BELIEVING, BELONGING AND BEING DEAF: THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN DEAFHOOD

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

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ABSTRACT

The decision to be a member of a particular church congregation can involve a variety of factors, both theological and social. These may include aspects of belief: believing in the existence of a deity, adherence to a particular set of creedal tenets, and the idea that such belief should result in the specific behaviour of attending an act of public worship. It may also reflect issues of belonging and connectedness: within a family, neighbourhood, parish, or cultural community. How these related patterns of believing and belonging are lived out in people's attitudes and behaviour has formed a major thread in the sociology of religion in Britain in recent years.

This thesis examines this lived relationship of believing and belonging within the British Deaf Church: Deaf groups worshipping in sign language, traditionally in chapels within Deaf centres, under the organisational structure of the Church of England. To date, Deaf Studies has acknowledged the importance of organised religion in the history of Deaf communities since the establishment of Deaf centres in Britain is strongly linked with the notion of a Christian 'mission to the Deaf'. Most of these Deaf centres in the past had their own churches with services in sign language. However, very little detailed material has been compiled about the activities and worship of these Deaf centre churches. The Deaf Church has undergone considerable change in recent years and many of these traditional congregations have already disappeared.

This research presents a detailed study of one such traditional Deaf church. Ethnographic descriptions and the spiritual journey narratives told by some of the Deaf Elders who make up the congregation are used to examine the role of religion in building Deafhood; both in the development of Deaf identity by individuals through the life-course, and how Deaf communities conceptualise their existence and its meaning.

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Glossary of Key Terms and Abbreviations

American Sign Language (ASL): the national sign language of the United States of America.

Book of Common Prayer (BCP): Rites and ceremonies of the Church of England. The edition currently in use in those Anglican churches which retain this form of liturgy was authorised in 1662. From the 1960s more modern liturgical texts were introduced.

British Deaf Association (BDA): a national membership organisation of Deaf people, formerly the British Deaf and Dumb Association (BDDA).

British Sign Language (BSL): the national language of Deaf people in Britain, which has its own grammar and structure unrelated to English. It is the first or preferred language of approximately 60,000 people. BSL was recognised as an official language by the British Government in 2003.

Common Worship: the main source of liturgical texts in use in the Church of England at the present time, authorised for use from Advent 2000.

deaf: having a degree of hearing loss, an audiological condition

Deaf: those born deaf or losing hearing in childhood (often before acquiring spoken language) for whom "the sign languages, communities and cultures of the Deaf collective represents their primary experience and allegiance" (Ladd, 2003, p.xvii). Where older documents have been quoted in the text which were written before this usage became conventional, the terms 'deaf' and 'deaf and dumb' referring to Deaf sign language people and communities have been retained.

Deafhood: "the existential state of Deaf 'being-in-the-world' " (Ladd, 2003, p.xviii). The term deafness with its connotations of impairment is

so firmly linked to a medical model of deafness as disability that it can limit a full understanding of the potential and possibilities of Deaf lives.

Deaf Anglicans Together (DAT): national organisation of Deaf members of the Church of England and their chaplains, formerly the National Deaf Church Conference (NDCC).

Deaf centre, Deaf club, Mission, Institute: the building and activities which are the focus of cultural and community life for Deaf people in a particular geographical area. Traditionally they have provided social, religious, sporting and welfare activities.

Deaf Culture: the ways of life, language, beliefs and values of Deaf communities. "Members of the Deaf culture behave as Deaf people do, use the language of Deaf people, and share the beliefs of Deaf people towards themselves and other people who are not Deaf" (Padden, 1980, p.93).

Deaf Ecumenical Clergy UK (DECUK): a national body for ordained clergy who are Deaf.

fingerspelling: a conventional system for producing the letters of the alphabet in a manual form to convey words borrowed from the majority spoken language such as personal names, place names and brand names.

Fresh Expressions: some flexibility is permitted to adapt authorised liturgical material to match varying local and cultural needs. "A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church" (www.freshexpressions.org.uk, accessed 21 May 2008)

hard of hearing: people who have some degree of hearing loss but do not share Deaf language and culture. They often rely upon hearing aids and lip reading to aid their communication.

hearing: used by Deaf people to denote both people without a hearing loss and also those who are hard of hearing.

NSDDS: North Staffordshire Deaf and Dumb Society

sign language: the language of Deaf people as distinct from the spoken language of hearing people. Sign language is not universal. The sign languages of specific national groups are referred to using capital letters.

Sign Supported English (SSE): an artificial signing system as opposed to a natural language of Deaf people. Key words of a sentence are produced using BSL signs but following the English structure.

1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Introduction

The decision to be a member of a particular church congregation can involve a variety of factors, both theological and social. These may include aspects of belief: believing in the existence of a deity, adherence to a particular set of creedal tenets, and the idea that such belief should result in the specific behaviour of attending an act of public worship. It may also reflect issues of belonging and connectedness: within the traditional behaviour of a family, belonging within a particular neighbourhood or parish, as part of a faith group that shares one's beliefs and experiences, values, ethnic or class affiliation. How these related patterns of believing and belonging are played out in people's attitudes and behaviour has formed a major thread in the sociology of religion in Britain in recent years.

This thesis examines this lived relationship of believing and belonging within the British Deaf Church: Deaf groups worshipping in sign language, traditionally in chapels within Deaf centres or affiliated to them, under the organisational structure of the Church of England. The Deaf Studies literature does acknowledge the importance of organised religion in the history of Deaf communities since the establishment of Deaf centres in Britain is strongly linked with the notion of a Christian 'mission to the Deaf'. Most of these Deaf centres in the past had their own churches with services in sign language, having been founded and funded primarily as centres of mission. The Church of England Advisory Board of Ministry (1997) reported that services specifically for Deaf people were held regularly in 111 locations and that around 60% of these services were held at the meeting place of the local Deaf social club (p.16). However, very little detailed material has been compiled about the activities and worship of these Deaf centre churches.

The aim of this research was to undertake a detailed ethnographic study of one such traditional Deaf church, both to broaden understanding within Deaf Studies of the place of religion in Deaf culture, and to add the case of a Deaf church to the British congregational studies literature. The Deaf Church has undergone considerable change in recent years and many of these traditional congregations have already disappeared. Ethnographic descriptions and the spiritual journey narratives told by some of the Deaf Elders who make up the congregation are used to examine the role of religion in building Deafhood; both in the development of Deaf identity by individuals through the life-course, and how Deaf communities conceptualise their existence and its meaning.

1.2 Conceptualising the Deaf Community

1.2.1 A Culturo-linguistic Minority

> The proper relations between a minority and the society within which it is embedded are generally the subject of heated dispute, and the proper relation between the signing community and hearing society has been the subject of an impassioned debate for over two hundred years. (Lane, 1984, p.xiv)

The prevalent view of Deaf people among those with no connection to the Deaf world has long been that Deaf people are simply individuals who have a hearing impairment. Widespread acceptance of this medical perspective meant that discussion of deafness became located firmly within discourses of treatment and cure, educational intervention to assimilate deaf people into majority society, welfare and charity.

Yet the proliferation from the nineteenth century of organisations of Deaf people, local and national, of social clubs, churches, and newspapers, would indicate that Deaf people do not share this notion of themselves as isolated individuals but view their lives in a far more communal, collective way. Jackson (2001) offers evidence that even before this flourishing of formal structures and organisations, Deaf individuals knew

where other Deaf people were to be found and sought them out, socialising, communicating and marrying (p.199).

During the second half of the twentieth century, organisations of disabled people mounted challenges to the prevalent medical model leading to wider acceptance of a social model of disability (Lewis, 2002, pp. 33-37). Deaf people allied themselves with this movement to a limited extent. However, this model still located deafness in the context of individuals with a physical impairment (Ladd, 2003). For many this sat uneasily with their self-perception that "to be Deaf is not a disability in Deaf culture, and most members of the Deaf-world see no disability in their way of being" (Lane, 1992, 1999, p.xiii).

Research in linguistics has proved the contention of Deaf people that their signed languages are indeed true natural languages, and that Deaf people form vibrant communities with their own culture mediated by Sign Language (Sutton-Spence and Woll, 1999). Deaf sign language users are therefore a linguistic and cultural minority within the majority hearing society. Ladd asserts that this is indeed the widespread view within Deaf communities that "their existential situation is primarily that of a language minority, rather than as a disabled group" (p.15). Lane adds that this conceptual view of the Deaf community is endorsed by findings of other academic disciplines:

> They [the Deaf community] see themselves as fundamentally visual people, with their own visual language, social organization, history and mores – in short, with their own way of being, their own language and culture. Scholarly research since the 1970s in such fields as linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and history supports them in this claim. (p.5)

To separate this concept of a Deaf way of being from the negative, medical connotations of 'deafness' - an impairment of the sense of hearing - Ladd conceived a new theoretical term: Deafhood. This asserts a positive state of Deaf "being-in-the world" (p.xviii) and a process through which an authentic Deaf identity and way of life is constructed for oneself and one's community. Taking the Deaf community out of a medical or social model

of disability and viewing it as a cultural and linguistic minority highlights the role of medical, educational and welfare discourses in extinguishing these Deafhood aspirations and the manifestations of Deaf culture.

1.2.2 Describing Deaf Culture

Mindess (1999) explores a number of ways that have been used to compare and analyse cultures and attempts to map American Deaf culture on to them. The concepts she considers most relevant for comparing Deaf culture with the hearing culture of the surrounding majority are: whether a culture is individualist or collectivist in orientation; whether a culture is high or low context; how a culture deals with the concept of time; and variations in communicative styles between cultures.

One tool which has been used widely to describe and analyse culture is the degree to which a culture is either individualist or collectivist in orientation (Triandis, 1995). While there have been debates about whether these two terms are exclusive categories or form a continuum, or indeed whether it is possible to generalise about culture at the level of a nation or ethnic group, it can still be argued that the concept is a useful theoretical tool for identifying "systematic differences in values, ways of thinking, ways of relating to others, ways of being a self, and bases of well-being" (Oyserman, Coon and Kemmelmeier, 2002, p.111).

Triandis et. al. (1988) identify a number of features of collectivist cultures. These include:

- prioritisation of group goals over individual interests;
- membership of one 'in group' and continuing loyalty to it regardless of the high cost this can entail, with social relationships tending to be in larger groups than in individualist cultures;
- social relationships which last over long time periods thus influencing the quality of the relationships – in individualist cultures people may speak of having many friends but they are often non-intimate acquaintances compared with the lifelong

friendships and complex systems of obligations in collectivist cultures;

- clear expectations and norms for behaviour, sanctions for non-compliance, mechanisms for encouraging conformity and minimising conflict between group members;
- interaction between group members which is relationship rather than task-oriented.

Mindess concludes that

> American Deaf culture clearly qualifies as a collectivist culture with its emphasis on pooling resources, the duty to share information, the boundary between insiders and outsiders, and loyalty to and strong identification with the group. (p.40)

Mindess cites particular features of Deaf life as reflecting its collectivist cultural values. One example given is the importance Deaf people attribute to spending time and sharing skills and information to benefit the community. Another such feature is the form which introductions of newcomers take, focusing upon possible connections to the group such as mutual friends or having attended the same school.

