

**Annual Report 2023**

**Overview**

The permanent staff members are Shell Roca, Director, Sarah Metcalfe, Assistant and Nikki Dhillon Keane, Signs of Hope Counsellor.

We are greatly supported by various members of the Deaf Community who voluntarily give their time and skills at the Liturgy Group, Bible Study and in many other ways. We are grateful to all the clergy who give their time and energy to the Deaf Community and who support the Deaf Service staff.

**Liturgies**

The Deaf Community Mass is on the 1st Sunday of each month to Westminster Cathedral Hall with a signed Mass at 4:30p.m. These Masses are signed by one of our group of priests with signing skills.

On the second Sunday of the month Mass in Word and Sign took place at St Mary & St Joseph, Poplar in the earlier part of the year, then Our Lady and St Frederick Limehouse in the middle of the year and finally in November and December at St Mary & St Michael’s, Commercial Road. These Masses were all were celebrated by Fr Keith Stoakes.

During the year there were also signed Masses at Our Lady Queen of Apostles, Welwyn Garden City and St Gregory the Great, South Ruislip, with a signed Mass available for Deaf people to attend for the first three weeks of Advent and an online Mass for Christmas.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered in sign language before the monthly Deaf Mass in the Cathedral Hall.

We greatly appreciate all the support that we receive from the clergy who offer their time and support for the Deaf Community. Bishop Paul McAleenan, Canon Norbert Fernandes, Canon Shaun Lennard, Fr Willie Skehan, Fr Keith Stoakes, Fr Robin Ellwood, Fr Paulo Bagini, Fr Brian O’Mahony, Mgr Vladimir Felzmann and Fr Daniel Daley.

We would also like to thank all our volunteers who support our work. This includes both Deaf and hearing people. Their assistance is invaluable and we are grateful for the support that they give to the team.

During 2023 the following liturgies have also been communicated in sign language, some in person, some online:

* Funeral Mass, Michael Newson RIP, January
* Funeral Mass, Kathleen Ryan RIP, January
* Installation of Canon Norbert Fernandes, Westminster Cathedral, February
* Lourdes Mass, Westminster Cathedral, February
* Ash Wednesday, Westminster Cathedral, February
* St Patrick’s Day Mass at Retired group meeting, March
* Chrism Mass, Westminster Cathedral, April
* Maundy Thursday, Maria Assumpta Chapel, April
* Stations of the Cross, Maria Assumpta Chapel, April
* Good Friday Passion, Maria Assumpta Chapel, April
* Easter Vigil, Maria Assumpta Chapel, April
* Walsingham pilgrimage Mass and reconciliation service, May
* Parish Mass, St Mellitus, Tollington Park, June, July,
* Feast of the Assumption, Westminster Cathedral, August
* Funeral Mass, Loretta Stratton RIP, Farnborough, September
* Fr Keith Stoakes, Ruby Anniversary Celebration, Poplar, September
* Inclusive Mass, Our Lady and & St Joseph, Kingsland, September
* Funeral Mass, Ann Chandler RIP, September
* Parish Mass, St Gregory the Great, South Ruislip, October
* Installation Mass for Fr Keith Stoakes, Commercial Road, November
* Pax Christi, Advent Peace Service, Pimlico, December
* Funeral Mass, Maria Cunningham RIP, December
* Parish Mass, Our Lady Queen of Apostles, Welwyn Garden City, December
* Online Christmas Mass, Our Lady Queen of Apostles, Welwyn Garden City, December
* During the year our Masses that were held at St Mary and St Joseph, Poplar, Our Lady and St Frederick, Limehouse and St Mary & St Michael, Commercial Road, were also available online on our social media platforms.

**Communication Support**

* Interpreted at Roehampton University for “Fully Living Conference”
* We have interpreted two CAFOD events. The first a Lenten Preparation meeting in February and the 'Following the footsteps of the Saints: Called to action by our faith' conference in June.
* We have provided sight translations of documents and letters, and have written replies to correspondence for clients as they have signed to us what they want to say.
* We have provided IT support for clients and shown them how to use various functions on their smartphone.
* We have made telephone calls on client’s behalf and booked taxis for them.
* There are other occasions that we have supported clients by interpreting for them. Including the details here in this report of what we were doing and where, would break confidentiality therefore we cannot refer to specifics.
* We have had an increase in the number of home pastoral visits during the year especially with those people who we have supported through the last months and weeks of their life.

**Catechesis and Sacraments**

* Our bible study sessions continued and are now, face to face, online, and provided in a printed format. These are co-ordinated by Sarah and with input from various Deaf people. This year these have taken place in Vaughan House while Milleret House undergoes extensive re-wiring work. Topics covered in 2023 included, King of Kings, St John’s Gospel, Lent and Easter plants, “I am….”, The Dove, All Saints and The Rosary.
* Our liturgy group continues to meet to organise the readers for our regular monthly Masses in Westminster Cathedral Hall.
* We have been working with two families preparing their children for the sacraments. One family the children are all hearing and they received their First Holy Communion and were Confirmed in December. The other family we are waiting for the parish to confirm the arrangements.

