



DEAF MINISTRIES

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Dear Friend,

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*"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and **harmless** as doves."*

Matthew 10:16

It was her wedding day, and she was nervous. Having decided to follow the Lord after nine years of being together with her deaf boyfriend, this young deaf lady asked for a last-minute appointment in my office. As the people gathered in the sanctuary, she shared with me something that had not been disclosed in the many sessions of premarital counseling: "I am not a citizen." I encouraged her that we had come this far by faith and asked her if her fiancé knew. "Yes, he will help me get a green card." Then I asked why it was important for me to know about this on that particular day. She suddenly had a moment of fear as she realized that I would be filing the marriage license with the government and, for the first time, the government would know exactly where she was. She was the first person I had met who came over the U.S. border illegally as a child with family members and continued to live an "undocumented" life. Like it or not, we as a church will be facing this situation more frequently than at any time in U.S. history. Among those who willfully come, no matter the risk, are often young children who had no choice in the matter. We see this on the news as migrant detention centers swell past capacity with over 15,000 displaced children, often separated from family members who brought them. And they are all within the purview of the Great Commission, needing someone to share the gospel of Jesus with them! I was reminded that this problem is not a new one as I listened to preaching from Acts 22:28, where the Roman Chief Captain admitted that he had purchased his citizenship (likely via bribes). Indeed, even Jesus, as a young child, spent time in Egypt effectively as a refugee when his parents fled the sword of Herod. How fitting that our Savior can personally identify with the day-to-day struggles of an IDP (Internally Displaced Person)! This problem is not isolated to our nation. In the deaf church in CO, we have a Russian deaf couple and a Ukrainian deaf couple. Both grew up in a Baptist-church background with fathers who spent time in prison for their faith. As we have gotten to know them, we have learned more about their extended network of family and friends. At one point, I learned that there was a factory in Lugansk (Ukraine) that hosted some 20,000 deaf employees! As I researched more to see if any missionary was reaching into this community, I found a report from the U.N. referencing the need for sign language interpreters as they dealt with "hearing impaired" among the IDPs that had fled the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Just as there are deaf people living in literally every place at every time of history (think Decapolis circa Mark 7), there are deaf children who flee violence and are sometimes extended compassion not afforded to others because of their physical condition.

Just how common is this situation? I started a mental inventory from my time as a pastor:

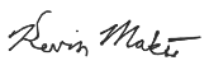
1. A college student in CA overstayed her student visa from Hong Kong as the nation was turned back to communist China. (We met briefly in 1999 as we surveyed the opportunity in CA.) A hearing Chinese pastor led her to the Lord by writing notes. He introduced her to our church and to a deaf church member, a man who ultimately became her husband.
2. An intern from a deaf college in GA shared with us how the U.N. found him as a "lost boy" soldier in South Sudan and brought him to the U.S. at the age of 14. He wandered the streets of Rochester, NY, for about six months before a social worker intervened and found a family member in another state. It was through this that he found salvation in Christ, was sent by his deaf ministry to Bible college, and was introduced to us.
3. A chaplain at the local jail contacted me with an urgent situation related to a deaf person who was to be deported within a few days or weeks. I was given access, determined he was a believer, and had the heart-wrenching task of preparing him to return to Mexico because he had broken a law, even though his mother had brought him into America as a child. He had grown up in the deaf schools and married a U.S. citizen, but he had failed to deal with becoming a "legal" citizen. "How will I survive?" he asked. "I do not know MSL only ASL..." Each session we had was focused on bringing his eyes back to Jesus, who is not only the author but the finisher of our faith.

4. We have been to several swearing-in ceremonies for U.S. citizens and even interpreted classes to prepare deaf people, from countries as far apart as El Salvador and Nigeria, for their citizen interviews. In each case, the person became convicted to start the process of citizenship AFTER being convicted of sin and their own personal need for salvation.
5. With COVID-19, I have been introduced to a young man who repeatedly called my video phone without leaving a message after a pastor gave him my phone number. When I finally got ahold of him in person, he was huddled in a blanket in a relatively dark room. Alarmed, I asked him if he was "safe" and he signed "yes." I asked him "where" he was, and he signed "with parents." Later as I tried to understand his spiritual condition, he signed "don't know" related to matters of the gospel and the church. The pastor who gave him my number later explained to me that the young man is a lower-functioning deaf migrant who has been cut off from the normal programs that would be offered by his state. Sad to say, this "new" problem of isolation was one we learned about from Asia, where family members "hid" their deaf child to "save face" in the community.

What an opportunity we are being afforded to reach people from every nation right here! Although we must be careful to walk wisely to not run afoul of the ever-changing law and although we are called to a higher standard to be blameless before a lost and dying world, it does not take much imagination for us to minister in a way that is deemed "harmless" as we shine the light before the eyes of those who cannot hear the gospel. "That ye may be blameless and **harmless**, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;" Php. 2:15

Update on family:

November 13, 2020, was a day that will live in our memories for many years to come as the mission house in which we currently live had the basement flooded due to a city manhole sewage backup. Five of our teenage boys were displaced from their bedrooms in the basement until mid-February 2021 as first remediation, then reconstruction, had to be completed. Countless hours were spent dealing with insurance claims and contractors, while we lived in cramped quarters on the first floor. Praise the Lord that our health was not impacted either by the event or COVID! A number of supporters have checked on the status of Samuel and Simeon after our prayer letter in August. To the glory of God, Samuel's eyesight (and subsequently swollen joints, too) has/have improved markedly and Simeon's teeth are being corrected with extractions and orthodontic care. Thank you not only for praying but for reaching out to let us know of your concern for our family. Ministry in CO has been positively impacted by the shutdown. During December 2020, we started an online option for shut-in deaf that either could not come as we had our first three positive results in the church family or due to people having recovery from surgeries that are now being scheduled as the caseloads come down in the hospitals. Roughly half of our faithful people come in person on Sundays, but the exciting part of this news is that several people who were never faithful in attendance on Sundays, even before the pandemic, are willing to attend online. Our boys have been learning to cover for areas of in-person service as deaf members are absent. Finally, as our commitment to MHBC for the deaf as an interim pastor will come to an end in January 2022, we are preparing for another "move." Our house in CA sold (thankfully!) in December 2019, which meant we did not have to deal with long-distance rental issues as COVID shut down America. Likewise, we were able to close on a house in March 2020 in CO that is a fixer-upper. Lord willing, everything will be repaired so that we can move in by spring 2022, as delays in contractor availability and materials have slowed the schedule and shifted some of the tasks onto our family to the DIY mode. Working with the Deaf for Christ



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