Becker (1980) also illustrates how the maintenance of the Deaf community is a primary value in Deaf culture:

> The values shared by the aged deaf derive from their deaf identity: being deaf is the single most important factor in their lives: one owes allegiance to deafness; and one must further the good of the community, putting it before oneself if necessary. (p.88)

She notes the positive value attached to sociability and being involved in group events and describes the means of social control used to promote this and thus ensure the continuation of the community. Participation is encouraged by constant checking that others will be attending group activities and dissociation from the group is discouraged by such 'nagging' to attend or 'gossip' about those who fail to do so. Becker identifies the primary social grouping within the Deaf community as the peer group

from school days. In many cases the friendships formed at the residential Deaf schools become enduring lifelong bonds.

> The deaf person's relation to the peer group is striking because these primary relationships usually last sixty or more years, extending over the entire life cycle. Such long-term relationships are unusual in the United States today, where a pattern of mobility is the norm. (p.65)

Ladd (2003) also agrees that Deaf culture is

> impelled by collectivist values, which therefore stand in contrast to Western cultures' essentially individualistic values. For many, the signs 'We' and 'Deaf' are quite inseparable. (p.167)

Ladd's research also indicates that this perception of a bond between Deaf people extends far beyond the immediate peer group or local community. The Deaf schools often had large regional and even national catchment areas. In adult life visiting old school friends often meant visiting other regions and being introduced to members of the Deaf community in that place. At a national level a sense of unity was fostered through sport, with visits to other clubs and participation or identification with a national team through the Deaf world games. Deaf people were also connected with others through participation in national organisations, particularly the British Deaf Association with its rallies, conferences and social events. However, this feeling of a bond with other Deaf people was something more than the concrete experience of being in regular contact with people from other regions. It was an inner sense of being part of a worldwide 'imagined community' of Sign Language Peoples (c.f. Anderson, 1983).

The second category for analysing Deaf culture offered by Mindess is whether a culture is high or low context. This concerns cultural attitudes to the management and sharing of information. In high context cultures much shared experienced is assumed resulting in background information being largely omitted and giving rise to highly contextualised conversation with little linguistic redundancy. Mindess identifies American Deaf Culture as being high context. Close peer group bonds mean that people and places relevant to any conversation are generally

known. There is relatively little socialising beyond group boundaries except with hearing family members whose names and situations will be known within the group. In contrast with low-context cultures where information is highly compartmentalised and specific details shared only with the people involved in particular situations, high-context cultures exhibit widespread and free circulation of information. Mindess quotes:

> "It should not be surprising that among people for whom all information is precious, even sacred, secrecy is considered antisocial. Sharing information is an affirmation of the unity of the Deaf community. Deaf people in turn often think a hearing person's attitude toward privacy [is] infuriating and perplexing." (S. Hall 99) (p.49)

Mindess offers a further insight into Deaf cultural values by comparing polychronic and monochronic cultures. Monochronic cultures tend to organise time in sequential linear fashion and are highly focussed on one event at a time. Polychronic cultures are those in which "people and relationships take precedence over agendas and schedules" (p.54). Deaf culture could in this sense be considered polychronic.

This attitude to organising time can also be linked with the Deaf cultural value of sharing information noted above: if information is precious then taking time to share it is a priority, even to the detriment of achieving the task in hand. It is also influenced by considerations examined by Mindess under the heading of rhetoric and communicative style. Since in Deaf culture cooperation and maintenance of good relationships is a key collective value all members of the group must have an opportunity to contribute to decision making. In a committee meeting it is more important to collect all the opinions and move together towards agreement thus ensuring everyone is happy or at least persuaded, rather than working through an agenda at speed and risking discontent and conflict after. An insight into the way that collective cultural values can clash with an individualist 'business' orientation can be found in Meyerhoff (1978, pp.120-126). The example is situated in a community of Jewish elders, but its themes serve well to illustrate the difference in

priorities that exist between collectivist Deaf and individualistic hearing cultures.

While the features described above offer useful theoretical tools for the investigation of Deaf culture it is important to note Ladd's caveat against treating Deaf culture as a 'monolithic' model rather than a "pluralistic site wherein its members *contest* Deaf cultural meanings"(2003, p. 215). In particular, Ladd draws attention to the need for furthering our understanding of the experiences of Deaf women, Deaf religious and ethnic minorities, Deaf people who identity as Gay or Lesbian, Deaf people with disabilities, and generational differences within the Deaf community.

1.2.3 Colonialism

One of the theoretical tools that has been proposed for examining the relationship between the Deaf minority and the hearing majority is colonialism. Lane (1992, 1999) states:

> I call deaf communities colonized, using the term in an extended sense – as when French philosopher Michel Foucault speaks of the "colonization of the body" by the state – because deaf communities have suffered oppression, in all its forms and consequences, in common with other cultures that were literally subjugated by imperial powers. (p.40)

Lane describes this in terms of the competing discourses, that Deaf communities and the hearing organisations and structures purporting to serve them have "two different points of view, two different conceptions of deaf people, and two radically different agendas" (p.44).

Ladd (2003) concurs that colonialism is a potentially fruitful theoretical tool for the exploration of the Deaf experience:

> Having spent a decade studying Deaf and other minority communities in order to formally conceive the treatment visited upon them, I have concluded that the model which offers maximum generative power is that which conceives of Deaf communities as having undergone *colonisation*. (p.78)

Lane makes a case for economic parallels with colonialism. The aim of assimilating Deaf people into the majority culture generates economic benefits for those involved in the vast research and development complexes surrounding technologies such as hearing aids, cochlear implants and genetic engineering. Ladd takes the analysis further and proposes that from a culturo-linguistic model of the Deaf community one can also identity linguistic colonisation and welfare colonisation at work in the Deaf situation.

> Both linguistic and welfare colonialism point us once again in the direction of culture, for in essence this is what colonialism set out to achieve – *the destruction and replacement of indigenous cultures by Western cultures.* (p.17)

A major episode in the linguistic colonisation of Deaf peoples, the attempt to eradicate sign language from education, is described below. The Milan Congress had far reaching impact, even down to the present time, on how Deaf people have been treated, how they have been viewed by the majority 'lay' people who have no direct contact with the Deaf community, and for almost a century on Deaf people's attitudes to themselves and their language through the oppression many came to internalise.

1.2.4 Oralism – the Milan Congress

> The meeting at Milan was the single most critical event in driving the languages of deaf communities beneath the surface; I believe it is the single most important cause of the limited educational achievements of modern deaf men and women. (Lane 1992, 1999, p.113)

In 1880 what was described as a world congress of the educators of deaf children was convened in Milan. However, Lane reports that it was far from representative with seven-eighths of the delegates coming from France and Italy. Furthermore, in spite of there being many Deaf teachers involved in Deaf education at the time they were excluded from the congress. The purpose of the conference was to remove signed languages from the classroom and ensure that spoken languages were the

only mode of instruction used in the education of Deaf children: the pure oral or 'German method' as opposed to the 'combined methods' that included signs and fingerspelling. The resolution proposing this was only opposed by four delegates, three America and one British. A second resolution stating that the use of sign language was damaging to speech, lip-reading and the process of thought itself, was also carried by a massive majority (Jackson, 2001).

The implementation of these resolutions in the years that followed the Milan Congress meant that Deaf teachers were no longer employed in Britain. Legislation of 1909 required all teachers to have received training in the oral method and be able to teach it themselves (Lysons, 1965). Jackson notes that by 1900 signing had been outlawed from all 87 schools for Deaf pupils in Britain and that

> the appointment of Edward Kirk to the post of Principal at the Leeds School for Deaf Children in 1881 was unique. It was to be over 100 years before another Deaf person was appointed Head of a School for Deaf Children in Britain. (p.38)

Furthermore, proponents of the oral method confidently predicted the total eradication of sign language of a result of their efforts. In a submission to the Royal Commission on the Education of the Blind, and the Deaf and Dumb (1889) a former headmaster of a Deaf school stated:

> The oral system is incomparably the best; it is not open to question at all... For a time, perhaps, the combined system may struggle on; I think that this is very probable. But that the sign system will last in itself, I have not the slightest expectation – I think sign language will die out. (Jackson, 2001, p.41)

The Royal Commission Report did however note that one advantage of the manual method of instruction was that it was "the only practicable way in which religious services and lectures could be conveyed to the deaf" (Lysons, 1973, p.74).

In the context of this thesis, a study of the relationship between Deaf culture and religion, it is instructive to note how religious arguments were

made to support the oralist view of the superiority of speech over sign language. Speech was portrayed as the continuation of the life-giving breath of God which made man fully human at Creation: "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Genesis 2: 7). The breath of God gave man a soul, distinguishing him from all other created animals; from this the oralists argued that the spoken word was the only way to express spiritual ideas. Tarra, the President of the Milan Congress, stated "Speech alone, divine itself, is the right way to speak of divine matters" (Lane, 1992, 1999, p.115). Sign language, characterised by its opponents as inferior, limited and impoverished, was deemed unfit for worship.

The perpetuation of negative attitudes towards sign language in school and among those who worked with the Deaf community, had a profound impact on the Deaf Church, not least in the way these attitudes were internalised by many Deaf people themselves. The effect of this oralist legacy on the Deaf Church is a major theme of the current study.

1.3 Believing and Belonging

The nature of belief and the relationship between religious faith and its manifestation in practice have received considerable attention in the study of the sociology of religion. Does a statement of allegiance to a particular faith or denomination necessarily imply acceptance of the traditional creedal beliefs of that faith? Furthermore, is such belief always expressed through belonging to a particular church and attending its public worship? Research indicates that at least in modern day Europe the situation is far more complex.

One possibility is that people state that they accept the basic creedal beliefs of religion, for example that they believe in God, but that such belief does not necessarily translate into the practical action of attending church. Davie (1994) labels this phenomenon 'believing without belonging' (p.94).

> Why is it, for example, that the majority of British people – in common with many other Europeans – persist in believing (if only in an ordinary God), but see no need to participate with even minimal regularity in their religious institutions? Indeed, most people in this country – whatever their denominational allegiance – express their religious sentiments by staying away from, rather than going to, their places of worship. On the other hand, relatively few British people have opted out of religion altogether: out and out atheists are rare. (p.2)

Voas (2009) paints a similar picture, but with perhaps a sharper focus on a consumerist 'pick and mix' approach to religion. People may retain quite vague (often unorthodox) versions of creedal beliefs, champion values which they associate with religious belief and attend such services as seem to meet their needs at particular times. Some of these continued allegiances are attributed to the appeal of tradition and nostalgia rather than intellectual belief. The somewhat unspecific nature of the beliefs and the unpredictable patterns of attendance of the majority seem very aptly characterised by his term 'fuzzy fidelity':

> Despite dramatic shifts in the prevalence of conventional Christian belief, practice, and self-identification, residual involvement is considerable. Many people remain interested in church weddings and funerals, Christmas services, and local festivals. They believe in 'something out there', pay at least lip service to Christian values, and may be willing to identify with a denomination. They are neither regular churchgoers (now only a small minority of the population in most European countries) nor self-consciously non-religious. Because they retain some loyalty to tradition, though in a rather uncommitted way, we can call the phenomenon fuzzy fidelity. (n.p.)

Questions of belief also intersect with concepts of identity, with religion operating as a force which both binds individuals together and marks boundaries between groups. This model informed many classical anthropological works describing traditional societies. Some authors would claim that fragmentation of modern society means that community is a less powerful force and collective notions of religion are less likely to be sustained (Bruce, 2002).

