



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



Disability Ministries

Greetings and Happy New Year,

This is a very exciting time of year, because it's a time of renewal and realization. Every time a congregation focuses the worship experience to accommodate a person with a disability, its members realize what a barrier-free ministry looks like. A barrier-free ministry looks like the gospel, where everyone is present at the table; every time a ministry has an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, has braille editions of Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW), ministers to people with mental health concerns, has accessible facilities, and so on, barriers are removed from inclusion. I invite and encourage everyone in 2017 and beyond to look at their ministries and congregations through the eyes of people with disabilities and focus on what they can do to remove barriers to accessibility and accommodation. "While all the powers of Good aid and attend us, boldly we'll face the future, be it what may. At even, and at morn, God will befriend us, and oh, most surely on each New Year's Day!" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from his poem, "New Year 1945").

Correction: In the last newsletter, Susan Lindberg Haley's name was misspelled.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel Bouman".

Rachel Bouman
Program Director, Disability Ministries
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Find additional information on Disability Ministries.
To financially support this work, **click here** and select Disability Ministries.

Hello friends!

I'm Anita, and I serve on the Disability Ministries team with a great group of people. I also serve at Trinity Lutheran Church in North Bethesda, Md., as the director of Youth and Family Ministry. Trinity is just outside of Washington, D.C. I have been studying American Sign Language (ASL) since high school and have continued my studies until the present day. I started learning ASL because I'm a giant nerd. I was fascinated by Linda Bove (a hearing disabled actress) on "Sesame Street," and growing up, I just wanted to learn ASL. When the opportunity arose in high school, I jumped at the chance, and I've been learning ever since.

ASL is a non-universal visual language independent from English. By some estimates, there may be as many as 2 million people whose primary language is ASL. ([Source](#)) By my count, there are 49 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregations that provide some services in ASL. (Source: The ELCA Yearbook.) I have had conversations with hearing disabled people who wish to attend an ELCA congregation, but the closest congregation with an interpreter was 200 miles away. As you can see, there is a need for ASL interpreters in ELCA congregations.

ASL interpreters study how to interpret in various settings. For example, legal and medical interpreters learn customized terminology to be able to clearly interpret in those settings. I focus on liturgical interpreting – interpreting in a worship setting. When an ASL interpreter interprets at church, they are interpreting language that we don't use in everyday life.

For example: What does "Kyrie eleison" mean? (It's a phrase some churches use to say, "Lord, have mercy.") How do you visually explain and express the concepts of transubstantiation, consubstantiation, and "begotten of the Father"? And did you know there are four ways to interpret the word "glory" in ASL, depending on the text, going back to the Greek and Hebrew meanings?

In 2015, a group of people gathered on Facebook because of the lack of training, resources, and available ASL interpreters in congregations. Most interpreting programs do not address the needs of the church, focusing instead in public or secular schools. Out of this gathering, the group recognized a need for additional awareness of this issue and the training to address it. Four of us (two Episcopalians, an ELCA member, and a member of Judaism) started working out the details of having an interpreters' conference. Through our connections, we were able to use space at Gallaudet University (the only university in the world that uses ASL as the primary language (Source: www2.gallaudet.edu/attend-gallaudet/about-gallaudet) in Washington, D.C.

We were able to arrange some great presenters, including the Rev. Susan Masters, an ELCA pastor. We were also able to get the Virginia Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf to provide continuing education units (CEUs) to certified interpreters for free. (CEUs are required for certified interpreters; certified interpreters must take continuing education to keep their skills fresh). The Holy Spirit aided and guided us, so we could gather on Sept. 23-25, 2016. The three-day conference included workshops on a variety of topics, including: interpreting music, history of the deaf church and frozen liturgical texts. (Frozen texts are ones that don't change, such as the Lord's Prayer and the Creeds). A grant from *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA* enabled the conference. We are hoping that the conference becomes a biannual event.

As the registrar for this event, I got to meet everyone who attended, and I learned about the participants' ministries in ASL. Some congregations are 100 percent in ASL, and only voice (speak) services if someone who is hearing is present. Everything, from Sunday school, Wednesday Bible study and services are in ASL. Some congregations have interpreters

weekly in their hearing services. When I left the conference, I realized that the ELCA needs to do more. I live outside of the Washington, D.C., metro area where Gallaudet is located, and there are no ELCA congregations within 100 miles that provide interpreters. (Source: the “Find a Congregation” function on the ELCA website)

The campaign has grants available to help start a new ministry, such as providing interpreters in worship or sending interpreters to a class on interpreting in church settings. [Giving to the campaign](#) can help a congregation go out on a limb to try something new.

Editor: Chris Ludwig

This email was sent to members and friends of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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