

In December 1999 Pauline Mitchell was inspired by God's word in, 'Mark 16:15', to establish SIGN (*Signing to Invite the Gospel to all Nations*) Ministries. She had noticed a lack of deaf people in 'the church' and that the church had no national strategic plans to reach out to deaf people in their community. After careful consideration and pray the ministry now has a core team of professional and committed Seventh Day Adventists who are Pauline Mitchell (*Director/Consultant*) Paulette Martin (*Disabilities Consultant & Quality Assurance Officer*), Monique Denny (*Deaf Awareness Instructor*) and Sandra Hamilton (*Arts Coordinator*) and are all striving to address this dilemma.

The ministry advocates for the rights of deaf people to participate and worship freely within an inclusive church environment. Working together with both deaf and hearing individuals we aim to assist the church in breaking down the barriers often faced by Deaf people in our churches. We also promote better communication, integration and outreach between deaf and hearing people. We highlight the importance of being aware of deaf peoples needs in and outside of the church. We advocate for better accessibility and endeavour to empower and inspire deaf individuals to share their skills and spiritual gifts in the church as well as to people in the community.

SIGN Ministries have worked tirelessly throughout the years addressing the needs of Deaf people in the church by, in the initial years, delivering Deaf awareness programmes to the members. Unfortunately, as time went on we realised that delivering deaf awareness programmes were not enough. When we revisited these churches nothing had changed and the needs of deaf people were still not being met so we had to rethink our approach. This culminated in devising two models of approach, the 'Crisis' and 'Preparation' Models of working with individual churches. These models enabled us to disseminate and establish Deaf Ministries in the Adventist churches and provide a more accessible and holistic approach

During these 14 years of ministry we have worked in over 15 churches spanning the South, the Midlands and the North of the UK delivering Deaf Awareness programmes and/or assisting in establishing Deaf Ministries in Adventist churches. For example, below Pauline Mitchell shares one of her experiences of establishing a Deaf Ministry in Lewisham SDA church:

' A man who is Hard of Hearing walked into Lewisham SDA church approximately two years ago and for two month he could not access the sermon adequately. Through a mutual friend he contacted me and asked if I could interpret for him. I agreed and when I arrived I soon realised that the church needed our help. After much discussion with the Head Elder and willing individuals who wanted to be involved in the Ministry and with this deaf man, I was able to assess and utilise the skills set available and help them set up a Deaf Ministry in their church.

This deaf man needed an interpreter so that he could access all verbal communication like his hearing counterparts and a loop system that was fully functioning for all hearing aid users. I also advised the Audio and Visual team to invest in putting subtitles on their live stream with an in-vision signer on the screen and establish a website so that the team could promote what they are doing and reach members of the deaf community online.

In addition, my work at this church included, every Monday evening for 6 months, teaching the team sign language, introduction to church Interpreting and how to set up a Deaf Ministry. I interpreted sermons, children stories and announcements for one and a half years for most Sabbaths to support and demonstrate how interpreting should be carried out, until certain individuals in the team were confident enough to join a BSL level 3 course and start signing the sermons for themselves (two members of the team are now signing the sermons every week) and how to establish a Deaf Ministry with my guidance. Lewisham SDA church now have a functioning Deaf Ministry in their church and this has resulted in two of their Deaf visitors becoming baptised members of the church.'

Today Sign Ministries endeavours to support and guide the church on how to become more inclusive and accessible for Deaf people and for it's members to fulfil the commission written in Mark 16:15 to the often neglected Deaf community.

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