However, one might also argue the converse, that where society is fragmenting and changing rapidly religion might be invoked to maintain boundaries, acting as an important affirmation of identity. Day (2007) reports research in which a person interviewed claimed to be Christian while at the same time explicitly rejected any notion of believing in a religion. She concludes that in this case the claim to be a Christian was a statement of national and ethnic identity rather than of religious affiliation with the term Christian signifying 'White English' as a marker of separation from one's Asian neighbours collectively characterised as 'Muslim'. Similarly, Hickman (1999) argues that a "religio-ethnic identity remains strong" (p.197) for Catholics of Irish descent in England, frequently expressed as a sense of communal belonging.

A further aspect of the influence of religion on questions of identity concerns the role of religion in the making of meaning and personal identity. Religion can operate as a resource for making sense of life experiences. The significance of religion and its relationship to experiences of oppression will be discussed further below.

This research project will concentrate upon those who regularly attend the Deaf Church – those who belong – and will study their individual and collective spiritual journeys, exploring the intersection of their Christian faith and their Deaf identity. Lewis (2002) states that

> Those who attend Deaf Churches today are, by and large, those who genuinely believe in the Christian faith. (p.67)

The context of this statement is the decline in Deaf church congregations and the extent to which this mirrors the reduction in churchgoing in the wider population. The universal expectation that all will attend church on a Sunday no longer exists in the Deaf community or in the majority hearing society in Britain. While it may be true that those who come to Deaf Church believe this does not mean that faith is the only or primary motivation for attendance. The research on hearing church congregations would appear to suggest that the situation is rarely so simple and that reasons for belonging to the Deaf Church merit further investigation.

It may also be the case that there are Deaf community members who believe but choose not to belong to the Deaf Church. Deaf Church congregations are swelled for special services by those who attend only infrequently, particularly for Harvest Festival or memorial services for members of the community who have died. Others, while never attending services themselves, may nonetheless view the Deaf Church as an essential component of the Deaf World to which they do belong. Consequently they may feel they are part of the Deaf Church, a form of what Davie has termed 'vicarious religion', whereby the minority active in religious ritual are seen as in some way being so on behalf of the rest of the community (Davie, 2000).

1.4 Religion and Oppression

1.4.1 Accommodation and Resistance

It has been proposed that the relationship between religious belief and how individuals or groups who experience oppression make meaning of their lives can be conceptualized in terms of either accommodation or resistance. Baer and Singer (1992) note that

> a significant debate in the literature on African-American religion addresses the matter of whether it has been accommodative to white-dominated society or emancipatory for the Black masses. (p.xviii)

Religion can be seen as instrumental in perpetuating patterns of oppression or habituating people to their subjection (Du Bois, 1899, 1967). Arguments derived from Biblical sources can be used to legitimate structures of inequality; endorsing the desirability of qualities such as patience and meekness or directing believers towards the duty of obedience to the civil and political authorities ordained by God. Religious faith can be the 'opium of the people', both giving solace to those who are oppressed and diverting them from tackling the real structures of inequality.

On the other hand religion can be seen as a force which can be harnessed for the resistance of oppression. A faith which teaches that every life has value and purpose, that all humanity is created in the image and likeness of God, is a strong defence against internalizing negative judgements of the self as defective or inferior. The religious arena can become one in which such discourses can be re-evaluated and contested. Within this space the sharing of experiences can give rise to a sense of group solidarity, of a common history and aspirations for the future. Oppressed individuals begin to come together and conceptualise themselves as a people, a further resource for resistance (Baer & Singer, 1992).

1.4.2 Narratives of Resistance: the Chosen People

One well-documented form of Biblically based discourse used to counter the experience of oppression is the African-American repertoire of religious songs from the time of slavery. Levine (1977) describes how these are often characterised by Old Testament themes through which the slaves identified themselves with the Children of Israel, the Chosen People of God. In a situation where their present existence denied them

> meaningful forms of personal integration, attainment of status, and feelings of individual worth that all human beings crave and need, the slaves created a new world by transcending the narrow confines of the one in which they were forced to live. They extended the boundaries of their restrictive universe backward until it fused with the world of the Old Testament, and upward until it became one with the world beyond. (pp.32-33)

In the absence of any political means of opposition, the image of the Chosen People constituted a resource for resistance. The Old Testament figures offered hope and not simply for the next world: Moses and the Children of Israel escaped the slavery of Egypt, the boy David beat the giant Goliath, Daniel was protected from the cruel punishment of an earthly ruler. The narrative of the Chosen People encouraged a sense of self-worth, and held out the promise that all things were subject to change and that the justice of God would ultimately prevail.

Present experiences could be understood with reference to this Biblical past. Levine offers the example of a former slave discussing emancipation in these terms:

> "The children of Israel was in bondage one time, and God sent Moses to 'liver them. Well, I s'pose that God sent Abe Lincoln to 'liver us.' " (p.137)

Similarly, Sernett (1997) quotes the use of the image of Moses and the Chosen People:

> The renowned African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier recalled that as a child he often heard "Negroes express the hope that some Moses would appear among them and lead them to a promised land of freedom and equality." (p.82)

Similar use of such Exodus imagery by Deaf people to describe and make sense of their experiences in the Deaf Church forms a major theme of the current study.

1.4.3 Religion as a Force in the Oppression of Deaf People

The history of the disenfranchisement and oppression of the Deaf community includes the employment of religious discourses as justification for such actions. A number of authors discuss and challenge interpretations of the Bible which focus upon a medical view of Deaf people as physically, and even morally, defective and in need of healing (Broesterhuizen, 2005; Hull, 2009; Lewis, 2002;). The discussion of the Milan Congress above described how tenuous religious arguments were used to promote the view of the supposed superiority of speech over sign language. Deaf defenders of sign language similarly used religious images to refute such claims. Padden (1990) cites a lecture by the President of the American National Association of the Deaf filmed in 1913 in which he describes sign language as "the noblest gift God has given to Deaf people" (p.196).

Referring to the situation of Black slavery, Baer and Singer (1992) contend that

> In keeping with racist views, many slaveowners asserted that their slaves were intellectually incapable of understanding the subtleties of Christian dogma. (p.5)

Similar attitudes can be seen in the Deaf context. Firth's (1966) conviction that most Church doctrine could not be understood by Deaf people is discussed below. Clearly such an assumption would have an impact upon the type of religious teaching made available to Deaf people and the opportunities for Deaf leadership in the Church. Ladd (2003) notes that characterizing the Other as intellectually inferior can be used to justify oppressive systems since they are thus in need of the civilizing and missionary influences of their colonial 'benefactors'. Broesterhuizen (2005) explicitly refers to the Deaf Church experience as spiritual colonialism in which "dependence was supposed and fostered" (p.317).

Documentation of these histories and discourses within Deaf Studies to date has caused some defensive reactions among Christians who feel that it is being proposed that Christianity as a faith embraces these models of deficit and deviance or that the Christian Church is complicit in the oppression of Deaf people. In fact, often what is being demonstrated and criticised is the faulty interpretation and application of Biblical references that have been taken out of context or used to support a particular agenda; a failure of hermeneutics rather than doctrine.

This thesis explores the intersection of faith and identity from a Deaf cultural perspective. It considers how Deaf Christians interpret their religious experiences and construct spiritual journey narratives that weave meaningful connections between religious belief and practice and Deaf identity. As Broesterhuizen (2007) notes:

> Enculturation into Deaf culture, assuming the values of Deafhood, the life experiences of Deaf people into Christianity: for a concrete Christian praxis there is no other way. As long as deafness is seen as an obstacle for faith development, as a limitation for reflection about Christian faith, as an impairment without its own values, as a form of being incomplete, Christianity will remain strange and estranging for Deaf people and the Christian stories will never be brought into relationship with their daily lives as Deaf people. (p.8)

This research is an ethnographic account of such praxis, the day to day lived experience of incorporating Deafhood values into Christian practice and Christian faith into Deaf community life, in the context of the traditional Deaf Church.

1.5 Chronological Framework for Researching Deaf Church

The framework for the presentation of the thesis material will be primarily chronological, following the experiences of the Deaf Church Elders through the life course. Their narratives broadly tend to follow the pattern outlined by Lewis (2002) as a structure for organising Deaf Church history:

- The Early Years of Deaf Church: its pre-Milan origins
- the Era of Missioners: post-Milan, 1880–1970
- the Era of Chaplains: 1970 - present

I would suggest that this framework has a certain limitations as a tool for describing and analysing the development of the Deaf Church nationally and these will be discussed below. However, the accounts given by the Deaf Elders do emphasise differences at the local level between the time of the Missioners and later experiences of Church under the chaplains. A primary aim of the present study is to look beneath the surface of imposed hearing Church structures, to critique discourses used about Deaf people and privilege discourses of Deaf people themselves about their histories and their religious experiences. In view of this, the division suggested by Lewis of an era of missioners and an era of chaplains will be used as genuinely reflecting the experiences of the Deaf people concerned, despite the caveats given below suggesting that nationally a more complex and nuanced reading of the involvement and role of the Church of England is warranted.

Also, in privileging a Deaf perspective, within the time span of the era of chaplains consideration will be given to the effects of what has been termed the Deaf Resurgence (Ladd, 2003) – the increase in confidence,

activism, self-determination and pride within the Deaf community largely as a result of the renewed recognition that sign language is indeed a true language equal to any other. This resurgence has also made itself felt within the Deaf Church as once more leaders who are themselves Deaf have emerged, been ordained, and have begun to form alternative organisations to challenge the power of the hearing Church structures.

While the history of the British Deaf Church as a whole is not the focus of the present thesis, some of the defining characteristics of each of these time periods will be now be described, with reviews of certain key texts which form a theoretical background to the current study.

1.6 The Early Years of Deaf Church

A number of authors cite religion as a prime factor in the establishment of associations for adult Deaf people. Jackson (2001) states:

> The adult Deaf community, as we know it today, effectively became a cohesive being in the early 19th century with the formation of adult institutes, deaf churches, sports clubs all contributing to a sense of identity shared by many. This was a step forward from the small, fragmented gatherings of Deaf people of earlier centuries. The first adult Deaf gatherings were mainly for the purpose of holding prayer meetings. (p.200)

Lysons (1965) describes the first known such organisation in Britain which was formed in Edinburgh around 1840. A Miss Burnside saw a number of Deaf people congregating regularly on a street corner, decided to rent a room and try to preach to them. Further assistance was later obtained from the local school for Deaf children. Lysons uses this account to draw out various characteristics common to the founding of early societies for adult Deaf people:

> Firstly, the congregating of groups of deaf persons drawn together by the desire to meet with others in like condition. Secondly, the intervention of an individual or individuals motivated by a mixture of compassion, evangelistic zeal and/or charitable concern who endeavoured to obtain and maintain premises where the deaf could assemble for social and religious purposes. Subsequently there was the

> inevitable fund raising, election of a management committee and organisation of activities which, as they became more complex necessitated the appointment of a "missioner" on whom responsibility for the day to day running of the "mission" devolved. (p.31)

Considering the fourteen missions founded in England before 1880, which he terms the 'pioneer societies', Lysons emphasises that they grew up independently largely initiated by the efforts of Deaf people themselves. Those who had the benefit of education or family wealth were particularly influential. The early societies were predominantly in the major urban centres where a sufficient number of Deaf people were gathered. Twelve of these fourteen pioneer organisations were 'unsectarian' in character; the exceptions being the Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb in London and the Winchester Diocesan Mission.

