

Guide for Working with Sign Language Interpreters in Catholic Religious Settings

Deaf Apostolate, Archdiocese of Philadelphia

What is an interpreter?

A professional sign language interpreter translates between spoken language (such as English or Spanish) and a form of manual communication (sign language). The interpreter facilitates communication so that the parties involved have equal access to information. The interpreter is not involved in the discussion or given any other tasks. Interpreters are not coordinators of ministry for the Deaf and should not be asked to make decisions on behalf of individuals who are deaf.

When is an interpreter needed?

Catholic churches and organizations are given direction by the *Pastoral Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities* (November 1978, revised 1989).

“It is essential that all forms of the liturgy be completely accessible to people with disabilities, since this is the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian Community together. ...Realistic provisions must be made for persons with disabilities to participate fully in the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations...Celebrating liturgies simultaneously in sign language enables the deaf person to enter more deeply into their spirit and meaning.” (Par. 23)

A deaf/hard of hearing person should be offered the opportunity to have the following interpreted:

- Sacraments / Liturgical Celebrations
- Retreats / Religious Events
- Sacramental Preparation Meetings
- Religious Education / OCIA
- Parent-Teacher Meetings
- Pastoral Counseling Meetings

Why should an interpreter be provided?

In accord with canon 777, n.4, pastors are responsible to be as inclusive as possible in providing evangelization, catechetical formation, and sacramental preparation for parishioners with disabilities (Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, June 1995).

The U.S. Catholic Bishops remind us that the parish is the center of the Christian experience; therefore, pastoral ministers should make every effort to fully include parishioners with disabilities. For people who are deaf to be fully included, they need access to programs and liturgies in sign language or interpreted into sign language.

How do I contact an interpreter?

- The Archdiocesan Office for Persons with Disabilities contracts with area interpreters who are skilled in religious setting interpreting. Individual parishes can utilize their services by completing the [Sign Language Interpreter Request Form](#) at least two weeks before the event. Parishes are asked to assume responsibility for paying the interpreter or make a contribution to the Deaf Apostolate who will then pay the interpreter. Interpreter fees range from \$50-60 dollars an hour. Many interpreters have a 2-hour minimum. This 2-hour minimum is sometimes waived for religious events.
- Parishes can contact the Deaf-Hearing Communication Center (DHCC), Interpreter Referral Division, 610-604-0452, <https://www.dhcc.org/request-interpreter> or the Communication Connection, Inc., 610-272-4948.
- Local professional Sign Language interpreters may be contacted personally. ***To expect parents, relatives or friends of the Deaf to serve as their interpreters is typically NOT appropriate.***

What other resources are available?

- The National Catholic Office for the Deaf (NCOD) has a written [Policy for Working with Sign Language Interpreters](#) in Catholic Religious Settings. Contact NCOD directly at 301-577-1684 or www.ncod.org.
- Deaf-Hearing Communication Center (DHCC) (www.dhcc.org) provides services to the greater Philadelphia region, ranging from communication access to American Sign Language (ASL) classes to mentorship & advocacy services.
- The Archdiocesan Deaf Apostolate can assist you in meeting the needs of parish members who are deaf.

Office for Persons with Disabilities & the Deaf Apostolate

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