

The Diocese of London needs a Chaplaincy among Deaf & Deafblind people with a full-time, paid Chaplain.

- **A Chaplain, fluent in BSL, is essential to provide leadership and develop culturally appropriate worship, for a linguistic minority community, thus enabling Deaf and Deafblind people to use their God-given gifts.**

Deaf people are unable to hear. This may be stating the obvious, but a surprising number of churches consider they are providing for Deaf people by putting in a loop system. Hearing aids give little or no benefit to profoundly Deaf, or Deafblind people as distinct **from hard of hearing people**, who have heard for most of their lives, speak English well, can read and write, and do find loop systems helpful. Profoundly Deaf people have mostly been Deaf from birth, or became Deaf very early in life, prelingually. This has a huge effect in acquiring English, both written and spoken and many Deaf people struggle with it. British Sign Language, a visual, spatial language, recognised by the Government in 2003 and **Britain's second largest indigenous minority language**, is the language of choice for most Deaf people.

The Deaf community is a cultural and linguistic minority. So much of what we do in Church assumes that the congregation can read and listen to English, thereby excluding Deaf people. If a BSL interpreter is provided, although there will be access and understanding, everything is effectively received second hand. Deaf people are spectators more than participants. In the Deaf Church worship is culturally appropriate in BSL. Everyone can take part and God-given gifts can be discovered and used.

- **A Chaplain can lead the Diocese away from the 'medical model' towards an incarnational one.**

The model the Church has used for generations is that Deaf people are disabled because they can't hear, therefore they need the help of healthy hearing people to be included in the Church. From a hearing viewpoint, to lose hearing is traumatic and devastating but Deaf people, who know Deafness, not as an absence of hearing, but as normal life, disagree. They are a part of a rich culture and language. They know what it means to be community, and **they know God is among them.** Deaf people don't need help. They need equality. They need to be recognised as **part of the body of Christ.** They need the opportunity to develop their Christian faith in culturally appropriate ways. They need to be able to receive teaching and to worship in their own language. They need to be able to recognise God's call to them and test their vocation. In short, they need all the same things the hearing do. A Chaplain works in the Diocese to promote and develop a greater awareness and understanding of Deaf people's experience.

- **The provision of a Chaplain is a visible sign to the Deaf community in London that the Diocese stands alongside them and values them.**

In these difficult financial times, every parish is asked to give as much as they can for the Common Fund. **The Diocese of London Deaf Church is not a parish** nor does it own property. We meet in other people's premises, in Deaf clubs and churches. We are similar to a **network model** of being church. However, we still pay a proportion of our income to the Diocese every year and the Chaplains fees are assigned. We are committed to continue to teach about discipleship and stewardship and encourage anyone to make legacies. We ask the Diocese to recognise that the Deaf community are not wealthy, many Deaf people never have full-time employment, and jobs are likely to be lower paid. Many survive on benefits. There are some Deaf people with good education, working in professional employment—though in general, they are the minority of the minority. This means that the Deaf Church will never be able to support a full-time chaplain. It is the view of the Diocesan Deaf Working Group, who oversee and manage the work of the Chaplaincy, that the Deaf Church should be treated in the same way as a Diocesan Supported Parish. Only with a full-time Chaplain, will the Diocese be able to fulfil Commitment 4a of the London Challenge: **"we are determined to maintain our presence in every community with a particular bias to serving the poor and vulnerable.**

- **A Chaplain is needed to continue the good work and mission.**

Four years ago, the Deaf Church was meeting three times a month using Deaf Centres at Hayes and Acton, in Willesden, led by a Deaf priest and Reader and there were just three Parishes with regular signed services. That was it! **Now**, through the work of the Chaplain and Deaf Church leaders, the **Church meets four times a month in Willesden** and has started a weekly group at **Hounslow in Kensington Area**. The Deaf Church **Council** has been formed to manage church life and finances, including using Gift Aid. **New services** have been developed to reach out to other Deaf people, and **to network** with other Deaf Christians. Within **Central London**, groups have been started to encourage people to learn BSL and to bring Deaf people together for fellowship and prayer. There are now **eleven parishes with regular signed services**, two of which are developing their own Deaf ministry. Deaf people have been welcomed to Diocesan services at **St Paul's Cathedral**, interpreted into BSL and BSL-interpreted tours have started. **BSL courses** for parishes with Deaf members have been set up and thirty-six people now have their **level 1 certificate**. There are many green shoots of potential all over the Diocese— but mostly they are small and tender. Will they shrivel away without someone to nurture them? I am reminded of a story of Jesus, about someone building a tower but having to leave it unfinished. The ministry should grow not fall apart.

- **A Chaplain is needed to share the good news of Jesus Christ in 21st century London.**

It is impossible to discover the number of profoundly Deaf people in the U.K. as this information is not collected or collated by any Government department. The RNID, the UK's largest charity for Deaf and hard of hearing people, has put on record that there are approximately 9 million or 1 in 7 of the population who are Deaf or hard of hearing and about 50,000 Deaf people that use Sign Language. This is probably on the conservative side. Phil Maddock, the Secretary of the Church of England Committee for Deaf & Disabled People thinks that the number of Deaf people who use British Sign Language in the UK, generally thought to be 0.1% of the population, is between 50,000—70,000, and so he estimates that **there are around 5,000 Deaf BSL-users in the Diocese of London—the size of a small parish—but scattered through the whole Diocese**. By travelling throughout the Diocese, meeting people in clubs, pubs and other Deaf social groups, the Chaplain is able to build up relationships, communicate clearly what the good news is all about, be available to offer occasional offices, pastoral care, Christian education and worship.

- **A Chaplain enables the Diocese to fulfil our requirements under the DDA and ensures that Deaf people are included in all aspects of the London Challenge**

Under the Disability Discrimination Act, organisations have a legal responsibility to make reasonable adjustments to their service, so that any Disabled person will not be offered a lesser service than someone who is not disabled. This is also central to our London Challenge—for example Commitment 2e states “We will take action to ensure that the leadership in the Diocese reflects the range of church membership both in the diversity of ethnic background and in age.” We have a Deaf priest, now retired, and a Deaf Reader, and are looking to recruit more candidates for accredited and ordained ministry.

- **A Chaplain will work to promote the Christian Gospel among the Deaf community.**

“Go! Sign!” Christian Deaf Link UK have stated: “Of those who use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first or second language, only 2% are professing Christians mainly due to the lack of BSL or interpreted services. Globally, they are the fourth largest unreached group in the world.” **A Chaplain can organize mission opportunities, provide nurture for young Christians and an ongoing Christian education**. If we fail in this, it will provide more opportunities for Jehovah Witnesses, presently very active amongst the Deaf community.