Reference has been made to the influence of the nineteenth century Evangelical movement on the development of the early voluntary societies for Deaf people (Lewis, 2002; Lysons, 1965). The growth of missionary endeavours to 'heathen lands' was matched by attempts to evangelise various classes of people at home such as sailors, former prisoners, and those having various illnesses or disabilities; people who would not otherwise be reached by ordinary church work. Evangelicalism not only prompted concern for unchurched Deaf people who were ignorant of the Gospel, but also influenced the way the missions developed: for evangelicals faith was of greater importance than allegiance to a denomination. Lewis claims that by 1880, the year of the Milan Congress, there were sixteen missions in England and Wales. Of these:

> the 'Edinburgh evangelical group' [begun by four Deaf men] appears to have directly influenced nine, with two more founded by deaf men with demonstrable evangelical inspiration. Three missions were founded by a school (the Manchester Institute) with at least one of those from the initiative of a group of Deaf people and only two, Winchester and Nottingham from the philanthropic/missionary

> influences of Church of England clergy... The early *DEAF-CHURCH*[1] of the mid nineteenth century was largely non-denominational and a place where religious minded Deaf men were responsible for their own worship of God and preaching the gospel to other Deaf people. (p.57-58)

Both Lysons and Lewis suggest economic necessity as a major factor which propelled the fledgling voluntary organisations and their churches, founded and run by Deaf people themselves, into the era of hearing control and denominational division. The missions came to be funded by outside interests and consequently subject to their control. The funding bodies appointed missioners who came to act as gatekeepers controlling interaction between Deaf people and the hearing world.

The idea that the voluntary organisations were influenced at an early stage by those outside the Deaf community (Deaf schools, church people or local philanthropists) is born out by the detailed accounts provided by Lysons (1965). However, the implication that non-denominational missions were subject to a Church of England 'take-over' during the subsequent era of missioners is harder to substantiate, and risks seriously underestimating the importance of the Church of England in founding its own missions. The two Anglican missions may have been in the minority among the fourteen 'pioneer societies' but were nonetheless significant. The Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb in time came to be responsible for the welfare of the majority of Deaf people in the London area. It could be argued that the Winchester Diocesan Mission pioneered the present pattern of a diocese-wide sector ministry for Deaf people.

The Winchester Diocesan Mission was founded in 1879. The process by which it came about was described by its founder, Reverend Owen, to the Royal Commission on the Education of the Deaf and Dumb in 1899 and is reported in Lysons (1965). First research was conducted to establish the number, location and condition of all known deaf people in the Diocese by requesting information from every parish. A committee was then set up

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[1] Lewis uses the glossed sign language term *DEAF-CHURCH* to refer those congregations in the UK whose main language of worship is sign language and where the majority of the congregation would self-identify as d/Deaf

to run the mission, a missioner selected and ordained, and centres were established where the numbers of people were greatest. Agreement was obtained for the missioner to work wherever there was need regardless of parish boundaries. The Mission was financed by voluntary contributions and collections taken at the preaching of special sermons. Owen told the Commission that he felt every diocese should do the same, for the 'moral good' and to 'keep hold' of the deaf and dumb after they left school. It is clear that during these early years of the Deaf Church before the Milan Congress, the Church of England was already active in ministry among Deaf people.

1.7 The Era of Missioners

In the early stages of their development the first voluntary societies or missions were assisted either by schools, churches or other charitable concerns. Subsequently a committee was formed to oversee the mission and a missioner appointed to do the work. Lysons (1965) summarises that the majority of missioners were either teachers from the Deaf schools, children of Deaf adults or people who were themselves Deaf. In the early years these groups of people were not necessarily mutually exclusive as until the beginning of the twentieth century Deaf people were working as teachers in the schools. It was only following the Milan Congress of 1880 that most of the missioners who were themselves Deaf were replaced by hearing workers (Jackson, 2001).

1.7.1 Spread of Church of England Missions

Lysons (1965) reports that until 1880 the fact that all the societies were founded independently meant that the spread of the missions was somewhat haphazard with large areas of the country having no provision for adult Deaf people. A body called the National Deaf and Dumb Society was set up in 1877 with the aim of promoting welfare among Deaf people by encouraging the systematic establishment of missions around the country. It was short-lived: records about its activities cease after 1885. Nonetheless it was significant in that this was the first group attempting

to organise welfare provision for Deaf people on a national level. A report compiled by the National Deaf and Dumb Society in 1882 showed that 32 English counties had no mission for the Deaf. Following the founding of the British Deaf and Dumb Association this pressure to spread missions for Deaf people into other regions continued and resulted in more Anglican foundations:

> Between 1892 and 1902 there was a rapid expansion of diocesan mission work for the deaf as a result of representations made by officials of the B.D.D.A. to the Bishops of several dioceses in pursuance of the Association's declared aim of establishing missions in neglected areas. (Lysons, 1965, p.69)

Various Church of England committees were set up to enquire into the care of Deaf people and agree directions for future work. A resolution of July 1919 aiming to increase the number of Church of England missions and missioners stated that it was "desirable that the missions to the Deaf and Dumb should be recognised as an integral part of Church work in each diocese, and as having a claim on Diocesan Funds" (Lysons, 1965, p.71)

The Church of England body set up to oversee the work with Deaf people became known as the Central Advisory Council for promoting the Spiritual Care of the Deaf and Dumb. From its reports it can be seen that the clear distinction made by Lysons between unsectarian and Diocesan work during the early years of the Deaf societies rapidly became blurred. The 1924 report indicates a mixed pattern of the Church of England running its own missions in some areas, but in other dioceses making grants to existing missions. The missions themselves were to all appearances non-denominational but their church work was subsidised by the Church of England. In addition, many of the missions which were not set up or run by the Church of England were using Anglican forms of worship. Lysons summarised that according to this report

> of 43 missions at work for the deaf in England it was estimated that about 20 were "being carried on on definite Church of England lines" whilst the remainder were

> undenominational "although among the latter the Prayer Book is used to some extent." (Lysons, 1965, p. 72)

Lysons concludes that this rather relaxed approach to the question of denomination was a pragmatic necessity. The Deaf community as a proportion of the total population being relatively small any denominationalism, however broadly defined, was impracticable. Towards the end of the Era of Missioners, when Lysons conducted his extensive survey in 1962, there were 51 Deaf societies in England and Wales of which 49 had a church. Of the remaining two, one society was extremely small with only 45 members in total, and the other served a widespread rural population and so did not have a fixed location for its meetings. The only denominational difference noted by the respondents was not between Anglican and non-denominational missions but between Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. Two of the 51 missions had a second, separate church for its Roman Catholic Deaf members while a further 11 societies claimed to make specific provision for them.

1.7.2 The Role of the Missioners

The primary objectives of the early societies for Deaf adults appear to have been religious, even if the motivation of the Deaf people themselves to meet resulted as much from a desire to recreate the community they had experienced in school. However, the function of the societies soon broadened to include other aspects of welfare and the provision of recreational opportunities. The missioners were responsible for overseeing all these areas of activity. The defining characteristic of the transition into the era of chaplains appears to have been the separation of these responsibilities into secular and spiritual. Secular functions were devolved to outside bodies or developed as specialised professions. Chaplaincy among Deaf people focussed solely on spiritual matters in contrast with the broad remit of the missioner.

Lysons (1965) lists the functions and activities of the voluntary societies for Deaf adults, all of which would have been the responsibility of the missioner, as:

- interpretation;
- spiritual work;
- placement and industrial supervision;
- social and recreational activities;
- miscellaneous: including prevention of poverty and other relief work, accommodation, visiting, work with Deaf-Blind and Deaf with mental illness.

Towards the end of the 1950s debates were arising about the desirability of separating spiritual and secular welfare. Many missioners felt that such a step was impossible; the work with Deaf people was an indissoluble whole which could not be broken down into spiritual and secular. The missioner was intimately involved with the life of the Deaf Society and knew all the members personally. Dividing the work into specialised functions carried out by different people risked losing this connection, with the Deaf person becoming simply another de-personalised 'case'. The role of the missioner was the holistic care of the Deaf person and spiritual welfare was an essential aspect. As one Missioner wrote to Lysons "I have argued that it would be futile to preach to the deaf on a Sunday if one had not served them as a Social Worker during the week" (p.192).

Some also contended that the secular aspect of the work would be done with greater care by someone with religious motivation, though Lysons does acknowledge that ordained missioners might prioritise spiritual matters over other necessary parts of the work while lay missioners might neglect the spiritual. This distinction between ordained and lay missioners raises the question of how many of the missioners were clergy or had specialised training for the spiritual aspects of the role.

Lysons (1965) reported that in 1962 out of 102 staff (missioners, superintendents[2], qualified and trainee workers) in the 51 Deaf Societies of England and Wales, 24 were ministers of religion or clergy. However,

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[2] Superintendent was a title frequently given to the officer in charge of the mission where there was more than one worker or missioner

the relatively small number of clergy masked their disproportionate influence:

> the clergy seem to form an intellectual elite among workers for the deaf. With the exception of one lay-superintendent all graduates working as superintendents were Church of England clergy. (p.132)

They also wrote the majority of articles in journals aimed at welfare workers and held many of the prominent positions in national organisations such as the British Deaf and Dumb Association, the Deaf Welfare Examination Board and the Church of England committees.

Lysons sought to establish what specialist religious qualifications were held by the lay staff of the Deaf Societies to equip them for their spiritual welfare role. He found that among the missioners there were:

38 licensed Lay Readers (Church of England)

1 licensed Lay Worker (Church of England)

1 Church Army Sister

1 lay pastor (had some Presbyterian ministerial training)

1 lay preacher[3] (Church of England)

1 lay preacher (Methodist)

33 had no specialist qualification for spiritual work.

Here again we see the blurring of distinctions between nonconformist and Church of England missions. It should be noted that the number of workers who were licensed Lay Readers of the Church of England was not coincidental: in 1961 those who had passed the Deaf Welfare Examination

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[3] Had obtained permission to preach from the Bishop of the area in which he was working but chose not to become a Lay-Reader because he considered that the taking of a Licence would label him as Anglican and "I maintain that I work among all deaf irrespective of creed" " p. 133

Board diploma[4] were granted exemption from the Readers' Examination in all Anglican Dioceses. Welfare workers may have chosen to claim this qualification regardless of whether the Missions in which they worked were otherwise non-denominational.

1.7.3 "The Plate Glass Prison"

A thorough description of the traditional structure and organisation of Deaf centres from the point of view of the Missioner is provided by George Firth's (1966) *The Plate Glass Prison.* This text will be reviewed both as an insight into the Deaf world under the missioners, and in order to expose some of the ideas about Deaf people and religion which have to a large extent continued unchallenged. Reviewing these influences which may have been unconsciously absorbed into later literature, the "unfounded traditional facts" (Lee, 2001, p.x), is a first step towards making space for authentic accounts of the experiences of Deaf people themselves.

Firth provides us with a valuable insight into the traditional Deaf club world as understood by one of its missioners; a paid worker responsible for the spiritual, physical and material welfare of the Deaf people within a particular geographical area. The work is aimed at the general reader who has no particular knowledge of deafness, and uses Firth's interpretation of his own experiences in an attempt to give the feel of the Deaf world and "call forth that surge of the imagination that we need if we are to understand the deaf" (p.6).

Firth gives a clear explanation of the organisational structure of what he refers to as the 'Institute' for the Deaf, a term synonymous with Lysons' 'mission', and which would usually now be called the Deaf club or centre.

> The Institute building is nearly always the property of the local Voluntary Society for the Deaf, of which there is one in nearly every borough or county... Most Societies began as

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[4] The Deaf Welfare Examination Board Syllabus of Examination (Revised 1964) included an extensive section on the spiritual aspect of welfare work covering scripture, Church history, doctrine, pastoral and moral issues.

