

## **My Church Is Ready to Reach the Deaf in their Backyard, Which Model is Right?**

From Deaf Millennial Project

One of the most common questions that is asked or is most often mentioned in conversations with hearing leaders, is: What is the best approach or model to take? While I will share the different models of d/Deaf ministries, there are several questions I always ask churches. “What is your end goal with d/Deaf ministry?” Then I’ll ask, “Are you trying to be accessible or accessible and inclusive?”

And then there’s the big question, “What is the heart of leadership desire?” Why are these questions so important? Because leadership’s desire and heart often lead to the success or failure of d/Deaf ministry and determine how many barriers it will face in the local church.

While our heart and dream is to see every local traditional and house church have a passion for reaching the d/Deaf, the reality is this is not always the case. And that’s okay.

Every model should at least be evaluated to determine what best fits their ministry and needs.

Before reading further, here are some questions you and your team should consider.

- What is the end goal of the d/Deaf ministry?
- What resources do we have, such as interpreter networks, and Deaf community members?
- Are we aiming just to be accessible, or accessible and inclusive?
- Does the leadership’s heart desire to see this as well?

These are just some starting guide questions to consider and ask when evaluating each model of d/Deaf ministry.

The most important step before starting is to invite Deaf people into the process. For far too long, the ministry has been done “ **for** the d/Deaf” instead of “**with** the d/Deaf.”

### **Four Models of d/Deaf Ministry**

#### **The Interpreting Ministry**

The interpreter ministry model typically involves both d/Deaf and hearing worshiping together. In this model, there is usually no d/Deaf person leading the ministry; instead, an interpreter leads and communicates with hearing leaders. The church’s main focus is typically just to provide access. Relationships between d/Deaf and hearing members tend to be superficial. This type of ministry depends on having certified/skilled interpreters regularly, and d/Deaf people are not always involved on a deeper level. Most churches in America use the interpreting ministry model.

The average interpreting ministry average is around 5-10 Deaf members attending weekly on Sunday morning.

However, the Interpreter Ministry model is a great way to start building relationships and understanding the d/Deaf community. It also pushes the church to become more accessible in ministry.

### **Integrated Ministry**

This model typically involves providing interpreting services, offering d/Deaf Sunday school classes, and potentially even a Wednesday night d/Deaf bible study in American Sign Language. In integrated ministries, the needs of the Deaf are met through biblical access in their heart language and equipping as well—this type of ministry allows deaf people to have their spiritual needs met.

Ministries like this allow more Deaf people to participate in Bible studies and Sunday School because they have a space to connect with others who share a common language, such as ASL.

This also provides opportunities to create Deaf leaders who will lead Sunday School and d/Deaf Bible study.

### **Separated Ministry (d/Deaf Worship)**

This model involves Deaf ministries having their own space, classes, community group, and worship experience within the hearing (mother) church. This typically allows the Deaf to lead in all areas but still depend on hearing support, such as financial and ministry support. It allows the Deaf to grow, teach, and disciple within their community and heart language.

In this setup, a d/Deaf committee or leader often reports to the hearing staff. However, these leaders are not typically part of the key meetings; a hearing staff member serves as the liaison for the Deaf ministry. It is encouraged that leaders invite Deaf people to be a part of those meetings to give feedback and input.

Ministries with their own spaces and d/Deaf worship often see an average attendance of 10-30 people per week.

### **Deaf Church (Supported or Independent)**

In this model, Deaf ministries meet totally on their own. They may still use the hearing church's space, but they have full control over that space and their financial resources. Deaf ministry leaders assume the role of leading the church. In this scenario, the Deaf are more actively involved in all areas of reaching and impacting other Deaf with the gospel. The hearing church does not control how they reach the Deaf but instead encourages them to develop their methods.

To be clear, this doesn't mean that hearing people are not involved in any aspect of the ministry. Hearing individuals can be involved. It just means that the majority of the leadership is d/Deaf, with a few hearing a part of it.

Reaching this stage of having a Deaf church is one of the hardest levels to achieve because of the small number of d/Deaf pastors. Typically, Deaf churches struggle to find a Deaf pastor.

It is encouraged to progress from an interpreted ministry to a Deaf church, so Deaf leaders can be empowered, equipped, and trained to lead this type of ministry.

Whatever model of ministry is chosen, the heart of the church should be not only to invite the d/Deaf person to church but to create a place where they can begin their spiritual journey. They should also be equipped and empowered to consider if God is leading them to be part of the ministry work. For far too long, the church has functioned as "do **for** d/Deaf" instead of the model of "do **with** d/Deaf."

Start with prayer, learn the heart language of the d/Deaf, build a relationship with the d/Deaf community, and invite them into the process.