

# Chaplaincy among Deaf & Deafblind People, Diocese of London

## ANNUAL REPORT 2009

By the Chaplain: Rev Anne Richardson

January 2010



### A fantastic community within which to work!!

As a Chaplain I am privileged to travel the length and breadth of the Diocese and therefore I get a broad view of what is happening across the Areas. However I am aware that the majority of people in the Diocese don't see me and are not aware of the work I do.

Like many Chaplaincies, the work among Deaf people is neither highly visible, nor easy for those outside the Deaf world to understand. It stands alongside a unique **cultural and linguistic minority** in our society, and fits like a hand in a glove with our own **London Challenge vision**. It can be an easy mistake to think that a Chaplain among Deaf people is ministering to a disabled community. In fact, I'm more akin to a missionary within an ethnic group!

The language of the Deaf community is British Sign Language - **Britain's second largest indigenous minority language**. During this year, I have achieved my Level 4 NVQ in BSL and have completed a three week course in Linguistics. Through these opportunities, my understanding has deepened and I've marveled afresh at the richness of this wonderful visual, spatial language.

**BSL was recognised by the Government in March 2003**, but since then the full recognition the community has been working for is very slow coming. I feel that we as a Church are often far ahead of society in general, when we recognize and affirm the place of the Deaf community within

and alongside our hearing Church. Deaf people are a minority in the country of their birth. But in the Church they are recognised as the full partners in the Gospel they truly are, with their own God-given gifts to share with us all. The warmth and welcome experienced in the sign language Christian community is a sign of the Kingdom and touches all who come into contact. When people worship in their own language and in a culturally appropriate way it is such an amazing and life-changing experience! I want the **5,000 BSL-using Deaf people** within the Diocesan area to know this and experience a living faith in Jesus Christ. We welcome hearing visitors too—don't take my word for it—come and see!

### Achievements in 2009 see over for more detail on 3 other events

- Monthly group for developing Church signers with an average attendance of 25 people.
- Working in partnership with St Paul's Cathedral to provide regular interpreted tours for Deaf people— always fully booked.
- BSL Level 1 courses involving 59 members of 5 parishes, taught by 5 different Deaf tutors. In total 36 gained their level 1 certificate.
- Organizing a prayer weekend.



Aileen Cranwell, Deaf tutor, adjusts the camera for students practising their growing BSL

- Regular worship in Central London, offering an Anglo-Catholic experience with Deaf fellowship

to bring together people from across the Areas.

- Regular acts of worship, social events and visits to promote fellowship and encourage Christian development.
- Commitment to being at Diocesan events, providing interpreters.
- Developing Deaf ministry with two parishes.
- Liaising with Assoc of Funeral Directors to promote good practice.

# Working towards meeting the London Challenge!

“It is often the power structures of the churches that have left Deaf people on the margins and continue to patronize Deaf people by asking “What can we do to help and include them in our Church,” rather than empowering Deaf people to be a Church in culturally appropriate ways.”<sup>1)</sup>

## We are committed to equipping the servants of Jesus Christ— (London Challenge 2 d & e)

Celebrating Sign: Workshops and Worship - Feb 09

We were delighted to welcome the Mayor of Hounslow to Holy Trinity, Hounslow. Dr Genevieve Hibbs had chosen the theme of Communication as a focus for her year in office.

The workshops were well attended, with Deaf BSL users and hearing people learning to use BSL. Everyone mixed well together as we learnt to sign songs, and communicate with drama.

Friendships were built over a meal and the day concluded with an uplifting time of worship. No-one wanted to go home.

This sort of activity is to further the second aim in the Chaplaincy Mission Action Plan, to work in partnership, develop communication skills and Deaf awareness in one Parish within each Diocesan Area. We continue to develop work in this area.



Genevieve learning how to ask for a cup of tea, from Andrew. Below: with Anne.



## We are committed to serving London and all her people: maintaining our presence in every community with a particular bias to serving the poor and vulnerable. (London Challenge 4a)



Deaf Day at City Lit, April 09  
Every year, hundreds of Deaf people from all over London and the surrounding area crowd into City Lit

in Holborn, to see new exhibitions and resources. Deafness can be incredibly isolating. Being in an environment where everyone can communicate equally is truly liberating!

It is only right that we are part of this day. Showing off what we offer, meeting people, laughing together and maintaining our Christian presence in the Deaf

community, is so important. Deaf people often feel ignored by society. Our presence at Deaf Day says we are committed to walk alongside. It was wonderful to work ecumenically with our Roman Catholic colleagues and witness together.

This year, I presented one of the workshops. The theme was “Deaf in the Church family”.

“Deaf people around the world share in common such things as a visual language, and a culture that is based on vision, touch and relationship”<sup>2)</sup>

## We will support traditional ways of being church and encourage the highest standards of worship, witness and service (London Challenge 1a)

British Sign Language Carol Service—Dec 09

Many Deaf people want to go to Church at Christmas to experience the wonder of God who came amongst us. Mostly, they



have to experience this second-hand, with the words of the readings and carols translated by a BSL interpreter.

This year, we hosted a Carol service with the RC Deaf Service, completely in BSL. Carols were signed by Deaf groups, including our new Signing Choir—SHINE! The readings were all signed by Deaf

Christians. A Deaf actress presented a BSL poem and story. We concluded by sharing the light of Christ, through the symbolic action of lighting candles and spreading the light through the church.

One Deaf man was very emotional as he told me it was the first time in his life he had received the Christmas message first hand. He’s been going to Church all his life.

