



GOSPEL HANDS

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Easily and Often Overlooked

By Kevin Maki, Director of IPM Deaf Ministries

As a rookie Pastor brought into shepherd a small congregation of Deaf people, I had no idea of about the importance of learning about a subset of the Deaf world known as Deaf-blind community. It was not that I was totally ignorant, after all we had a Deaf-blind member in our congregation and not including this person's spouse, there were three other members who were Social Service Providers (SSP's). The problem was I just did not realize the all-encompassing nature of double sensory deprivation: loss of sound and sight. Sure, I could see the guide dog, the cane, the braille pad, and the ever-present dark sunglasses on the face of our congregant but tactile sign language just did not seem that different from visual sign language to be a major concern.

My first clue came in the form of an invitation. One of the SSP's let me know that our church should be providing lunch for the local Deaf-blind association and that I would be expected to give a 10-to-15-minute presentation to the group. On the appointed day, our members lined up behind a counter with the food our church was providing and each Deaf-blind person with his or her own SSP came through the line. As a scoop of lasagna was placed on the plate, the SSP explained the kind of food and gently brought the fingers of the Deaf-blind person to touch the exact position on the plate. There were about 25 Deaf-blind people in the room and another 25 or more SSP's. I came to learn that while the environment was primarily tactile, there was a very strong second sensory component found in smell.

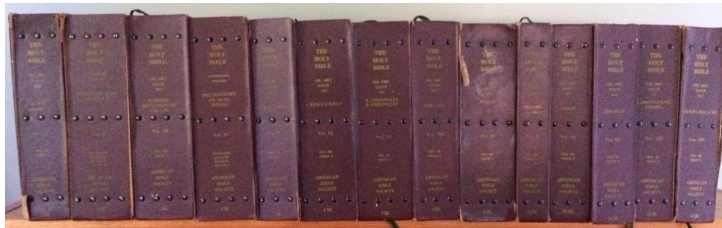
My next clue came around Thanksgiving time when a Deaf man visited our home and asked me to stand under a light while I was signing. He had Usher's Syndrome and ultimately would go blind. I had met this sighted, Deaf man a few years earlier as he was training to be a graphic artist at the local community college. It was that night that I learned he would no longer continue his dream but instead would go for training to live independently at the Helen Keller National Center.



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your hands will be
Gospel Hands!**

**A circular assisting
pastors, leaders,
and workers
dedicated to
reaching the Deaf**





It was probably about 9 months after I had begun as Pastor before I finally got my courage up to ask our Deaf-blind congregant why the Braille Bible I had seen in her home during a pastoral visit never came to church. I believed firmly that each person should be reading the Word themselves and

yet our scripture reading time in church really served as a rest period for both interpreter and the Deaf-blind. She was very clear in her signed response to my question: "I do not know which book of the Bible you will preach next week." Oh. I had never considered the fact that a separate Braille book would be required for each distinct scripture passage! But it was more complicated than that as I volunteered to give her advance notice on each and every passage that I would cover. She shook her head and let me know that there was no table on which she could place her Braille book even if she brought a volume. And when I provided a table, she frowned and shook her head again explaining to me it was the wrong height. We finally landed on a piano bench being 'just right' after a number of attempts.

This was just the beginning. We quickly learned that although there were clear visual posted signs in the building for the nursery, the fellowship hall, the bathrooms, the library, and even different Sunday school rooms, there was a need to encode all of this information into a tactile format. A raised shape or Braille word was needed to be posted at a reasonable height for the Deaf-blind to function independently. Little-by-little, we were realizing that so many different aspects of our sighted (or auditory) world led to the Deaf-blind being overlooked and excluded.

For instance, one day a new bus driver dropped our Deaf-blind person off at the corner of our church property. However, what the driver did not pay attention to was the card that our congregant had shown upon entering the bus specifying the stop BEFORE the church. As the Deaf-blind person debarked the bus AFTER the church, turned right as normal, she headed down an unfamiliar sidewalk. Thankfully a police officer recognized the danger and intervened before she entered 4 lanes of traffic! As her pastor, I was involved in the meetings with the transit system to make sure it never happened again! For her safety and for the glory of God.

Deaf-blind & COVID

Pastor Jim Hansen works with the Deaf-blind at the Commission-on-Compassion (COC) in L.A., CA and I called him to get a perspective on the way ministry was impacted over the past 2 years.

1. In-person training at the local Braille Institute was suspended from March 2020 until May 2022 which meant that the deaf-blind were excluded from the virtual training provided.
2. At the peak of COVID shutdowns, Grace Bible Deaf Church was closed completely for 10 weeks due to restrictions imposed upon them. They decided that since the Deaf-blind participants could not use ZOOM, they would not hold remote services that excluded a portion of the body of believers. This provided unique ministry challenges to reach their primary audience.
3. A part of the mission of COC includes independent living for the deaf-blind. Although they closed their dining room, they continued to provide food by delivering meals to each individual apartment in the facility.
4. Although professional interpreters were not allowed to help out even in the hospital, this did not stop the staff of COC from transporting them to the hospital. The Deaf-blind person had to enter alone without any form of interpretation of what was happening to them.