> literally 'missionary' Societies dedicated to preaching the Gospel to the Deaf. (p.105)

Firth describes the tiered structure which operated at this time. The Institutes were run by a committee charged with the management of the building and overseeing all the activities of the charitable association for Deaf people in that area, the Voluntary or Deaf Society. This Board of Management was made up of representatives of churches, the local authority and local businessmen; those deemed to have the status and knowledge to be patrons of the charity. The Board of Management would then in its turn employ someone to undertake the actual work among Deaf people – a missioner or welfare officer. The problem with this arrangement, as Firth sees it, lies in the gap between the various layers. The committees

> carry out their duty towards the deaf by finding money to remunerate their paid employee, but do not themselves play much part in the work as individuals. Indeed many of them have never even met a deaf person. (p.107)

The existence of such committees gave the impression of a large number of people working to improve the situation of Deaf people. However, Firth contends that it was only the Missioner with his practical knowledge who was actively involved in planning, recruiting and training other workers, disseminating knowledge about the Deaf world and campaigning for the needs and aspirations of Deaf people.

Firth, as a missioner, is intimately involved in Deaf community life, but even employing a 'surge of imagination' to understand the Deaf world he remains bound by the oralist views of his time and his occupational training. In fact, Firth argues what Ladd (2003) describes as "one of the tenets of oralist discourse", that "each born Deaf person is a helpless isolated hearing-impaired individual, with no intrinsic relationship with any other Deaf person, past or present, no group allegiances or history" (p.163). Firth writes:

> The deaf seldom think of themselves are [sic] belonging to a community. They certainly know each other very well, because most of them will have attended the same school

> together. But they will often refer to the rest as "the Deaf" as if they had no part with them... The deaf are individualistic, they live each unto himself: and, as already explained, they find it difficult to think in general terms, or to envisage their lot as a cause on a National scale. (p.43)

I would dispute Firth's interpretation of the evidence here. The context in which 'the Deaf' is used by signers in conversation would seem to indicate not a distancing of the signer from the rest, but rather denotes the collective 'we'. As noted by Ladd, for many Deaf people the collectivist way of thinking is so strong that the terms 'we' and 'Deaf' are inseparable.

While the tone of the book generally seems aimed to elicit interest in and understanding for the situation of Deaf people in a hearing society, there can be no doubt that Firth views deafness as an affliction and fully subscribes to the oralist education policies of the day which sought to separate Deaf people from one another:

> Many cities have day-schools for the deaf, and day attendance is generally to be preferred, for this keeps the child in a hearing environment for as much of the day as possible. Should it become necessary for him to attend a residential school, no great harm is likely to result, but special efforts will have to be made, when he is at home during the holidays, to see that he is integrated as far as possible into the groups of children around the home circle, and that he is not allowed to spend his whole time in a "deaf" environment, with his handicap for ever foremost in his thoughts. (p.63)

It would seem that the educationalists and Missioners of this time feared that Deaf people rather than being 'individualistic' would indeed form a community unless special measures were taken to prevent this.

The book also offers important insights into the attitudes of the missioners to the spiritual care of their congregations. Firth quotes what he calls a 'classic' description, the received wisdom of his time, from Dr E. S. Greenaway, Head of Doncaster School, that Deaf people suffered from "intellectual malnutrition, social deprivation, educational retardation, emotional frustration, moral and spiritual starvation, economic

limitation, and aesthetic impoverishment" (p.21). Yet, in contrast to this 'moral and spiritual starvation' he states that

> The deaf can safely be allowed to have spiritual life as rich and valuable as our own, except that it may be different in scope and in kind. (p.36)

What this 'rich and valuable' spiritual life might consist of, Firth does not speculate, but the claim for its existence does not sit easily with the description which follows of a simple, natural faith he feels that he has observed in some Deaf people:

> To most of the deaf, their religion is extremely simple. God is Providence, the Heavenly Father whom they have learned to trust. Who knows what small voice speaks to them in the silent groves of their heart? Whatever they may have been taught by conscientious schoolmasters and struggling clergymen, life is its own teacher. They have seen what they have seen and know what they have known, in nature, in other people, and in themselves; and if they come to the conclusion, as so many of them do, that in spite of all their afflictions God is their good Father, it is not because anyone has managed to indoctrinate them. I am convinced that nearly all Church doctrine is incomprehensible to them – merely because it is abstract: it relies on language, symbols and analogies. (p.36)

This romantic notion of the unlettered Other as having a natural simplicity and purity and therefore being open to intimations of divine understanding fits with Broesterhuizen's (2005) contention that the Deaf community has undergone spiritual colonialism. Similar ideas have been applied in other colonial situations, for example Greer (2005) describing the early French Jesuit Missions to Canada.

However, Firth seems to be suggesting that even with the aid of the missioners Deaf people will be unable to grasp the most fundamental tenets of faith and doctrine as mediated by language, symbols and analogies; a view strongly reminiscent of the conclusions of the Milan Congress that sign language is inadequate and inappropriate for the transmission of divine truths.

Firth also comments on the reactions of Deaf people who have been bereaved. He describes an incident in which he found a Deaf man calmly filling in his pools coupon beside the body of his wife who had just died. The man had not alerted anyone to her death since he wanted to finish the pools coupon and post it on his way to see the doctor. Firth attributes this to a matter-of-fact attitude among Deaf people: death is inevitable and must be met with stoical resignation. He concludes:

> the deaf do not dramatise their feelings. They know little of romantic literature or social attitudes. A spade is a spade... marriages and deaths seem to be faced plainly and matter-of-factly. It is this simplicity of attitude that enables the deaf to rise above the many pains and pinches of their situation. (p.28)

The notion, substantiated only by this one anecdote, that Deaf people are somehow not troubled by death and immune to grief seems to permeate later accounts unchallenged.

The role of the missioner as gatekeeper, having power over access to services, health and job opportunities is often cited in later literature. For some Deaf people, church attendance was not so much a matter of religious faith as keeping in favour with the missioner in order to access these necessities. Ladd (2003) records the widely held Deaf view 'Not at church Sunday, missioner won't find you a job Monday' (p.341). However, Firth characterises the relationship in a different way. He sees the role of the missioner in finding the Deaf person a job on Monday not as conditional upon attendance at church on a Sunday but as the natural outpouring of practical Christian charity that stems from a concern for the spiritual welfare:

> I believe that the deaf world is one of those small pockets remaining, where the Church – using the word in the widest sense – is acting according to its real nature in making a true combination of the two commands to love God and one's fellow. Societies for the deaf were mostly founded as acts of Christian charity, to preach the Gospel to those who could not hear it for themselves, and to help those in need. Thus it is the same man who preaches on Sunday, and finds the deaf man a job on Monday, and I think the deaf themselves are aware of the essential connection between these two

> activities. Prayer and worship both arise from and produce practical action in the material world and each gains profundity thereby. (pp.37-38)

For Firth it is highly significant that the role of guarding and transmitting Christian faith should be matched in practical action by good works, as directly instructed in the New Testament.[5] Lysons (1965) indicates that many missioners shared this view that their work was better performed by a man of faith motivated by holy charity than by a detached professional.

In Firth's view religion was an essential aspect of Deaf community life, not only as a prime reason for the founding of the Institutes but also as part of their continuing work:

> The Institute must have somewhere to brew tea, and it must have a chapel, whether this be a proper room, or merely a cupboard on the wall opened out on Sundays. (p.96)

The Church and its members are seen as central to the running of the Institute during the time of the missioner:

> The Institute building is not the property usually of the deaf members, but, within it, their affairs are run by the Deaf Club Committee, or Deaf Church Council as it is sometimes called. Sometimes these are two separate bodies, but this is rare. (p.101)

1.8 The Era of Chaplains

From the 1970s changing social attitudes were directly influencing how the Voluntary Societies were run and funded. The functions of a generic welfare officer or missioner were separated out into specialised types of services and the funding which formerly went directly to the Institutes from local authorities was rechannelled to these specialist social work, employment and benefits services. By the 1980s interpreting, formerly

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[5] "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." James 2: 14-17

the role of the missioner, was also beginning to emerge as a distinct profession.

In all of this the spiritual welfare of the Deaf community seems to have been the poor relation with no comprehensive plan for how this was to be addressed if it was no longer the responsibility of a paid missioner. Lewis (2002) describes how this resulted in a variety of Deaf Church provision according to local circumstances. In some areas the Deaf clubs were able to survive despite the withdrawal of local authority grants and the welfare workers continued to lead the church services for a time. In other places church services stopped abruptly with no alternative provision. Gradually the dioceses of the Church of England started to fill this void and accept responsibility for the Deaf Church:

> In some cases, as in Lichfield, the diocesan Bishop realised that the services had stopped and appointed a chaplain to remedy the situation. In other situations, the Church of England Council for the Deaf (the successor to the Central Advisory Council and forerunner of Committee for Ministry among Deaf People) had to campaign for the provision of chaplains. A survey by the NDCC [National Deaf Church Council] in the early 1980s edited by Brian Murray, the Organising Secretary of the CECD shows a Deaf church still in transition from one era to the next. Thirteen dioceses are still served by local voluntary organisations with a principal officer carrying the responsibility of chaplain and finding it difficult to find time for anything other than social work. Thirteen dioceses employ full or part time chaplains, three of whom are seconded to teams of social workers. Fifteen dioceses have honorary chaplains and d/Deaf lay ministers, sometimes with social workers acting as interpreters for honorary chaplains. In some of these dioceses, the d/Deaf lay workers provide pastoral care, in others the only provision is for worship. Finally, in one diocese, Lichfield, the spiritual care of d/Deaf people is through a council with representatives from the local voluntary societies and the diocese with joint funding and the chaplains stipend provided by the diocese. (p.65-66)

This snapshot of the Deaf Church at the beginning of the 1980s shows a number of areas where the old system of Voluntary Societies was still offering spiritual care for its members. The transition was clearly gradual but thirty years on the era of chaplains is firmly established. While the

Voluntary Societies may still have mission statements that claim they are serving their Deaf clients' welfare in a broad, holistic way, it seems hard to imagine now that the person responsible for the day to day management of the Deaf centre would expect that leading a Christian church service on a Sunday was part of their job description. Nor would they be likely to agree that their role was to help members of the Deaf community to "become useful citizens and good christians" (NSDDS, 1968, p.15). However, while services such as social work with Deaf people have now moved out of the Deaf centres in many areas and are fully integrated into local authority departments, there are reasons why the physical separation of spiritual welfare from the Voluntary Society premises has not been complete.

Provision of services in the Church of England is based upon a system of parishes. The Diocese under study, for example, has some 400 parishes. Rather than expecting the clergy in every parish to become proficient in sign language, chaplains with specialist skills have been employed or trained to cover a whole diocese. In terms of church structures this tends to be equated with other kinds of chaplaincy arrangements, often referred to as 'sector ministry', which are not parish based; for example, school, prison or hospital chaplaincies. In reality there are considerable differences. The latter are all based in specific geographical locations in much the same way as a traditional parish. The chaplain with Deaf people is responsible for all Deaf people who may be scattered throughout the entire diocese. The chaplaincy would still need central places of worship geographically accessible to the majority of Deaf worshippers. Where such chapels still existed in Deaf centres these were often retained as bases for worship when chaplains were appointed.

