



Committee for Ministry of and among Deaf and Disabled People

Guidelines for the provision of BSL/English Interpreters for weddings and funerals

Introduction

Events such as weddings, funerals and baptisms mark key moments in people's lives when they want their family and friends around them. Many Deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL) do not have easy access to such events.

When such ceremonies include Deaf people, then BSL/English interpreters should be used if required in order that they have access and are included in these services.

Clearly, it would be unfair to charge Deaf people who use BSL more for these services than hearing people and some system of ensuring that interpreters for these services are used and paid is necessary.

These guidelines will help dioceses to draw up their own policies and procedures to ensure that Deaf people have the access they need in a timely and efficient way.

Guidelines

Any service involving Deaf people may need the provision of one or more BSL/English interpreters

Suggested criteria to apply to requests for funding

The service being interpreted is conducted by an Anglican ordained or authorised minister *and:*

The Deaf people attending are the principal participants (chief mourner, bride, groom etc) family members, close friends or representative members of the Deaf community.

or:

There are a substantial number of Deaf people attending the service.

Interpreters funded by dioceses should be registered with the National Register of Communication Professionals with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) or an NRCPD trainee Sign Language interpreter. This ensures they are trained, insured and have a recent DBS check.

Any professional interpreter engaged in such work should be expected to submit a copy of their Terms and Conditions and a note of their fees.

Frequently asked questions

How much will it cost?

This is difficult to answer because most interpreters are free-lance workers and so their fees vary. In 2022 the national average fee charged was around £45 an hour but you should remember that most interpreters will have a minimum call-out fee that they will charge that equates to two or three hours. Fees also vary with location. London and the South East interpreters charge higher fees. The National Union of Sign Language Interpreters has a summary of fees charged by their members here: <https://nubsli.com/guidance/interpreter-fees/>

Can't some interpreters provide this for free for the Church?

Some interpreters already work for free in their local churches, Sunday by Sunday, interpreting the services. Some will reduce their fees for Church work and some will occasionally work without a fee, if the Deaf person who has died, or the Deaf people who are getting married, are known to them personally. However, it should be remembered that free-lance interpreters are highly trained interpreters who need to earn a living. They should be treated fairly. Even if they volunteer, their travelling expenses should always be met.

Our service is entirely on the screen/written in a service sheet/book so why can't the Deaf person simply read the text?

Having written/projected material is really helpful for Deaf people. However, many people do not use English as their first or preferred language and will not be able to engage in worship simply through the written word. A BSL/English interpreter gives access to tone of voice, emotional content and, of course, all the parts of a service that are not written down.

We have someone in our congregation who has been studying sign language – why can't they do it?

They may be able to – but you need to make sure that they have learnt BSL to at least level 3 (A level equivalent) and also had some interpreter training. Weddings and funerals use very complex language and interpreters are trained to deal with such language. It would be good if the sign language user could come to the service to be around for Deaf people who may attend – even if they are not actually interpreting.

We have a local Chaplain for the Deaf. Can they do it?

As above, they *may* be able to do it. However, some of the Chaplains do not have the required skill level and some of the Chaplains are Deaf themselves so may not be able to interpret. You should ask for their advice because even if they are not able to interpret, they will be able to put you in touch with an interpreter.

A Deaf person wants to give a tribute/do a Bible reading in the service. How would that work?

Easily, the interpreters work between two languages: English and BSL, so if something is presented in BSL, it can be interpreted into spoken English for the benefit of the members of the congregation who do not sign.

Where can I find an interpreter?

The National Register of Communication Professionals with Deaf and Deafblind people
www.nrcpd.org.uk

The Association of Sign Language Interpreters www.asli.org.uk

Both these organisations have databases that are searchable by regions or postcodes.

Signs of God www.signsofgod.org.uk has a searchable database of Christian interpreters that are familiar with Church services. They are also happy to send interpreting requests to their members.

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