

Reintroducing “Gospel Hands”

By Kevin Maki

Dr. Curt Young wrote several different “targeted” publications during his ministry at IPM. One of these related to the history of Deaf ministry and was intended for the audience of people interested in learning more about the Deaf world. When I became director, I asked Bro. James and Sis. Marta to collaborate on a circular, a publication that would come from the perspective of BOTH Deaf and hearing. Little did we know that this challenge would take a couple of years to come together AND part of the reason for the timing of this release is that God “touched” the lives of our staff this year: one member with the effects of severe long-term COVID and another by losing a portion of physical hearing. As current Director for the Deaf Ministry Department, I want to encourage you to read with new eyes and be move with new zeal to reach the those that are physically “hard-of-hearing”, profoundly “Deaf” and even those who are spiritually “deaf” or “blind” to see Christ! Thank you, Dr. Young for letting us borrow the title as we use our hands TOGETHER to spread the gospel!

Are You Inclusive Enough?

By James Campbell

Picture this: You go to a new church for the first time. Maybe you are a believer; maybe you are not. Either way, the place feels unfamiliar. Once you find your way into the sanctuary, you are looking where to sit. You cast your eyes up and down the aisles till you find an empty spot not too close to the front. You move your way through people and claim your seat. Your eyes roam the crowd, strangers, all of them - smiling and chatting and laughing, sharing the week’s ups and downs. Shaking hands. Hugging. Sharing lives. But you are not a part of it: you intermingle with the crowd. Maybe one or two people smile at you briefly, but that’s it.

Week by week passes. Soon, a person notices and greets you. Then you are introduced to someone else. All of a sudden, you have new friends. You belong. Gradually, you meet more people, learn names, become rooted. You laugh together, cry together, pray together, rejoice together. You belong.

Now, suppose... just suppose that everyone around you was speaking a foreign language. You understand absolutely nothing of what is going on around you. Someone translates the sermons for you , but you understand nothing else. Everyone else is laughing and chatting, but you are utterly left out because you understand nothing.

You never meet anyone. You never become rooted in the community. Nobody notices your loneliness, nor do they make any attempt to include you. You are just there, co-existing but detached... not belonging. If nobody ever spoke to you in church or made any attempt to talk with you, how long would you keep attending that church?

Having a Deaf ministry is a terrific addition to your local church, and it gives churches an opportunity to serve the Deaf community in your area.

An Invisible Minority!

Deaf people often have no or minimal contact with hearing people in their churches. How does this

happen? Deaf people are invisible to most hearing people. Why are Deaf people just not on their radar? They know Deaf people exist after all they see the sign language interpreter, they see the section with deaf people sitting in it, but they often have given little or no thought to how isolated Deaf people are.

Implications and Ramifications...

What kind of message does the church send to the deaf community? Is the message, "I want a deaf ministry but have not yet fully counted the cost of implementing it"? Changing this situation is extremely complicated. Making a hearing church truly accessible to Deaf people requires serious commitment from staff, interpreters, and members individually, as well as a community commitment from the church as a whole. Often, a greater commitment than initially expected.

To have a successful Deaf ministry:

- Make sure all programs are inclusive to everyone, including deaf, by work cooperatively to bring Deaf people together so there is a large enough group for meaningful sharing and programming.
- Church Leadership meet and greet deaf visitors and deaf members. Spend a few minutes to get know about them. Ask about their family? Job? School?
- Invite speakers who collaborated with deaf community and ministries.
- Go to the soulwinning with a deaf partner visiting deaf community.
- Get yourself involved with their activities, programming, and others.
- Find a seat at potluck/picnic and eat with them.
- Make sure to include deaf events and announcements in your church announcement.
- Provide Sign Language classes for your hearing members to learn.
- Allow deaf members to serve in various positions within the church, i.e., usher, door greeter, and kitchen server.

And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? – Exodus 4:11

Who *is* blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger *that* I sent? who *is* blind as *he that is* perfect, and blind as the LORD'S servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not. – Isaiah 42:19-20

A Missionary Story:

By Kevin Maki

We presented at a church in a city of about 1 Million people the need for the deaf. The pastor shared with us after the meeting that in 25 years of ministry, not one time had he seen a deaf person. He wondered if there really was that big a need for such a ministry. The following week, we received a phone call from his assistant Pastor informing us that he and the senior Pastor had gone to lunch at a favorite pizza place near the church: 4 deaf sat signing at the table across from them! I informed him of a Deaf chat that met in his neighborhood that averaged 50 people once-a-month. Yes, there are Deaf/deaf/hard-of-hearing around us all.

What We Can Do To Welcome The Deaf In Our Midst?

By Marta Galdamez

Most hearing people are not aware of the importance to have fellowship with a deaf person. Many times, it could be unintentionally, hearing people think that the deaf cannot understand things. They are surprised knowing that there are deaf who are computer programmers, teachers, scientists, and the list goes on. As hearing people, we fail to recognize the need the deaf have for accessibility. We know that the deaf lives in a hearing world, therefore, many hearing people suggest that the deaf can do something to gain some type of hearing, like cochlear implants or any other hearing devices to make it easier for them to understand their surroundings. It is sad that hearing parents do not see the need to learn Sign Language to communicate with their children.

An adult hearing person all her life, in a moment found herself in a hard of hearing world. She felt isolated, her children did not understand her, they were not sensitive, they were not accommodating, they did not have patience, resulting in her depression and loneliness. Therefore, it is important that hearing people are made aware of the needs.

Fellowship is very important for a human being. We were created to have fellowship with God and one another. Even in the hearing world we find people being rejected because they are different. Between hearing and deaf should be a common purpose, awareness, valuing differences. Most of the hearing think that learning Sign Language should be fun, not considering the commitment to reach, minister and fellowship with the deaf as who they are.

As I travel to different churches, pastors, and church members state that there is a need to reach the deaf with the Gospel, but most of the time I have seen that the mentality is that someone else can do it, like interpreters or people who know Sign Language. It is very uncommon to see others wanting to get involved in this ministry.

We know that in the Bible, God wrote “deaf and dumb, about 30 verses.” But, I know the deaf in general are not dumb. Unfortunately, many churches do not understand the deaf and their needs. Hearing people, who have an interest in Sign Language, should be inviting the deaf to attend church programs. That will result in an increase of church membership by building a strong bond between the hearing and deaf communities.

An Example of Partnering in Soulwinning

By Kevin Maki

One of our deaf men wanted to become an evangelist. As a Pastor, I want to take people with me when natural discipleship opportunities exist. So, we went door-to-door in our community knowing that almost every person we would meet would be a hearing person. However, there was a surprising result: not one door was slammed in our face! Here is how it happened. The deaf member of our church stood in front of the door, and I voice interpreted for him as he signed to the person answering the door. The person looked at him, looked at me, looked back at him, and before we all knew what had happened, we were done speaking and the person was now trying to figure out whether to speak to me or to the

deaf person in response! One memorable time was at the door of a Muslim man who shared that Jesus was a prophet in his religion. We had an amazing opportunity to show him from the Bible that Jesus is the only way to get to heaven (John 14:6) not just one of the prophets.