The potential problems and benefits of running the Deaf Church according to a sector ministry model staffed by chaplains is explored in an Advisory Board of Ministry working paper (1979) *The Church Among Deaf People.*

1.8.1 The Church Among Deaf People

The literature from the era of chaplains tends to portray the role of the Church of England in terms of service provision. The Advisory Board of Ministry (1997) states in its Preface by the Bishop of Chelmsford:

> We have prepared this book in order to provide information for those who may come into contact with deaf people, or have to make decisions about the provision of resources for this very specialised ministry.

The Paper casts doubt on the effectiveness of the previous system of Missioners:

> The traditional image of chaplains in the past was of the full-time chaplain/missioner working from a Mission for the Deaf and Dumb, employed by a Voluntary Society and often only very loosely connected to the diocese. It is doubtful if this system ever worked effectively across the country as a whole. (p.27)

However, it also acknowledges problems with the various structures within which chaplains might work in a diocesan situation. Where a diocese employs a full-time chaplain that person can focus fully on the work with Deaf people, improving their communication skills and knowledge of the community and its culture. However, given that the Deaf people served will be spread over the whole diocese it means that the chaplain has to travel considerable distances in the course of this work. A major disadvantage for a full-time chaplain who is hearing is the risk of not feeling fully 'at home' in the Deaf community while being isolated from the parochial and deanery support structures that are available to parish based clergy. Where the chaplain works part-time with the Deaf Church and part-time in a hearing parish such support from hearing colleagues is available. Yet few dioceses are small enough for a part-time chaplain to offer an adequate level of service. Such an arrangement can also lead to divided loyalties and a struggle to balance fairly the demands of Deaf and hearing churches.

On the whole it seems likely that where a missioner had responsibility for the Deaf community in a particular location there were more frequent

opportunities to attend church services and more practical pastoral assistance available in times of need than is now the case. This has to be weighed against the fact that many of the missioners and welfare officers were not clergymen or had varying amounts of formal theological training. However, as has been noted, the Deaf Welfare Examination Board did require a broad knowledge of both scriptural, pastoral and ethical aspects of spiritual work.

1.9 Resurgence

While the Church of England continues to work within the structure described above of diocesan chaplains, the Deaf communities to which they are ministering have changed considerably since the 1970s. From the 1980s there has grown what has been termed a Deaf Resurgence – an increase in confidence, activism, self-determination and pride within the Deaf community (Ladd, 2003). A number of strands have contributed to this including linguistic research into sign language, equality legislation, and greater visibility of sign language in the public sphere.

The advent of this Deaf resurgence is concurrent with the latter part of the era of chaplains and operating in tension with it. Key features have been pressure for the ordination of Deaf clergy, BSL liturgies, and representation of Deaf congregations within the Church of England's synodal structure of government.

1.9.1 Deaf Liberation Theology

Lewis (2002) offers the first in-depth academic study of the Deaf Church in Britain from a Deaf cultural perspective. Lewis examines the history of the Deaf Church and uses liberation theology as a tool to explore Deaf people's experience of Church. She looks for evidence of Deaf-led culturally appropriate worship in the past and uses this as the basis for discussion of what authentically Deaf worship could be.

Lewis argues that the construction of Deaf people in terms of impairment within a medical model resulted in oppression, suppression of Deaf

culture, and some Deaf people internalizing negative views about their own self-worth and potential. In contrast, social and cultural models of Deafness can be experienced as liberating, and Lewis sees the Church as having a role to play in this liberation:

> The cultural and social models provide alternatives to the oppression of the medical model and encountering them is often experienced as a liberation of self... In fact, the feeling of liberation is so strong that it has been described in semi-religious terms as a conversion experience, or a total change of heart, mind and the way a person views the world. I would argue than an important role of the Christian church is to be a place where this transformation is made possible and encouraged as an important part of the journey towards God of individuals and communities. (2002, p.47)

The current research will explore experiences of oppression and liberation as recounted in the life stories of Deaf believers, and will reflect upon their interpretations about how these experiences impacted on their spiritual journeys and their identity as Deaf Christians.

In addition to criticising the medical construction of deafness as impairment Lewis also questions the role of Church structure and practice in the oppression of Deaf worshipers. She argues that adapting existing theology and practice to Deaf contexts, allowing for expressions of faith that are linguistic and cultural distinctive, is insufficiently radical. What is required is a liberation theology "challenging and changing the social and ecclesiastical structures that are the basis of the oppression of d/Deaf people" (2002, p.15).

Within the ecclesiastical structure of the Church of England Deaf churches have been expected to follow the fixed (written English) liturgical texts and rubrics of the hearing church and its administrative systems. This thesis employs Lewis' notion of ecclesiastical oppression to further explore the role of Church in terms of colonisation, introducing and enforcing hearing models and traditions of Church into the Deaf world. The focus of the study on the practical effects of church structures, rules and traditional practices on the life experiences and worship of a particular church group of Deaf Elders in context is itself in line with the

practice of liberation theology: it cannot be abstract but has to be constructed in direct engagement with those affected by the oppressive structures and situations (Lewis, 2002, p.16).

1.9.2 Deaf Clergy Accounts of Spiritual Journeys

> At present in the Church of England there are two priests and one deacon who are deaf and about 40 Readers. Many other deaf people exercise informal ministry within their own communities. (Advisory Board of Ministry, 1997, p.33)

The Advisory Board of Ministry paper states a number of reasons why ministry by Deaf people to Deaf people is considered desirable. It is suggested that communication will be more effective from a native signer, that a Deaf minister would be a powerful role model which would in turn increase the confidence of the Deaf community, and that a Deaf worker would generally be more 'at home' in Deaf situations. However, during the period following the Milan Congress there were a number of impediments to ordination for Deaf aspirants. Anglican ordination generally required a university degree and understanding of languages in which Scriptures were originally written, a level of educational attainment achieved by few Deaf people under oralism. When the Church of England later relaxed such requirements it was still very difficult for Deaf candidates to access the specialised training for ordination.

Two of the pioneering Deaf clergy have recounted the stories of their journeys to ordination. Vera Hunt was the first Deaf woman priest in the Church of England, and Peter McDonough was a Roman Catholic priest ordained by Pope John Paul II on his visit to Britain in 1982. McDonough (1996) describes the barriers he faced in accessing academic lectures during his seminary training in Spain:

> It was physically impossible to lipread or follow any lectures. The fact that they were in Spanish made no difference, they might as well have been in English or Chinese. No provisions were made for me; I sat in the back row and relied solely on reading books and notes. This was hardly satisfactory, and I missed out on all discussions and debates which were a crucial part of any learning formation. (p.38)

Hunt (1996) describes her progression through the various levels of ministry as they became open to Deaf people; first as an authorised Lay Helper, then Licensed Reader and later to the ordained ministries. Hunt reflects on the stalemate that existed in her experience of ministry: a lifetime of experiencing hearing attitudes towards Deaf people had led to a feeling of helplessness, and Deaf people were allowing this situation to continue by not challenging it:

> Looking back over the years, I realise that through being deaf I received no choice in life – no choice to follow a vocation – no choice to explore my beliefs that there was a God – no choice to serve Jesus. I feel strongly that this was not because of my deafness, but because of the wider church's lack of understanding about a deaf person's needs. Years wasted through sitting back and watching others serve and participate...An important thing that emerged from the Lay Helpers' Course was the realisation that the doors of the church were not completely closed to the deaf world – the realisation that we should have more forward attitude – it was up to us to push open those doors and break down the barriers that were keeping us outside – a task that we are still working on today. (pp.25-26)

By 2002 there were 10 Deaf people working as ordained clergy in the Church of England in Britain (Shrine, 2002, p.27). As the number of ordained Deaf people in Britain grew they formed themselves into an organisation for mutual support, Deaf Ecumenical Clergy UK. This group of Deaf priests, both Anglican and Roman Catholic, also works together on creating new forms of BSL liturgy and exploring appropriate ways of worship for Deaf people. It is interesting to note that the organisation is ecumenical: for its members the bonds that exist between Deaf people mean they can more easily work with Deaf clergy of other denominations than with hearing colleagues from within their own Churches. The demand to find ways to reach other Deaf people is so urgent that it transcends denominational boundaries. In this respect the emerging structure of the Deaf resurgence mirrors the evangelical impetus and largely non-denominational emphasis of the early Deaf Church.

1.10 Research with Older People

Becker (1980) presents a study of Deaf Elders in the context of the Deaf community and its relationships. It is an early example of research that takes account of the views of Deaf people themselves about their own lives. In terms of both topic area and research techniques it relates closely to the current research project.

Becker describes her research as "an exercise in applied anthropology" (p.x). The aim of the project was to collect information about elderly Deaf people in order to inform those professionals responsible for providing services to them. Bearing in mind that the text is from 1980, the author makes a bold choice of method in opting to research the question by focusing on the Deaf community rather than relying on secondary data from literature or the views of hearing professionals involved with Deaf people. The research was conducted with a sample population of 200 Deaf people aged 60+ in the San Francisco Bay area. The data collected was in the form of field notes made over one year from either participant-observation at deaf social events, or from interviews with a subsample of 60 Deaf informants. Additional material was also obtained from approximately 30 others; those involved with the Deaf community in a professional capacity or relatives of the elderly Deaf people in the study.

Becker concludes that the coping skills and adaptations learned through life by Deaf people trying to make their way in a predominantly hearing world are valuable resources in meeting the problems of old age. Being part of a strong-knit community and having access to peer support reinforces a sense of identity and self-worth. In old age this may be a great asset to Deaf people compared with the mainstream American culture which values personal autonomy and individualism. Becker found that the Deaf Elders in her study had five or six close friends, often life-long friendships from school days, compared with fewer and more transient friendships among elderly hearing people.

Perhaps Becker's most significant contribution to the field of Deaf studies concerns the transmission of culture. Becker's insights from

anthropology allowed her to recognise a most important feature of Deaf life: the central role of residential Deaf schools in the transmission of Deaf culture. Since the vast majority of Deaf children are born to hearing parents, transmission of language, culture, and the development of Deaf identity tend not to be through the family. Becker attributed the strong peer-group bonds she found among Deaf people to the intense experiences of discovering sign language when encountering other Deaf people at residential schools and the consequent possibilities for socialisation and personal development.

While Deaf studies has appreciated the importance of the residential schools and the huge value Deaf people place upon education and the future of Deaf children, it was perhaps slower to recognise the other point that Becker makes in regard to transmission of culture. For those Deaf children with Deaf parents the process is very different. Becker identifies that the self-perception, attitudes and expectations among intergenerational Deaf families are markedly different from those with hearing parents. Very little research makes this distinction when trying to interpret varying attitudes and responses within the Deaf community. An attempt to seek generalised Deaf values is more common. Perhaps this has been an inevitable consequence of trying to gain acceptance for the concepts of Deaf community and Deaf culture – investigating differences within the Deaf world had to be set aside in the early stages of establishing a new discipline.

The importance attached to this notion of transmitting Deaf knowledge between the generations was such that it was a main aim and motivation for many who participated in Becker's research:

> Many informants expressed a wish that their individual life experiences might have some relevance for future generations of deaf people. I hope that they will view my interpretation of those experiences as consistent with that goal. (p.xi)

This theme of passing on Deaf knowledge and experience to future generations will be explored in the context of Church in the current research.

