

Summary Sheet

Prayer and Liturgy within Deaf Culture

First and foremost, the Deaf community are a people who have a culture with its norms. They prefer to be called “Deaf/deaf” as that is a neutral word, instead of “hearing impaired” since the word

“impaired” focuses on the negative. While each country has a different sign language, the Deaf community’s official language (in the USA and some parts of Canada) is “American Sign Language (ASL).” It is a complete, natural language that has the same linguistic properties as spoken languages, with grammar that differs from English. ASL does not only use the hands, but also through the face accompanied by sign movements and locations.



Jesus Loves You

Prayer and worship is to be a holistic experience, meaning that it caters to our senses as much as possible. We can feel, taste, see, smell, and hear in various ways. Deaf people “hear” through their eyes and senses (such as through drum beats, etc.).

While this is not an exhaustive list, a few important things about Prayer and Worship within Deaf Culture are:

- (1) Through the visual world of the Deaf, their faith has often been referred to as an “**incarnational faith**.” Since Jesus, God Himself, became flesh and visible, the visual world of images, icons, and statues are made permissible and validating to the visual-centered world of the Deaf. This powerfully connects to Deaf Culture’s use of facial expressions and bodily communications that can also lead to an experience of God who made us “in the image and likeness of God.” These are profound affirmations of our vocation as the “Body of Christ.” Often, people (both Deaf and hearing) are moved by seeing clearly through certain ASL signs and phrases “*enfleshed*” the many images and concepts of God.
- (2) The Deaf community is **communal**. Due to language barriers and discrimination, communal support is very important in which they share each other’s joys and sufferings, as well as to ensure access and inclusion. Within the Mass, the Sign of Peace is often longer in which they want to exchange with as many Deaf people there instead of only those next to them.
 - a. In group circles of prayer, hearing people can hold hands and close their eyes. Deaf people need their hands to communicate as well as to keep their eyes open, so they put their feet next to those next to them, and watch and share together.
- (3) Value of **Light**: Light makes things visible and accessible. Darkness disconnects, isolates, and engulfs into isolation. Deaf people often congregate in kitchens as that is the brightest room in the house. Jesus said, “I am the Light.” Light is a critical and beloved aspect in Deaf Culture.
- (4) **Music**: Music can be appreciated in many different ways. Within Deaf Culture, sign languages can be used as poetry, rhythm, and song. Various components, such as drums and be felt throughout the worship space, as well as clapping to show rhyme and rhythm.



Cherish Deaf Culture by Deaf Artist, Nancy Rourke