



Tips on working with BSL interpreters.

If you have a Deaf person or family that attend your parish who use British Sign Language (BSL) to communicate you will probably use a sign language interpreter at some point. These are some suggestions for your parish to make this interaction go smoothly.

- **Talk directly to the Deaf person or people. The communication is between you and the person who is Deaf, not with the interpreter. Face the Deaf person and talk to them in the same way as you talk to anyone else.**
- **Make sure that any conversations take place where there is good light so that the Deaf person and the interpreter can see each other clearly.**
- **For occasions like parents sessions for first Holy Communion classes and baptism preparation make sure you provide the interpreter with notes prior to the session. Ideally this information should be provided two weeks before the session. By not providing any information prior to the day or only doing it the day beforehand means that the Deaf people are likely to miss out and not have equal access to the sessions. Accurate interpreting requires adequate preparation time. If you are using a DVD for any part of the session try and get one with subtitles. Again give the interpreter the opportunity to view the DVD before the day that you are using it.**

- **If the session is due to last more than 2 hours, two interpreters are needed so that proper breaks are possible. Ideally two people working together do 20 to 30 minutes and then swap with the other person. For all sessions where only one interpreter is used a break of 10 minutes in every hour is essential for the interpreter. Without breaks not only does the interpreter get over tired, the Deaf person or people will not be provided with equal access as it is impossible to keep interpreting accurately for long periods of time.**
- **For Mass an interpreter will need a copy of everything that is said at Mass not just the responses, this includes everything that the priest says from the missal, all the hymns and the bidding prayers. For the hymns the words alone are enough. A lot of priests do not write down their homily, but some notes are very helpful especially if they are going to refer to a specific person or Saint and to dates and places during their homily. If any words of a different language are going to be used, Greek, Latin, Japanese, make sure these phrases are told to the interpreter beforehand.**
- **If you are having a meeting with a variety of people that includes Deaf people, make sure that people take it in turns to speak. More than one person speaking at the same time makes the interpreter's life very difficult. Allow time for the Deaf people to contribute to the meeting. If a question is raised, the Deaf people have to wait until the interpreter has relayed the question which is often 6 or 7 seconds later, so make sure your Deaf people at the meeting have a chance to contribute. Overcoming barriers make people into very good**

problem solvers; the Deaf person's idea or solution might be just what you are looking for so give them time to contribute.

- **Often there are times when churches look beautiful by candlelight and liturgically for example at the Easter Vigil when we have very limited light in the church. If you have a BSL interpreter there and Deaf people, make sure that the parts of the church that they are in are still well lit. Sign language does not work in the dark.**
- **For advice on booking interpreters please contact Sarah Metcalfe or Michelle Roca in the Deaf Service office. We will be happy to answer any questions you have and explain the process of booking an interpreter.**