



How to Start a Deaf and the Hard of Hearing Ministry

2. Starting a Deaf Ministry

- A. Begin by selecting an APM leader in the local church.

This person oversees the various APM ministries including the Deaf ministry. He/she should serve on the church board and should be familiar with the organization and website for Adventist Deaf Ministries International (ADMI).

- B. Identify a pastor or an elder who has a passion to reach the Deaf for Jesus.

The preferred choice would be a Deaf person who identifies him/herself with the Deaf people group or a hearing person who is or has been immersed in the Deaf world (i.e., fluent in sign language, a child of Deaf parents, deafness in the family). The last option is choosing a hearing person who may not know but is taking sign language and culture courses. There are online courses available as well as in-class options. Some colleges and universities offer a two-year or a four-year degree. Master's courses are also available and so is a Doctorate. The principal concern is to find a leader who can communicate effectively with the Deaf and preferably in their sign language so that God's messages can be clearly conveyed to them.

- C. Secure a room at church for the Deaf to use.

The room can be used for Sabbath School class, small group, worship service, felt-need evangelism, Bible study, counseling, and so on. No matter the size, the Deaf generally prefer that the space be reserved just for them.

Use that time to discuss the Sabbath School lesson in sign language and sign accordingly to his/her level of understanding. You may need to repeat until your emphasis is clearly understood. You may also need to add more time explaining who that Biblical person was, or what that word meant. The Deaf value and appreciate using that time because they are learning!

The other option is putting the Deaf in a larger group with hearing people. If this is done, skilled interpreters must be provided. If the interpreter isn't doing well, the Deaf will likely feel lost and left out. Advanced or technical discussions in Sabbath School can cause the deaf to feel abandoned. The Deaf are generally shy when it comes to making comments or asking questions in the presence of the hearing in fear of being labeled stupid. For these reasons, a room just for the Deaf is ideal.

D. Leadership Participation.

With the Deaf Church model, Deaf members will have the opportunity to serve as officers such as elders and deacons or deaconesses, participate in committee meetings, and assist with the order of worship service. All are inclusive.

E. Feelings of Inclusion Are Critical

When the Deaf meet with the hearing, it is imperative that the Deaf feel wanted and included. A special effort should be made to discover their gifts and find ways of involving them in the church's ministry. A few can be selected to serve as an officer such as an elder or a deacon/deaconess. Others should be selected to serve up in the front leading out the worship service. One may do the song, scripture reading, pray, for instance, etc. Participation is the key.

Interpreters must attend social events. They help with communication needs. If interpreters cannot attend, consider having a few church members who know sign language be present. They will be able to have basic communication. If a video is shown, subtitles or captions for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers should be used.

F. Socialization Outside the Church Building Is Important.

Consider inviting the Deaf to someone's home. Provide a meal. Develop friendship and build trust. Find their needs and meet them. The Deaf will appreciate knowing that you are sincere and interested in them.