



Overview

The permanent staff members are Shell Roca, Head of Caritas Deaf Service, Sarah Metcalfe, Deaf Service Development Worker 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 also grateful to all the clergy who give their time and energy to the Deaf Community and who support our staff.

Liturgies

The Deaf Community Mass takes place at 4.30pm in Westminster Cathedral Hall, on the first Sunday of each month. 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, is celebrated by Fr Keith Stoakes at St Mary & St Michael's, Commercial Road.

During the year, signed Masses were also celebrated 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.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered in sign language before the monthly Deaf Community Mass in Westminster 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 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 2024 the following liturgies were also communicated in sign language:

- Lourdes Mass, Westminster Cathedral, February
- Ash Wednesday, Westminster Cathedral, February
- St Patrick's Day Mass at the Lunch club group meeting, March
- Parish Mass, Our Lady of Grace and St Edward, Chiswick, March
- Burial of ashes, Loretta Stratton RIP, St Michael's Abbey, Farnborough, March
- Palm Sunday, St Gregory the Great, South Ruislip
- Stations of the Cross, Westminster Cathedral, Lent
- Chrism Mass, Westminster Cathedral, March
- Maundy Thursday, Maria Assumpta Chapel, March
- Stations of the Cross, Maria Assumpta Chapel, March
- Good Friday Passion, Maria Assumpta Chapel, March

- Easter Vigil, Maria Assumpta Chapel, March
- Baptism, St Paul the Apostles, Wood Green, April
- Mass in Word and Sign, Allen Hall Seminary, April
- Parish Masses, Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St Simon Stock, Kensington, May and June
- Walsingham pilgrimage Mass and reconciliation service, May
- Pentecost, Our Lady Queen of Apostles, Welwyn Garden City, May
- First Holy Communion Mass, Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St Simon Stock, Kensington, June
- Parish Masses, Our Lady Queen of Apostles, Welwyn Garden City, June, September and December
- Baptism, St John the Evangelist, Islington, July
- Parish Mass, St Gregory the Great, South Ruislip, July
- Feast of the Assumption, Westminster Cathedral, August
- Eucharistic Festival Mass, Westminster Cathedral, September
- First Holy Communion Mass, St Gregory the Great, South Ruislip, September
- All Saints Day Mass, Westminster Cathedral, November
- First Sunday of Advent, Westminster Cathedral, December
- Pax Christi, Advent Peace Service, Somers Town, December
- Catholic Children's Society Advent Carol services, Westminster Cathedral, December

Communication Support

- Providing sight translations of documents and letters, and writing replies to correspondence for clients as they signed to us what they wanted to say.
- Providing IT support for clients and showing them how to use various functions on their smartphone.
- Making telephone calls on clients' behalf on a range of issues, for example by booking taxis for them.
- Other occasions that we have supported clients by interpreting for them, the details of which cannot be disclosed for confidentiality reasons.

Catechesis and Sacraments

- Our Bible study sessions have continued and are now offered both in printed, online and in-person formats. These are co-ordinated by Sarah, with input from various Deaf people. These sessions have now moved permanently to Vaughan House. Topics covered in 2024 included the CSAN "Do Justice" campaign, Passover, St Joseph, Our Lady of Walsingham and Jubilee 2025.
- Our Liturgy Group continues to meet to organise the readers for our regular monthly Masses in Westminster Cathedral Hall and Holy Week services at Maria Assumpta Chapel, Kensington.
- We have been working with two families on preparing their children for the sacraments. In both cases the children were Deaf. One made their First Holy Communion in June at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St Simon Stock, Kensington, and the other in September at St Gregory the Great, South Ruislip.
- We also worked with two Deaf families with babies to be baptised. One child was baptised at St Paul the Apostle, Wood Green, and the other at St John the Evangelist, Islington. The baptism at Islington, which was for a few families, had another Deaf family present, who we were also able to support.
- A Eucharistic festival on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross took place in Westminster Cathedral. The event began with Mass and was followed by periods of

Adoration, sermons by Bishop Nicholas Hudson and Fr Alan Robinson, the Rosary and Benediction in the presence of Blessed Carlo Acutis' relic. The event was interpreted for the Deaf Community.

Deaf Awareness and BSL/Liturgical Signing Sessions

- A group of seminarians from a variety of dioceses have been learning to sign. Seven students carried on from the course that was started in Autumn term of 2023. For the first time, a Mass in Word and Sign was celebrated in the chapel at Allen Hall Seminary, which the seminarians studying BSL all took part in. Fr Keith Stoakes celebrated the Mass and the Deaf Community that attended were all impressed with the skills and interest shown by the seminarians. There was an opportunity after the Mass to socialise and enjoy refreshments. In October, the group reconvened and five of the seminarians continued their BSL studies. The other two students are now on placements and thus not available to join the sessions, though all of them are interested in continuing their studies in the future.
- In January, the Caritas Priest and Laity Focus Group meeting was attended to raise awareness about the work of the Caritas Deaf Service, particularly within parishes amongst parish representatives and clergy.
- In March, we worked with the Education department producing videos that were shared with schools, teaching how to sign the "Our Father".
- In July, an online Deaf Awareness session was run for the Anna Chaplaincy with around 50 attendees. The feedback was very positive.
- Fr Daniel Daley started to learn to sign during 2023. He concelebrated his first signed Mass with Canon Shaun Lennard in August 2024. Feedback from the Deaf Community on his signing was very positive.
- Deaf Awareness sessions were completed for two Confirmation groups, the two parishes in Kilburn in April and a group at Potters Bar in November.

