



## **The Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

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Are you aware that spoken languages are not the only language humans use in this world? Are you aware that there is another culture that is different from the hearing culture? Yes, sign language is mostly used by Deaf people and their associates, and they also have their own culture. It was discovered that there are about four hundred different sign languages in the world. The Deaf comprise one of the largest unreached people groups. The main reason for being unreached is the lack of access to visual communication.

Because of this concern, Adventist Deaf Ministries International (ADMI) was established to help the world Church become aware of both the needs and possibilities of the Deaf. The ministry of ADMI works to develop an acceptance of the Deaf as they are, and to develop action plans to reach them for Jesus and to assist them to reach out to others.

Statistics have estimated that only 2% of 70 million Deaf<sup>1</sup> know Jesus and have accepted Him as their personal Savior. Where is the rest of the majority? Statistics also show that those with various kinds of hearing loss, such as Hard of Hearing or late deafened, is about 466 million<sup>2</sup> worldwide. Many rely heavily on technology such as audio devices and/or closed captioning to be able to keep up with spoken language. The Church cannot afford to be ignorant about such a huge ripe field.

There was a young boy who grew up attending Adventist Church, but he didn't benefit much from it. Why? Because he was deaf. However, things began to change when he was ten years old. The church recognized the deaf boy's needs so two young adults took interest by taking sign language classes. Their friendship began to develop with the boy. A sign language interpreter who lived next to the church heard about the need and went to church regularly and interpreted for him. This was also a great benefit for the two sign language students. They had the advantage to how interpretation for the Deaf worked in a church setting. At the age of thirteen, the deaf boy started to understand who Jesus was, took Bible study lessons with the church pastor, and joined the church by baptism. A decade later, that deaf boy became a Seventh-day Adventist minister who is currently ministering to his people group with whom he can relate very well. The Deaf pastor would often mention that if it weren't for the church's interest in him, he would probably not be in the faith today. That's a scary thought.

While it is true that sign language interpretation is needed for joint activities with hearing church members, Deaf people often find themselves preferring to gather with others like

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<sup>1</sup> <https://wfdeaf.org>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/deafness-and-hearing-loss>

themselves. There is a special bonding due to common language and culture which is common among any people group. Living in the hearing world is tough for many Deaf because of the lack of communication, so it's natural for them to want be with other Deaf. For this reason it is better, when possible, for the Deaf to have their own Sabbath School class rather than having interpretation in regular hearing class. The Deaf can often feel left out of class discussions due to the lag of interpreting and the level of understanding. The same goes with worship service. If the group is large enough, permission to have their own service should be granted. (The same would be true, of course, for any spoken language group. French speaking individuals in English speaking church would rather meet with other French speaking people for worship, for instance.) Placing Deaf members in church leadership is encouraged. It is important that they feel like they belong and that they can also contribute to the church's ministry. They can serve as elders, deacons, deaconesses, greeters, and so on. As with other members, it is important to understand the spiritual gifts of the deaf person and provide ministry opportunities accordingly. That's the point of APM and its motto: "All are Gifted, Needed, and Treasured."

Isolated Deaf people have a great need to meet with other Deaf individuals. Because of ADMI, they have been able to. An example of this happened when a Division in Europe offered a Division-wide congress for the Deaf. It was inspiring to see many smiling faces as they conversed in sign language. Spiritual messages were presented in their language. Closed captions or subtitles were shown on the large screens up front. Similar approaches could be done yearly for the Deaf at local camp meetings. Social events at local churches could include the Deaf. It would be important to provide interpreters for them. These are just a few examples of what churches around the world can do!

Video production is one of the priorities the church can offer in reaching the Deaf. The Deaf and the Hard of Hearing community are visually oriented which is why they benefit from videos with sign languages and when closed captions or subtitles are inserted.

In closing, the first angel's message was to proclaim the gospel to everyone. "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—"3 Two key words are mentioned here: tongue (language) and people. Sign language is a language, and the Deaf are people. The Deaf people group needs to be reached with the everlasting gospel, and YOU can be involved.

If you have any stories you'd like to share, we at ADMI/APM would love to know! Please keep us informed! God Bless!

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<sup>3</sup> Revelation 14:6 NKJV