

POLOCY FOR USING SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS IN RELIGIOUS SETTINGS

Introduction

The Ministry of the Deaf Office is dedicated to promoting equal access for deaf persons in Catholic Church settings.

We are publishing this Policy for Using Sign Language Interpreters in Religious Settings in response to the needs of the deaf community. This policy has been developed in consultation with deaf persons and reflects the expertise and experience of deaf community and of interpreters.

The intent of this statement is to establish basic principles for sign language interpreting in religious settings and set forth a standard for making church functions accessible and participatory to deaf persons.

What Is an Interpreter?

The one who facilitates communications so that the parties involved have equal access to information, to Liturgy and to Sacramental Preparation. The role of the interpreter is limited to that of interpreting. They do not do other tasks along with interpreting.

The interpreter needs fluency in both the spoken language and the sign language used in order to accurately convey the message. A Code of Ethics for Interpreters includes:

- confidentiality
- accurately translate the spirit and intent of the parties involved, using language most readily understood by those who are being served
- the interpreter will not counsel, advise or interject personal opinion

When is an Interpreter Needed?

An interpreter should be present whenever the deaf are participating at the Sunday Liturgy, at Sacramental Preparation for their children, at the reception of Sacrament, Funerals and other functions. Particular attention must be given to Marriage interviews. The average reading skill of a deaf adult would be at grade five level, therefore, it is essential that an interpreter translate the material into the language skill of the deaf persons. It is a common myth among hearing people that all deaf read lips. Very few deaf persons have fluent lipreading skill; in fact, the best lipreaders have only 25% accuracy lipreading English. "Even the best lipreader requires a native speaker within a few meters in a good light who moves his lips broadly, slowly

and deliberately. If the speaker turns his head, addresses someone else, reads aloud or has an accent, it is usually hopeless.”¹ For these reasons it is essential that an interpreter be present to ensure accurate information is exchanged and recorded during marriage interviews.

¹ H. Lane, *A History of the Deaf. When the Mind Hears*, (N.Y., Random House, 1995), 72.