**Deaf Awareness and BSL/Liturgical Signing Sessions**

* During the year there has been two groups of seminarians learning to sign.

3 students carried on from the course that was started in December 2022 and completed the course by Easter 2023. Two of them have continued during the Autumn term of 2023.

In September a new group of 8 seminarians started to learn basic BSL and liturgical signing. This group completed their first term and the plan is for them to continue in 2024.

* A BSL taster course was held at Sacred Heart, Quex Road, Kilburn in the Autumn with 15 students.
* Fr Daniel Daley has started to learn to sign during 2023. He is scheduled to concelebrate his first signed Mass with Canon Shaun Lennard in August 2024.

**CDA**

* We provided the interpretation for the Bishop’s Committee meetings, in person and online along with the National Heads of Services meeting.
* We were successful in receiving funding from the Jesuit Missions towards the costs of a coach for the Walsingham pilgrimage and were therefore able this year to take a group on a fully accessible. While at Walsingham we assisted with the interpreting at the Mass and on the Holy Mile Walk. Deaf people from Southwark and Brentwood Diocese joined us on the coach.

**Outings, and other Events and Meetings**

* Our Retired Group is once again meeting regularly for a shared lunch. The Deaf Service team prepare the food to ensure Food Safety standards are met.

We held a celebration for the King’s Coronation and a Christmas party this year. For the Christmas celebration we decorated the room and hosted a tombola so that the Deaf people who attend, who are now of an age where going out for a meal is too much of a challenge for them, were able to celebrate Christmas together. We were supported at the Christmas event by Machir Ahmed, a seminarian who is currently learning BSL.

**Communications**

* The Caritas Deaf Service website continues to be regularly updated with information relating to the Deaf Service’s events, services and with current articles. During Deaf Awareness Week
* The newsletters and e-newsletters continue to be produced.
* We continue to use our Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/wdds](http://www.facebook.com/wdds)) to good effect, as well as X, Instagram (@CaritasDeaf) and YouTube ([www.youtube.com/@deafservice5095](http://www.youtube.com/@deafservice5095)). At the end of 2023 we had 1750 social media followers spread across Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter) and YouTube.

**Signs of Hope**

* Signs of Hope, the Deaf Counselling service, continues to be in demand. The work of the counselling service is both life changing and lifesaving. Clients referred to the service can be at risk of suicide and self-harm and may well have already made attempts on their life. During 2023, there were over 280 counselling sessions delivered by Signs of Hope.
* We offered both face to face and online counselling in 2023 depending on the needs of the client. We are very grateful to St John the Evangelist, Islington for the use of their premises. We also extend our thanks to the team at St John the Evangelist, supporting our work by welcoming clients in the parish office when they arrive for their session.
* The BSL videos on life skills continue to be used by both Deaf clients and Deaf professionals. These are still the only source of information in BSL on these topics in the UK.
* Signs of Hope now has 1163 followers on X (Twitter).

**Links**

* We have made links with the St John’s Ambulance Service and interpreted at one of their training sessions at Lewisham Fire Station.
* In December we joined with the Anglican Cathedral in Portsmouth Diocese and we interpreted the carol service at Portsmouth Cathedral
* We also have links with the JDA (Jewish Deaf Association) and have continued to share useful information throughout the year that helps Deaf people.
* We have continued to work with Pax Christi and CAFOD supporting their events by interpreting for Deaf people who support and volunteer for them.

**Other issues**

* We support the launch of the Caritas Animating Seniors event in April and spoke at the event about the support we offer for older Deaf people.
* We have supported Caritas St Joseph’s interpreting at their Achievement Day and at Inclusive Masses.
* We continue to support the clergy that sign Mass for the Deaf Community mostly with one-to-one sessions as and when required. These have been done either Face to face, via Zoom or by pre-recording video clips and using YouTube or WhatsApp to forward them to the relevant priest.
* The Caritas Deaf Service team all continue with their own professional development in BSL, counselling and other areas when opportunities arise.
* Throughout the year we collected £200.96 for Mary’s Meals and £186.47 for the Daughters of Charity project for Deaf people in Nigeria.
* We have started on preliminary work on a toolkit to support those in parishes who are hard of hearing.

**Feedback**

From the Walsingham trip from a Deaf person who is also a wheelchair user: “Thank you for all the hard work and stress of doing this!”

From participants of the bible study: “I really enjoyed the practical activities” (translated from BSL conversation).

From a BSL student: “fun as well as informative. I through enjoyed every lesson and looked forward to classes.”

From a seminarian: “Thank you for all the hard work you do for us.”

**Director’s Reflection**

In many ways it has been sad year with the number of funerals we have had amongst our regular attendees and the priests that support our work. At the same time though we have also been able to celebrate with Fr Keith Stoakes the 40th anniversary of his ordination meaning he has been signing Mass for the Deaf Community for 40 years too and to celebrate with Fr Norbert Fernandes when he became a Canon of Westminster Cathedral. We have also celebrated children receiving the sacraments plus two parties with our retired group members, so as well as the sad times there have been high points too.

Shell Roca

January 2024