Becker (1980) is also one of the few texts to include material on Deaf community attitudes to the approach of death and how the topic of death was discussed among community members. Becker categorizes the discussions which she observed as forming two patterns; one where a death was anticipated and the other where death came unexpectedly:

> People are concerned about the details of death. The death and dying process tends to follow two patterns: one pattern when a person dies suddenly and another when a person has a lingering illness.
>
> Mrs. Gerardi was seriously ill for a long time. Her friends talked about it continually. They took turns keeping her husband company each time she was hospitalized. When she died, little was said about her actual death. Instead, people discussed the details of her funeral.
>
> In contrast, when Mrs. Moore died suddenly, speculation was rampant as to the circumstances under which she died. Many people approached me to ask if I knew what "really" happened. They would then discuss the new information among themselves. (pp.95-96)

Becker's work formed part of wider body of research literature on the topic of aging carried out in California. Another example which has particular relevance to the present thesis is Myerhoff's (1978) study among the elders of a Jewish community: a group united by the common experiences, culture and attitudes of their religious identity. There are also parallels with Deaf experience in that both groups were isolated from the surrounding majority community and from other generations in their own families. Having emigrated from Eastern Europe to America Myerhoff's Jewish Elders had experienced separation from older generations of their family. They were also increasingly distanced from their own children who were eager to assimilate with the wider community and no longer communicated in the language of their parents.

All the Deaf Elders who act as key informants in the current study had hearing parents and themselves have hearing children.

1.11 The British Deaf Community in the 1930s

The core Deaf Church members range in age from 60 to 90 with the majority being over 70. The older members attended school during the 1930s and were leaving to join the adult world of the Deaf Church and club at around the time the present Deaf centre was opened in 1938. A picture of the situation of the Deaf community in England and Wales at this time can be obtained from a report prepared for the Ministry of Health and Board of Education (Eichholz, 1932). Lysons (1973) compiled key statistics from this data which give us an overview of the world the Deaf Elders would have experienced.

In 1930 a total of 3951 children were being educated in certified schools for deaf pupils. Of these 3147 were considered to be "deaf and dumb". There were 30 day schools and 20 residential. Three of the residential schools also had departments for blind children, including the school which the Deaf Church Elders attended in the area under study. Only in London and Bristol was there provision for partially hearing children in separate schools, accommodating 147 pupils.

At this time the statutory age of school admittance for Deaf children was 7 but 53% of the pupils had in fact been admitted before the age of 7 and 36% at 5 or younger. Admittance later than the statutory age was not uncommon; Eichholz gives the figure of 21% and attributes this to parental reluctance to send their children to a school for deaf pupils or to be separated from them by residential provision. The statutory age for admission of deaf children was later lowered to 5 - the same age as hearing pupils - by the Education (Deaf Children) Act of 1937.

Lysons (1973) notes that one of the reasons cited for admitting deaf children to school at a later age than their hearing peers was the difficulty of making a definitive diagnosis of deafness at this time and the absence of any established standards for distinguishing degrees of deafness:

> Eichholz observed that it was not infrequent for a child, who had been the victim of a faulty diagnosis, to be sent to the wrong type of school or not to be sent to a special school at all. In the case of deaf and dumb children there was the danger of classifying them as low grade mental defectives. With regard to the partially deaf, the absence of any definite medical standard to guide school medical officers in selecting cases suitable for admission to schools and classes for the partially deaf sometimes caused partially deaf children to be taught with the deaf and dumb or, alternatively, kept too long in an ordinary school until their hearing power and speech had deteriorated to a marked extent. (p.508)

Considering pupils who had left the schools for deaf children in the years 1923-1930, Eichholz found that 71% of men and 66% of women were in employment. Using school data about the proportion of 15-16 year olds who were deaf, Eichholz extrapolated that there were around 34,000 people in England and Wales at this time who were "deaf and dumb".

There were 60 Missions concerned with the welfare of adult Deaf persons; 34 of these were run by the various dioceses of the Church of England, 2 were Roman Catholic and the rest had no denominational affiliation. However, the Missions which were organised by the Church of England made their services available to any Deaf person in their area regardless of denomination. There were 74 Missioners, 15 of whom were 'clerks in holy orders', 1 Catholic priest, and 20 who were themselves Deaf. Eichholz was able to establish that of his hypothetical 30,000 deaf and dumb adults, over 18,000 were on the books of these Missions, and some 5000 were in mental hospitals or public assistance institutions;

> the balance being unaccounted for due to such reasons as the absence of any system of registration, the lack of missionary organisation in certain areas and the reluctance of many orally taught and speaking deaf to join missions where the manual method of communication was used. (Lysons, 1973, p.517)

Of the 17,877 persons for whom Eichholz obtained employment data from the Missions, 81% of men and 74% of women were employed albeit in a restricted number of trades. Male employment was concentrated in trades such as shoe making and repairing, carpentry and cabinet making,

or baking. Women were mostly employed in sewing and dressmaking or domestic work. The narrowness of the range of occupations was attributed to limited vocational training in the schools and lack of initiative on the part of the Missioners in seeking out new employment opportunities. The latter appeared to be highly significant: Eichholz noted that the labour exchanges were doing little to secure employment for Deaf school leavers and that this responsibility was largely falling to the Missioners. In spite of this, and the large proportion of Deaf adults served by the Missions, few of the Missions were receiving financial assistance from public authorities as allowed by the Poor Law Act of 1930. Eichholz found that only 14 Missions received any such assistance and that in total this only amounted to a little over £400.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 The Research Topic

The research project began as a reflection upon two related incidents described below.* Both concerned bereavement and were linked by the use of a common sign: 'not bothered'.

The Diocesan Chaplain among Deaf people went to visit a former member of his congregation. Joan, now in her eighties, was a widow. She and her husband Bill had been members of the Deaf Church since they left school. For over forty years they had held positions of responsibility; he was committee treasurer and church warden, she had taken her turn on the rotas to serve refreshments or provide the altar flowers. Joan explained her absence from church to the Chaplain: "I am on my own now, but I am not bothered. My husband used to drive the car so now he is dead there is no-one to bring me to church. I am not bothered."

The Chaplain found the incident disturbing and reported the conversation to me in the hope of enlightenment. As a relatively newcomer to the Deaf Church he wondered if there was some information he was missing, or perhaps some Deaf cultural way of thinking about death that he had failed to understand. He could not believe that Joan was really not bothered by her isolation, missing church services and not seeing her friends. Joan's situation was very similar to that of another widowed church member, Lucy:

After the death of her husband Tom, Lucy would spend hours contacting the other church members by Minicom (a text telephone) or via the Typetalk relay service which allows Deaf text phone users to converse with hearing people through an operator. During one such conversation

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* Material taken from field notes written by the researcher or the creative research stories compiled from such notes are identified in the text by use of an italic font. Direct quotations from research participants are distinguished by the use of indented italic font.

Lucy told me that now her husband was dead there were things she could not do, including coming to church. Lucy said that she had hobbies, interests in the house, and was not bothered about the things she could no longer do. But the church members concluded she was lonely as these long conversations had no particular purpose, and given how difficult most of the group find written English communication they tend not to take the trouble of text conversations unless they have specific information to impart or requests to make.

On the surface, such responses to the experience of bereavement might appear unfeeling. Deaf culture is often characterised as very direct. What might seem impolite or even shocking to a hearing person is considered more socially appropriate than ambiguity or prevarication (Mindess, 1999). I had frequently been told by hearing people working in the Deaf community that in Deaf culture everything was 'black or white' and even that sign language itself was incapable of expressing subtle distinctions. I speculated about Firth's (1966) contention that Deaf people have a 'matter-of-fact' attitude towards death. A psychologist I spoke to suggested that separation from parents and the emotionally deprived environment of a residential school might give rise to a lack of empathy for others. But all these ideas seemed unsatisfactory and superficial; an outside perspective stereotyping a people and their culture.

However, Deaf Studies as a discipline had little to say on the subject of death and bereavement to refute these ideas. In recent years there has been a renewed academic interest in attitudes and practices surrounding death with specific university departments, journals and conferences dedicated to the topic. Yet relatively little is known at the present time about attitudes and practices in the Deaf community, despite this being a major area of experience affecting all community members at some point. The absence of death as a topic is particularly surprising as Deaf Studies focuses on the language, community and culture of Deaf people. Similar systematic studies among other cultural communities, for example in anthropology, would usually consider death to be an important area of investigation. For this reason I decided to research Deaf cultural

responses to death: Deaf funeral rites and customs, ways of grief and the types of community support expected in times of bereavement.

The topic also connected with my work as a community interpreter. I specialise in religious interpreting; in church services, at meetings of clergy and for theological training courses. Many interpreters avoid working in religious domains. It either holds no interest for them or they acknowledge that they have insufficient understanding of its terminology and rituals. As in medical or legal domains, religious interpreting has its own lexicon. The much repeated adage is "you can't interpret what you don't understand".

A frequent part of my church work is interpreting at funerals. Some interpreters avoid funerals as potentially emotionally distressing, but personally I find it an immensely satisfying area of work. From my perspective as a Roman Catholic burying the dead is a work of mercy: it is considered a privilege to be the priest who 'sends a soul to God', and an honourable task to take part in that final act of service to the deceased person. There is also the satisfaction of knowing that one has made a difference to the bereaved. I often receive little cards or words of gratitude from family members who were, for the first time, able to follow the service. They compare this with their previous experiences of funerals for parents or partners from which they felt excluded because there was no access through sign language.

Since there were so few references to death in the Deaf Studies literature it was difficult to predict what areas would prove most fruitful for research. Therefore the research began with a very broad approach: an ethnographic study with no fixed hypotheses or specific research question other than to investigate whether there was anything distinctive about Deaf community customs surrounding death, funeral rites and bereavement. Absence of coverage in the literature might have reflected that there was indeed nothing distinctive to be found. My own experiences and initial discussions with chaplains among Deaf people suggested that the main areas of interest would be funerals and memorial services, Deaf ideas about the afterlife, systems for community support in

times of bereavement, and culturally acceptable ways of talking about death.

It seemed likely that older Deaf people would have more direct experience of funerals and bereavement. These were also the members of the community with whom I had the closest connections. So I concentrated my efforts on events when they came together and made field notes at the Over 60s club meetings on Thursdays and at Deaf church services and social events. Wherever possible I also observed funerals of community members or funerals where Deaf mourners would be in attendance. Participant observation in all these areas generated plentiful data but making sense of the material seemed to require taking a step back. For the Deaf churchgoers it seemed impossible to understand what they considered to be appropriate in terms of funeral rites without reference to their experiences and understandings of other religious ritual. Such attitudes would be formed and informed by their experiences of public acts of worship throughout their lives, particularly in the Deaf school and at the Deaf centre chapel.

In view of this need to place church funeral and memorial services in context as examples of religious ritual I began to concentrate the research on Deaf community experiences of church. A major aspect of this was conducting life story interviews with the Deaf Elders, focussing upon their experiences at the Deaf school and on joining the church at the Deaf club. These personal accounts were analysed to identify key events and common themes in their spiritual journeys. The life stories contained much significant material pertaining to Deaf history. The accounts related to me by the church members reached back to stories they had been told in their youth, spanning the entire 150 year period of their community gathered in that city.

In addition, from the time that the study had been conceived to the close of the fieldwork period I had observed major changes in the Deaf Church. Memorial services, regular events when I first became involved with the Deaf centre church, had virtually ceased. More Deaf congregations were moving out of the Deaf centre chapels and changing their traditional

styles of worship. It seemed vital that the history and practices of at least one traditional Deaf Church congregation was documented while there was still an opportunity to do so.

