



Outreach Ideas  
English District  
Evangelism Team  
Newsletter

March 2024

## Reaching Out to the Deaf and Those Experiencing Hearing Loss

When you read the title of this month’s newsletter, you may have thought to yourself, “Well, we don’t have anyone in our congregation who is deaf.” However, the reason that we may not have deaf individuals in our church is that we haven’t made our worship readily accessible to them. Deafness has often been referred to as an ‘invisible’ disability.

Would you like to discover what percentage of the population is affected by hearing loss in your county? Click on it using the [new interactive map](#) from SoundCheck. According to the [National Council on Aging](#), “Hearing loss affects about 60.7 million Americans age 12 and older. About 15.5% (44.1 million) of American adults age 20 and older have some level of hearing loss.” That’s a sizable demographic to consider.

I had a remarkable aunt who was deaf. She was always on the cutting edge of the newest technology available that would allow her to communicate with her family and large network of deaf friends. She was proficient at reading lips and signing. She also had a beautiful faith in God and is with her Savior today in glory. Chances are good, given the statistics above, that this number includes

some in your family, your circle of friends and your congregation.



Here is a 15-minute video summary of the history and current work that our Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod has done, and is doing, in bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Deaf people. (In keeping with the topic, there is also a signed version of the same video available.)

Here's an important, and easily overlooked, opportunity for outreach in our midst. It's also an exciting opportunity. We are blessed with a growing number of terrific resources for this work. This includes resources for reaching out to those who are deaf, like my aunt. There is also tremendous technology available for equipping our churches to better minister to the number of those currently experiencing hearing loss (a number which the NCOA expects will double by 2060.)

As we read in [Mark 7](#), we have a loving Savior who cares deeply for our friends, family and neighbors who are deaf. We have also been given the very best message to share with them.

## Toolbox

### Ideas, Suggestions and Handy Bits

Where do you start? Our LCMS has a handy bulletin, as a part of the LCMS Disability Task Force Resources, titled “[Ministry to and with People who are Deaf](#).” (Some of the resources listed are no longer available but the background is very helpful.)



Are you looking at offering interpreted services at your church? Take a look at some of the remarkable resources that are available.



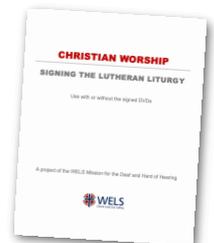
The Lutheran Deaf Ministry Society has 21 online YouTube videos for [Signing the Liturgy](#).

They also have text versions of Lutheran Liturgies for signing. These include [The Lutheran Hymnal page 5](#), [The Lutheran Hymnal page 15](#) and [LSB page 184](#), and an [An Agenda of Occasional Services Weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc.](#)

The texts of the the 3-year lectionary series [Lutheran Service Book](#) are available. Each file has the Introit (Psalm verses), Collect (prayer), and 3 Bible readings.

In addition to all of this, they have a very large selection of [hymns](#) that have been '[glossed](#)' for signing.

The WELS also has a useful downloadable publication on signing [hymns, liturgies and prayers](#). Although it's designed around their former hymnal, *Christian Worship*, one particularly useful section deals with [“Difficult Liturgy Phrases.”](#)



Lutheran Friends of the Deaf

[Lutheran Friends of the Deaf \(LFD\)](#), a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, is the founding member of the [Mill Neck Family of Organizations](#). Check out LFD's [Facebook page](#) for interpreted chapel services. They have training

and social events for children, youth and adults near you. They also have a [list](#) of Bible story books available in ASL. Each book includes a DVD and a companion book containing English text.



The [Lutheran Deaf Mission Society \(LDMS\)](#) is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the LCMS. They have a very useful bulletin titled, [“Hearing Congregations](#)

[Working With Deaf People.”](#)

You will also want to bookmark their [Youtube Channel](#). This channel includes videos on everything from signed versions of the LCMS Updates given regularly by Rev. Matthew Harrison to Sunday sermons. In addition, Luther's Small Catechism videos are available, Bible Studies and much, much more. You can subscribe to the Lutheran Deaf Mission Society newsletter by filling out the request form at the bottom of the home page of their [website](#). Check out all their [resources](#).



The [Ephphatha Lutheran Mission Society](#) is also an LCMS RSO. They offer a variety of YouTube videos on their [YouTube channel](#). (Please note that many of the videos are signed with neither audio nor subtitles). Deaconess Diana Rice, who teaches at [St. Martin Lutheran School in Dearborn, Michigan](#), provides a handy explanation of the Divine Service in [“Deaf People Can Understand Liturgy,” Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).



Rev. Dr. John Reinke and his wife Dacia (Texas District) offer [BLAST](#), a series of videos designed to teach Luther's Small Catechism in ASL. In addition, they offer a

variety of Bible Study materials in video and PowerPoint. They note, “Power Points take the student materials and make it easy to show and teach with laptop and T.V. or for worship leaders to download and use. Videos are first for you to watch and learn visual ways to present the materials. After you watch yourself you can teach the material (signing yourself) or you can also use the video in your class or at worship.” You are welcome to contact them by [email](#) for more information. You can also check their signed worship services on [Facebook](#).

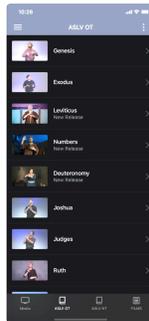


Check out the [Deaf Bible](#) app from the Deaf Bible Society. It's free and it's available in the [Apple App Store](#) and [Google Play](#). Currently 55 sign languages are available. It is also available [online](#).

The WELS has a useful bulletin offering insights and suggestions for [Confirming a Deaf Adult](#). The WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has completed a rework of the adult instruction manual *By Grace Alone* by Pastor Rolfe Westendorf (NPH, 1979). "*By Grace Alone: An Instruction Manual for Deaf Adults* uses simple, short sentences and Scripture quotes from [The Holy Bible: English Version for the Deaf](#)." (This is a print version.)



The folks at [God's Word for the Nations](#) report that, "The American Sign Language Version of the Bible (ASLV) is finally complete!" (This is a visual version). Deaf Missions' founder Duane King began the project in 1982 to break down the language barrier Deaf people often face when it comes to the Bible, asking "Why can't Deaf people have the Bible in their heart language?" After 22 years, the New Testament was completed in 2004. With increased funding and vastly improved technology, Deaf Missions was able to accelerate their translation process in 2017. It can be watched [online](#) free. It is available as an [app](#) for your phone and it's available in the [Roku Channel Store](#) so that you can watch it on TV.



### Why a "Deaf" Bible?

As it was noted recently in an article in [Christianity Today](#), "Many hearing people think sign language is only an alternate rendering of vocabulary—similar to how Braille reproduces written text in a code of raised dots. Sign language, however, has its own vocabulary and its own grammar, and linguists consider it a distinct language."

[Beverly Nehls](#), of the WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, also does a good job of explaining this need.

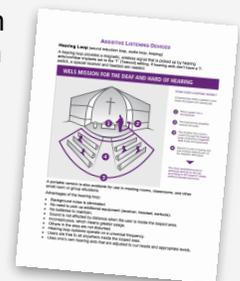
## Hearing Assistance Technology

Are you looking at ways to assist those in church who, while not deaf, would benefit from hearing assistance technology? A "[Hearing Loop](#)" may be the answer.

Liz Marler, a third-year student in the AuD program (American Academy of Audiology) at Purdue University and an LCMS member, estimates that within our synod "340,000 members likely have some degree of hearing loss." In her blog, "[Ear Audities](#)," she gives an excellent summary of how our congregations can benefit from hearing loop technology. She notes, "A loop is simply an assistive technology that is allowing the entire church population to hear the word each week. Just as you provide large print bulletins, hymnals and bibles to those with visual impairments, the loop is an important step to making sure people of all conditions are able to equally access the word."