5. The greatest impact on the Deaf-blind community was “fear”, in part, because they did have access to the media (using Braille) while simultaneously being cut off from the normal social network of SSP and fellow Deaf-blind residents or church members.

Pastor Jim concluded his call with a staggering statistic from the Helen Keller National Center: there are roughly 125,000 Deaf-blind people in the L.A. metro area with 12.5 Million souls. COC has just 33 units. Although there is a great need for workers to reach this particular people group, Pastor Jim believes that many are unaware of this.

Deaf-blind & India

In 2016, I travelled to Kolkata and visited the fledgling Deaf-training center. At the time I was curious if they had met any Deaf-blind. I knew of one person in CA who had been born in Kolkata but moved to the U.S. because there were not resources to assist him there.

In 2022, the Pastor in charge of the Deaf training center sent us photographs of their very first Deaf-blind participant! I shudder to think of the isolation that this person must face daily. It is only recently that the government of India has moved from oral to sign language education in the Deaf world. Additionally, although the caste system is illegal, there is still great stigma against people with a single disability, let alone multiple disabilities because the Hindus believe that reincarnation includes a sort of divine justice. A person born Deaf AND blind must have done something very horrible, in their thinking. Finally, the needs of poverty are so very great at every level that Deaf-blind are simply overlooked.

Although Jesus healed multiple blind people and at least one physically deaf man, we have no record of Jesus healing a person who was both deaf and blind. John 14:12 gives us a hint that Jesus left us some work to do: “...and greater works shall he do, because I go to my Father.”



Benefits Of Hearing And Deaf Relationships

By Marta Galdamez, IPM Deaf Ministries Assistant

As a Hard of Hearing person now, I stand between a hearing and a deaf world.

The success of any relationship comes down to communication. We need to ask ourselves, are we hearing people deaf aware? Can we sign? Of course, the deaf person bears just as much responsibility for this. Hearing people get frustrated when they're introduced to Deaf people – and find that they're the ones left out, in a sea of signing hands, struggling to know what people are saying. You could argue that hearing people aren't used to coping with this. The same situation can be said with deaf people surrounded by speech.

A situation can arise and exist where both the deaf and hearing person struggle when they're mixing with each other's families and friends, even though they get along perfectly well when it's just the two of them.

The relationships between deaf and hearing can be beneficial for each person. It will take work and perseverance. In spite of the frustration and feelings of not being understood it will require mutual respect for each other's communication needs and cultural backgrounds. Accepting that communication with everyone in each other's familiar and friendly relationships might never be perfect, but everybody has to make the best of it.

For the hearing person, it might mean going to Sign Language classes, or becoming more aware of deaf people. We need to take in consideration love for one another. Hearing and deaf people should exercise compassion, patience and understanding the ways to communicate effectively. In order to learn from one another and explore relationships in very different perspectives, we must take the time to reach out, get out of our comfort zones,

receive acceptance and rejection as adults, teach others to find ways to broaden communication between these groups.

It happens when deaf/hearing people received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. Old friends and family continue to see them as they were and not understanding the change that had occurred.

“The success of hearing and deaf relationships often comes down to a decision that even when miscommunication happens that we will be faithful to the PERSON, since they are important to the Lord.” – Pastor Kevin Maki, Director of IPM Deaf Ministries.



Community Calls

By James Campbell, IPM Instructor/Evangelist

1 Thessalonians 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men*.

When we hear the Lord’s voice in our heart and we respond to Him, God is not only calling us to Him. God is also calling us into the Church. God is calling us into community. Once we accept Christ, it is important that we join in with a community of believers. A community of believers comprise a full spectrum people of ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, education, and disabilities.

Acts 2:42–47 says that discipleship, fellowship, worship, ministry, and evangelism all are to take place within the context of community. We are called together so we can do the things God wants us to do together. Every one of us is part of this community to minister to one another.

This message urges you to encourage, strengthen, comfort, instruct, teach, and admonish Deaf in your community. Don’t stay silent and feel sorry for them. Don’t say that there is a communication barrier and there is nothing you can do. The communication barrier exists because folks are not willing to find alternatives to communicate. Deaf have been known for using many alternatives including lipreading, writing notes, gestures, unclear speaking, and using interpreters to communicate because they want to overcome the barrier. A Deaf person is very eager to communicate with you and wants to be involved in a ministry within your church.

My local church has a deaf church employee who serves as an administrative assistant and does janitorial work. It is a blessing to give opportunities to the Deaf so they can be a part of the community rather than being an outcast. Matthew 25:35-40 tells us to help one another regardless of their backgrounds and cultures.

We should be trying to motivate everyone in our church to take that next step forward in the faith. This means working with deaf members. We need to encourage Deaf members to grow in the faith by being close enough to notice when they got discouraged. As a community of faith, we should be there, just to offer a shoulder, or just to listen. We should cheer up and comfort those who need it.

Every one of us have real problems, spiritually and emotionally. Deaf need to know that there are people who will help them through these times of difficulties. The community of faith should be a place where Deaf know people love them and will help them.

Working with the deaf ministry requires a lot of patience. Not everyone moves at the same pace. Everybody, every single person, will do things different than the way they should, or we think that they should. We need to be patient and calmly minister to each other, wherever we are.