



The United Methodist Committee on

Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Ministries

DEAF MINISTRY BEST PRACTICES RESOURCE GUIDE

Definitions

Deaf Ministry

Deaf ministry is a ministry or program that has a primary focus of being in ministry with Deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, Deafblind persons and their families. There are various aspects of what a Deaf ministry looks like. The book, *Deaf Ministry: Ministry Models for Expanding the Kingdom of God*, goes into the nuances and models of Deaf ministry. A few examples of a Deaf ministry can include: An interpreted ministry, Deaf missions, and a hard of hearing ministry. Below are some best practices that hearing churches with a Deaf ministry may wish to consider for building or expanding their ministry.

Best Practices

According to the online Business Dictionary, *best practice* means “a method or technique that has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other mean, and that is used as a benchmark.” Often, best practices are context specific. The following are some general best practices to keep in mind, which are geared toward hearing churches with Deaf ministries.

Points to observe

1. Hospitality (e.g. having a welcoming spirit.).

Hospitality is number one for a reason – it can make or break church’s Deaf ministry. Smiling, welcoming, inviting, including, accessibility, and other features are a part of hospitality. Read this article about some basic [principles of hospitality](#).

2. Being accessible (architecturally, communication, and attitudinally).

Accessibility is the church’s commitment to Deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and Deafblind people, along with people with disabilities. At the heart of this is the desire to have a church that is accessible and inclusive in the life of the church. Accessibility considerations from the Committee on Disability Ministries can be found in [this checklist](#); the Committee on Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Ministries also has [this list that is specific to hard of hearing and late-deafened people](#).

3. Widen your scope

Consider expanding your ministry to additional ministry programs by doing mission work or reaching out to other populations such as hard of hearing and/or Deafblind people.

4. Audism

Audism is a negative bias toward deaf people, which includes thinking they are not able to do certain things or cannot be in leadership because of their deafness. For example, what is your church's motivation for your Deaf ministry? Another example is feeling sorry for them, even being paternalistic toward them. An article with more information can be [found here](#).

5. Missional

Be missional. At the heart of Jesus' ministry was mission work, which often moves beyond charity to creating relationships with those the church is in ministry with. Find a niche in your community. (1) Offer pastoral assistance to Deaf and hard of hearing people at the local shelter. (2) Adopt a Deaf group home. (3) Establish a Deaf senior program.

6. Deaf Culture

Become familiar with Deaf culture and include it within your church. Know the culture (the people), not just the sign language, your ministry is including into the life of the church. This will help with aspects of hospitality. [Here is an article about the basic principles](#).

7. Fellowship

While some Deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and Deafblind people visit or join a church of discipleship reasons, many look for a faith community for social reasons. Provide fellowship opportunities on a regular basis, as this is important for most culturally Deaf people. It can include Bible studies, regular lunch or dinners in the community, potluck meals, and even conversations over coffee and donuts before or after worship.

8. Communications

Support a variety of communication modalities so your church is more accessible. This includes sign language, lip-reading, having an assisted listening device or system, the use of captioning, and so on. For more information, see DHM's electronic book [Breaking the Sound Barrier](#).

9. Sign Language Classes

Offer periodic sign language classes for your church and your community. This helps with building relationships and helps any Deaf and hard of hearing people to connect with others in the church. Some churches offer classes on a quarterly basis, while others will offer it once or twice a year. They can range from introductory to more comprehensive classes. If there are not any Deaf or hearing people to teach it, then consider an online sign language class and have someone facilitate it. DHM has list of some online classes and dictionaries [available to download](#).

10. Evaluations

Periodically evaluate your Deaf ministry. What are we doing well? What should we do better? For example, do we have Deaf people in leadership positions? Why not? Do we offer sign language classes? Any signs of audism? Have we begun having a Deaf ministry committee? The book, *Deaf Ministry: Ministry Models for Expanding the Kingdom of God* (through Amazon.com) is helpful with this, as it includes some guidance for a Deaf ministry committee and some responsibilities of a Deaf ministry coordinator.

11. Empower

Empower, empower, empower. Don't just include, but empower Deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Sometimes this happens by partnering a Deaf and hearing persons in the beginning until the Deaf person feels comfortable or confident in whatever the role is. For example, running a food pantry or planning a potluck gathering.

Reference: Yates, L. (2018). *Deaf Ministry: Ministry Models for Expanding the Kingdom of God, 2nd Ed.* Charlotte, NC: Create Space, Inc.