CDA

- We were successful in receiving funding from the Jesuit Missions towards the costs of a coach for the Walsingham pilgrimage, and were therefore able to take a group on a fully accessible coach. While at Walsingham, we assisted with the interpreting at the Mass and the Reconciliation Service. Deaf people from Southwark and Brentwood Diocese joined us on the coach.
- We also promoted other Catholic Deaf Association events on our social media platforms.

Outings, other Events and Meetings

- Our Lunch Club (previously the Retired Group) met regularly for a communal lunch. The Deaf Service team prepare the food to ensure Food Safety standards are adhered to. We held a celebration for St Patrick's Day 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 held our first 'Lived Experience' discussion group in April, and asked for feedback from the Deaf Community using a Net Promoter Score. We had very

useful feedback and plan to have other opportunities for the Deaf Community to share their views with us.

- In July, we had a private tour of Hatfield House and gardens as guests of Lady Salisbury. Along with Canon Norbert Fernandes, who led prayers in the house chapel, a group of 14 from the Deaf Community enjoyed an informative and interesting day.

Communications

- The Caritas Deaf Service webpages continue to be updated regularly with information relating to our events, services and latest news.
- We have started to provide information about Jubilee 2025 on the website, with the Jubilee prayer and hymn now available to view in BSL.
- Our newsletters and e-newsletters continue to be produced.
- We continue to use our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/wdds) to good effect, as well as X, Instagram (@CaritasDeaf) and YouTube (www.youtube.com/@deafservice5095). At the end of 2024 we had over 1800 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 2024, over 285 counselling sessions were delivered by Signs of Hope. It remains the only UK service offering faith-sensitive counselling in BSL.
- We offered a choice between face-to-face and online counselling and are grateful to the staff of St John the Evangelist, Islington for offering the use of a counselling room and welcome to our Deaf clients.
- The BSL videos on life skills continue to be used by both Deaf clients and Deaf professionals. As far as we are aware, these are still the only source of information in BSL on these topics in the UK.
- In October, we formed a partnership with the Deaf Counselling Network. At our first co-hosted event in October, we gave a BSL talk on Trauma and Deaf-Centred Therapy. We have also formed a working group of experienced Deaf professionals to develop good practice nationally.
- In December, it was agreed that a sessional counsellor would join the team and begin seeing clients in 2025. This counsellor is Deaf herself, so from next year clients will have the option of a Deaf or hearing counsellor.
- Signs of Hope now has 1144 followers on X (Twitter).

Other issues

- We have supported Caritas St Joseph's, interpreting at their Achievement Day and at Inclusive Masses.
- We attended the National Head of Service meeting, sharing information and ideas with other Deaf Services in England and Wales.

- We took part in the Notre Dame on the Square event and interpreted some of the music in the square, as well as the prayer service at the end of the day.
- 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 £167.25 for Mary's Meals and £326.54 for the Daughters of Charity project for Deaf people in Nigeria.

Feedback

"Absolutely brilliant session today." "Thank you for a very informative afternoon."
(Attendees at a Deaf Awareness course)

From participants of the Bible study: "I like the Bible studies as they help me grow and I want them to continue". (translated from BSL)

From an attendee at Deaf Community Mass: "You provide a wonderful service and help to bring the Catholic Deaf Community together".

From our Walsingham Pilgrimage: "I had a wonderful day. It was totally new for me, it was a moving and powerful experience." (translated from BSL)

From a seminarian: "Learning BSL has been a thorough enjoyable experience. Being able to have conversations and engage the Deaf Community in Mass and liturgy has been incredibly useful in my parish placements and will be of great use in my future ministry."

Reflection for 2024

We are very grateful to the Albert Gubay Foundation and the Cardinal's Appeal, both of which provided core funding for our work, and would also like to thank all the individual donors who have contributed to making our ministry possible. We have been privileged this year to work with two Deaf children who received their First Holy Communion, and three Deaf families with children and grandchildren who were baptised. We have had a busy year, with Shell and Sarah almost travelling the equivalent of going from Westminster Cathedral to Bethlehem (just short of 3000 miles)! For me, the highlights of the year were the Mass in Word and Sign at Allen Hall Seminary, the trip to Hatfield House and our pilgrimage to Walsingham. We look forward with hope to the Jubilee year 2025 and our 50th anniversary year in 2026.

Shell Roca
January 2025