call 800-264-0662.
- › **Everyone Sing and Sign**, available in both a singer's edition and a leader's edition, is described as a songbook with a simple vocabulary level. It allows children and adults, with or without disabilities, to enjoy singing 66 hymns of praise. The singer's edition includes the signs pictured above the words. The leader's edition includes musical accompaniments and guitar chords. A CD also is available with vocal and accompaniment tracks for each song. This resource is available through Northwestern Publishing House at 800-662-6022 or [nph.net](http://nph.net).