However, it became clear at this point that the project material now formed two divergent strands; one which focused on funerals in their wider context of Deafhood and religion, and the other more community-oriented aspects of cultural attitudes towards death, grief and support in times of bereavement. Further research into Deaf ways of grief is essential, not least to counter the cultural stereotypes that have dominated the literature to date, but also to illuminate how Deaf cultural values of collective support and reciprocity come into play in times of bereavement. But such research would require in-depth engagement with the literature of psychology and counselling and as such I felt that it was moving away from my own areas of specialisation. The starting point of the research had been my involvement with the Deaf Church. As a specialist church interpreter with access to one of the few remaining traditional Deaf centre chapels I felt I was uniquely placed to complete the study of Deafhood and religion: an ethnographic account of one particular Deaf church, its history, and the spiritual lives of its members.

The inspiration for the final structure of the thesis was my interview with Harry in which he recounted the origins of the Deaf church in the place under study. The narrative offered an insight into the way the community understood the significance of Deaf Church, and provided the overarching metaphor for this account of their shared experiences.

2.2 Selecting a Research Method

The considerations used in selecting a research method were that it needed to be appropriate to the research topic, aims and available resources. The main aims of the research were twofold:

1. to record the life of one Deaf Church still worshipping in its traditional Deaf centre chapel;

2. to consider the intersection of religion and Deafhood by using the real-life data from 1. to explore how individuals make sense of their religious experiences in the context of being Deaf and a member of the Deaf community, and conversely how they make sense of their experiences as a Deaf person in the light of their Christian faith to create for themselves meaningful spiritual journey narratives which synthesise these Deaf and Christian identities.

The primary consideration was to research this from a Deafhood perspective, privileging Deaf people's accounts of their churches, worship and spirituality.

The method chosen had to be suitable for researching culture, capable of generating rich in-depth data reflecting and respecting the knowledge and insights of participants. It needed to be achievable by a single researcher and suitable for use with a small sample or single case. In view of all these considerations the method selected was ethnography, a method with a primary objective commensurate with the research aims, namely

> understanding the social world of people being studied through immersion in their community to produce detailed description of people, their culture and beliefs. (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p.12)

Ethnographic research would allow the study to be firmly embedded in the context of the Deaf community. In the past much has been written about the Deaf community by hearing professionals and service providers. Ethnography is a method which acknowledges the importance of the researcher learning from those among whom the research is conducted, recognising the value of their experiences and insights (Spradley, 1979). The main tools within ethnography are participant observation and interviews during an extended period of fieldwork, paying attention to both behaviour and language, as the researcher "gathers artefacts and physical trace evidence; finds stories, rituals, and myths; and/or uncovers cultural themes" (Creswell, 1998, p.59).

Bourgois (1995) argues that the participant observation methods of ethnography are particularly well-suited to documenting the experiences

of marginalised and oppressed groups who initially may be hostile to outsiders. It is only within the long-term engagement of ethnographic fieldwork that the researcher can build the relationships necessary to ask probing questions and be considered capable of understanding the answers given.

2.3 The Research Setting

> Access and entry are sensitive components in qualitative research... By establishing trust and rapport at the beginning of the study, the researcher is better able to capture the nuances and meanings of each participant's life from the participant's point of view. (Janesick, 2003, p.54)

The British Deaf community is a minority group with its own language and culture, not readily accessible to outsiders. One of the main potential constraints on the research would be gaining access and establishing a relationship of trust, something which can require a considerable commitment of time on the part of the researcher. Consequently the decision was made to base the research in a Deaf centre and with a church group to which the researcher already had access.

I first become involved with the Deaf centre in this study in the early 1990s, beginning as a student of sign language, then as a member of the Deaf church, and later working as a community and church interpreter. My lengthy relationship with the church group and my language fluency meant that I was readily accepted and included in activities and discussions.

The Deaf Church identified for the study meets in a purpose-built chapel in a Deaf centre in the Midlands which was opened in 1938. The Deaf centre is managed by an independent local charity for Deaf and hard of hearing people. The Deaf centre church is under the care of a Church of England chaplain appointed to minister to the six Deaf church congregations in this Diocese. There are approximately 150 people in regular contact with the Diocesan chaplaincy and its activities. Around 25

of these are linked with the church identified as the main focus of the study.

Spradley (1979) discusses the need to choose participants who have sufficient cultural knowledge to act as informants. In the context of the Deaf community I selected 'core' members with reference to Baker and Cokely's (1980) definition. They identified various criteria for Deaf community membership including audiological (some degree of deafness), linguistic (sign language users), social (involvement in Deaf social activities) and political (involvement in the organisation of the community). Core members would match with all these characteristics. For the purposes of the current research I added the requirements that key informants should also be regular members of Deaf Church and have attended a Deaf school. The significance of the residential school in the formation of Deaf identity and lifelong bonds between community members was noted in the literature review. The residential schools and the Deaf clubs are the two main locations for the growth and flourishing of Deaf community life; the 'twin pillars of Deaf culture' (Ladd, 2003). As such it seemed vital that key informants should have personal experience of both these areas.

2.4 Data collection

Data was collected through interviews and participant observation in the following settings:

- Deaf church services in the Deaf centre chapel;
- Church social events;
- Diocese services and special events shared with other churches in the same diocese served by the same chaplain;
- Funerals attended by Deaf mourners;
- the Over 60s group at the Deaf centre;
- National Church meetings e.g. Deaf Anglicans Together;
- Clergy conferences.

Although, as indicated above, I had involvement with this group both before and after the period of formal fieldwork, field notes specific to this research were collected over a span of three years. These primary materials were supplemented by more lengthy (between one and three hours) formal interviews with three of the key informants among the Deaf church members and with two hearing chaplaincy staff (one lay and one ordained).

In addition, five people provided written accounts of their experiences in the Deaf Church. One was a Deaf church member who had prepared the material when taking part in a ministry training course. Two chaplaincy staff responded in written form to requests for information. A further two chaplains with Deaf people, themselves hearing, allowed access to unpublished pastoral reports which dealt with the topic of Deaf bereavement and funerals.

Supporting material was also drawn from the national Deaf Church magazine *Signs,* the archives of the Deaf centre where the church was located and Deaf church documents such as committee minutes, newsletters, orders of service and service registers.

2.5 Issues of Translation and Transcription

Kvale (1996) asserts that any transcript is not simply raw data. It has already undergone alteration and analysis through the act of being transcribed. The researcher will have made choices about what material to transcribe and the form in which it will be represented. Clearly this is compounded in the case of signed languages which have no written form without translation. With BSL material there would appear to be two significant and related issues to consider; ensuring that the researcher has understood the intent of the signer, and how best to convey this information to the reader in written English.

2.5.1 Conducting Research in BSL

Reviewing previous research studies based upon interviews with Deaf participants reveals a variety of methods for producing a written record of the interaction. Naish and Clark (1998) conducted interviews through a BSL interpreter and claim that the interviews were "transcribed with the help of notes" (p.25). In the absence of further detail the most likely method would seem to be that the interpreter voiced the responses of the Deaf person while the researcher made notes that were later expanded.

This method is refined by Skelton and Valentine (2003) who record the voice of the interpreter and use this as the basis of their transcripts. The authors appear to have given careful thought to the method and express concern about the ethics of a process which records their own voices and that of the interpreter but excludes the Deaf respondent. However, they do not effectively address the question of accuracy. Even the most skilled interpreter can introduce errors in simultaneous interpretation, particularly when meeting an individual for the first time and if there are unfamiliar regional signs or other social variations in language use. In simultaneous interpreting at normal conversational speed, while the overall meaning of the material may be represented accurately it can be difficult to find the exact word or phrase that best conveys a particular nuance to render the intention of the signer precisely. Skelton and Valentine's method of audio taping the interpreter voice-over allows no opportunity to go back and review the translation.

Ridgeway (1997) as a Deaf researcher conducted interviews herself in BSL. Having asked her question in BSL she wrote down the response in English and then signed it back to the interviewee "to ensure accuracy in recording and translation" (p.10). I would contend that the ability to repeat back to the interviewee in BSL the responses that have been signed in no way verifies the accuracy with which they are represented in English on the page. However, there are precedents which would indicate that this is considered by some to be a valid method. Until the introduction of video recording this was the way that the accuracy of statements given by Deaf people to the police and interpreted was verified, and it is still a

procedure using in formal interviews about welfare benefits. Such a method also has implications for the length of interviews and would inhibit the flow of conversation and potentially the rapport with the researcher.

Video recording of interviews solves some of the problems raised above and clearly has benefits when working with a visual language. It allows the researcher to maintain eye contact throughout, a most important consideration in sign language (Miles, 1988). Making notes requires breaking off the conversation. Alternatively the researcher could employ a note taker or interpreter but the presence of an additional person could adversely affect the relationship with the researcher. Recording means that the material can be reviewed at leisure; there is no need to make judgements on the spot about what information to note down or how best to translate a particular phrase. The camera may capture information the value of which is only recognised at a later time. A negative factor is that in order to fully understand the communication it is vital to have a clear view of the face of a signer. This can create problems about where to place the equipment. If the researcher's contributions need to be included in the recording then the conversation has to be conducted in a rather unnatural arrangement with both participants angled towards the camera.

An additional consideration in the context of the current research was that all the key informants, the core members of the church group, were over 60. A possible concern was that they might be unaccustomed to being filmed and feel uncomfortable, especially when discussing topics which they might consider deeply personal. I had also observed in previous research I conducted how some signers would switch from their normal language use to a more formal, stilted style in the presence of the camera. Clearly this was a potential problem for research attempting to capture natural, detailed narratives of personal and religious experiences.

In fact the main barrier to recording resulted from the locations in which participants were willing to be interviewed. Two participants were involved in a joint interview at their home, one interview took place at the

home of the researcher and another during a conference at a residential centre. However, these situations were unusual. Generally it proved difficult to arrange meetings outside the regular sessions at the Deaf centre and while people were very happy to talk about the research topics at these times the location was not suitable for recording. Other people would be sitting at the same table or milling around the large club room, able to watch the conversation if they wished. Setting up a camera would have drawn considerable attention to the person being interviewed and would no doubt have resulted in many interruptions and questions.

One attempt to work around this problem was suggesting an interview before the main club sessions were scheduled to begin but this was not a successful strategy, as recorded in the field notes:

After church on Sunday I asked Len and Vera if I could interview them and we arranged to meet the following Thursday before everyone started to arrive for bingo. Len said they always came early to secure a parking space so it would not be any trouble for them. When they arrived at the club Vera was most surprised to see me and asked what I was doing there. When I replied "I have come to see you" she seemed touched and drew me towards her for a hug. It appeared she had completely forgotten our conversation. Meanwhile one of the centre staff had asked Len to help her organise the list of lunch orders. By the time they were ready to come and sit in their usual places and talk to me the other tables were already filling up. A steady stream of people arriving had to be greeted individually, there were bingo and raffle tickets to be purchased and numerous other distractions. I started by showing Len some photographs and he began to describe what he remembered about them. At this point Harry and Irene joined us and an animated debate broke out concerning the exact location of the room in the pictures. Once they had resolved this to their satisfaction Harry wanted to talk about Deaf centre politics so it was not easy to ask the questions I had prepared for Vera and Len.

2.5.2 Representing Sign Language in Written English

In the current study the purpose of field notes and interviews was to capture cultural understandings and narratives of individual experiences, so the focus was on recording informational content. However, choices about how to represent this information are not straightforward. Oliver et al (2005) note that

> Transcription can powerfully affect the way participants are understood, the information they share, and the conclusions that are drawn. (p.1273)

Good ethnographic accounts are brought to life by the 'voices' of the participants with their distinctive rhythms, vocabulary choices and patterns of regional, gender, age and class variation. However, