

# 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 decision 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 / RCIA
- 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 Department for Pastoral Care for Persons with Disabilities (PCPD) contracts with area interpreters who are skilled in religious setting interpreting. Individual parishes can utilize their services by calling the Deaf Apostolate at 215-587-3913 or emailing [pcpddeaf@adphila.org](mailto:pcpddeaf@adphila.org). 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 \$35-50 dollars an hour. For regular assignments, interpreters have a two 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 or the Communication Connection, 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 usually 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 the Department for Pastoral Care for Persons with Disabilities for a copy of this 8 page booklet or contact NCOD directly at #301-577-1684 or [www.ncod.org](http://www.ncod.org).
- DHCC ([www.dhcc.org](http://www.dhcc.org)) has a one page guide for working with Sign Language Interpreters.
- The staff of the Archdiocesan PCPD and the Deaf Apostolate can assist you in meeting the needs of parish members who are deaf.

***Sister Kathleen Schipani, IHM***  
*Administrator*  
Office for Persons with Disabilities &  
the Deaf Apostolate  
222 North Seventeenth Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
215-587-3913 V /VP/TTY  
[sr.kschipani@archphila.org](mailto:sr.kschipani@archphila.org)  
[www.DeafCatholicPhilly.org](http://www.DeafCatholicPhilly.org)