

Can We Hear Them?

What Are They Hearing from Us?

A Strategic Plan to Reach an Unreached People

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Adventist Deaf Ministries International

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I. The Challenge

- a. The prevailing perception is that being “Deaf” is about having a hearing disability and, therefore, the ministry offered to them is presented with that in mind. It is much more than that. [In this paper Deaf is spelled with a capital “D” to indicate the target group is identified by both a unique culture and a disability referred to as deafness.] Being Deaf needs to be distinguished from those who are hard of hearing.
- b. The identity of a Deaf person from a hearing perspective is often about what they cannot do rather than who they are as a person.
- c. The Deaf are scattered throughout all communities and normally do not live in groups and are, therefore, hard to locate. Unfortunately many hearing church leaders assume there are no Deaf because they do not see them.
- d. Deaf often feel isolated, excluded and often suffer from loneliness.
- e. Deaf are isolated from the typical sources of spiritual teaching and encouragement. When they are members of a hearing church they are often not included in most church activities.
- f. Interpretation for the Deaf is expensive and most do not see this as the cost for doing ministry.
- g. Few hearing know how to communicate with the Deaf via sign language.
- h. Some Deaf are resistant for the hearing to speak to their groups because of their imperfect signing ability.
- i. Few administrators are willing to allocate budgets for the training of Deaf pastors and therefore there is a critical lack of theologically trained Deaf pastors. The implications are serious in the long term.
- j. Seldom does the Church recognize the Deaf as an unreached people group despite the fact that only 2% of the 200 to 300 million Deaf in the world are Christian regardless of the denomination. No budget or strategic plan is in place to reach this group with the “everlasting gospel.”

II. The Church’s Response

“I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. This is God's test of our character. If we have the true religion of the Bible, we shall feel that a debt of love, kindness, and interest is due to Christ in behalf of His brethren; and we can do no less than to show our gratitude for His immeasurable love to us while we were sinners unworthy of His grace, by having a deep interest and unselfish love for those who are our brethren, and who are less fortunate than ourselves.” Ellen White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol.3, p.511



Reaching the Deaf is God's mission. Jesus showed an interest, He showed compassion and He often made an intense effort to minister to all who had some kind of disability including those with deafness. "The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world." (*Acts of the Apostles*, p.9). Ministry to the Deaf is first and foremost God's mission but the church is the agency He has chosen to reach this people with the gospel. We must not exclude this group from the strategic planning of the church.

a. Vision

As part of its comprehensive mission, each of the thirteen world divisions will launch and develop a Deaf ministry in each union using every means available to locate the Deaf and put into practice Christ's method of ministry as outlined by Ellen White in *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143

[Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me."--*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.]

b. Goals

1. That every division in consultation with the Deaf in its region (when possible or Deaf leaders outside their division), unions, conferences and mission will initiate and develop Deaf ministries by:
 - a. Locating the Deaf members and non-members within its territory, making special note of geographical concentrations of the Deaf and their approximate ages for purposes of future ministries.
 - b. Identifying those who know sign language and those who desire to learn sign language. Develop classes where the hearing can learn sign language.
 - c. Organizing annual training of current Deaf leaders and recruit additional leaders to minister to those discovered in the search process referenced in part "a" above.
 - d. Developing materials for outreach and nurture for the purpose of equipping and strengthening the Deaf for ministry to their fellow Deaf.
 - e. Developing an Internet and television ministry to reach the scattered Deaf population.

- f. Developing a cooperative endeavor where the Deaf and the hearing work with and in support of one another.
 - g. Including Deaf ministry in all large city and “centers of influence” evangelistic initiatives.
- 2. That the office of the General Conference for International Deaf Ministries and Special Needs Ministries, in consultations with Deaf from around the world, will provide the following global support:
 - a. The development of a global website designed especially for the Deaf and their ministries of outreach and nurture.
 - b. Be a resource center for the collection of successful ministry approaches used to reach the Deaf.
 - c. Develop a certification manual or process to assure that workers being trained for ministry to the Deaf are adequately teaching Adventist beliefs.
 - d. To encourage fair financial treatment of those working for the Deaf.
 - e. That every effort will be made for the Deaf to be included in the media ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- 3. That an annual report will be given at the end of each year regarding efforts taken to minister to and with the Deaf and the results of such efforts.

c. Resources

- 1. Spiritual Resources – Any effort to share the everlasting gospel “to every nation, tribe, language and people” (clearly the Deaf are part of this commission) is reliant upon the power of the Holy Spirit to convict the hearts and minds of the Deaf. The immense challenge of reaching the millions of unreached Deaf requires engagement from the entire body of Christ, through the reliance on prayer and the Holy Spirit and careful planning in order to make the most effective use of resources available.
- 2. Human Resources – In many areas of the world, little or no resources have been designated for Deaf ministry. More Deaf pastors need to be trained for this expanding ministry. The good news is that many members both hearing and deaf are anxious to become involved. The Bible clearly calls every believer to give, serve, and share Christ’s love. Ministry for the Deaf must not be limited to only the Deaf working for the Deaf.



In order to empower church members in every region of the world to share the gospel in word and deed with the unreached Deaf it is vital that

- a. Both the Deaf and the hearing be involved in planning for ministry to reach and to incorporate into our Christian fellowship the unreached Deaf of the world.
- b. Each department, at every level, will need to focus attention on the Deaf assuring that attention regarding training and materials be designed with the Deaf in mind along with other segments of society.
- c. Deaf members also be trained to use their spiritual gifts in their own ministries.
- d. Plans be made to train and to add more church workers in ministry for the Deaf.

d. Evaluation and Accountability

Evaluation and accountability are essential for any ministry. This is especially so with Deaf ministry because the salvation of over 200 million is at stake. Evaluation and accountability is part of good stewardship. Therefore, the goals listed above once accepted should be included in evaluating the progress being made towards reaching the Deaf.

e. Responsibility

The primarily responsibility for planning and implementation rests with the leaders of the church at each level. The General Conference Office of International Deaf Ministries will assist the world church in this special focus on Deaf ministries by coordinating with division leaders.