The Wisconsin Lutheran Synod has a useful bulletin on [Assistive Listening Devices](#). It also discusses "Hearing Loop" technology. They note, "A hearing loop provides a magnetic, wireless signal that is picked up by hearing aids/ cochlear implants set to the 'T' (Telecoil) setting. If hearing aids don't have a T-switch, a special receiver and headset are needed."



They also have a brief note about FM systems and the "Pocketalker." You can also check out their "[Survey of Hearing Loss and Sound System](#)" and adapt for use in your own congregation.

The next most important thing to do is to advertise if you have signed services or hearing loop technology available. You can include this information on your website, in your social media posts, and in your bulletins. Here is a terrific example from [Messiah Lutheran Church](#) in Seattle, Washington.

## Our Synod and District Programs

Materials and Workshops Available For You  
(Have a workshop scheduled? Let us know.)



Join in a week-long “Jesus Signs Immersion Workshop,” with Rev. Dr. John Reinke, on July 22 – 26, 2024 at Immanuel Lutheran Church, 115 South Sixth Street, St. Charles, Missouri. For more information check out the Deaf Outreach [website](#).

The Church Interpreter Training Institute (CITI) was established in 1985 by The Rev. Dr. George Kraus and The Rev. Robert Muller to assist signers to improve their skills signing the Word of God to the deaf persons in their congregations. CITI instructs interpreters, church members and professional church workers as they reach out to the deaf community. Watch for the dates and locations for their upcoming summer institutes. These are for beginners as well as experienced interpreters.



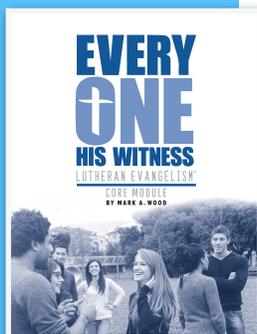
Def Pah is a program of study for Deaf church servant-leaders. (“Pah!” is an ASL expression that means “Success!”) The Deaf Mission staff of the LCMS originally created Deaf Pah and DIT specifically for LCMS Deaf congregations. LDMS notes, “You can see this connection most clearly in the theology and doctrine classes. We have opened

access to Deaf Pah course materials to people of all faiths. However, enrollment in the seminary level Deaf Institute of Theology is limited only to Deaf Christians who are active members of an LCMS congregation.”

## Every One His Witness

Every One His Witness is our Synod’s premiere resource for equipping Lutherans to share the Gospel with the people they encounter in their everyday lives.

Did you know that the DVD has an option for closed captioning for the hearing impaired?



## From The Field

Our Pastors and Congregations



This year Ephphatha Lutheran Church of the Deaf in Chicago, Illinois, is celebrating 59 years of ministry for the Deaf. As Pastor Prentice Marsh exclaimed, “Deaf ministry at Ephphatha is going on strong.” Check them out on [Facebook](#).

Our Savior Lutheran Church of the Deaf (Michigan District) is located within their host church Ascension of Christ Lutheran Church (English District) in Beverly Hills, Michigan. You can read about their worship and outreach in the Winter 2023 edition of Lutherans Engage.



## Articles, Books and Research

Current Research and Writings



Check out the article “So They May Hear,” in Concordia Theological Seminary’s “For the Life of the World.” It describes their Deaf Ministry program.



“Sign to the Lord a New Song,” is a 279 page religious sign language dictionary available from Northwestern Publishing House. It describes the signs for hundreds of words and phrases used in the worship setting. It also provides alternate signs for words that have multiple meanings. Clear, sharp pictures enhance the understanding of many of the signs.

## Please Contact

Pastor David Tannahill  
of our Evangelism Team  
with your ideas and input.

Share details of what has worked for you. The collegial sharing of tips and ideas is a blessing for our brothers and sisters in Christ.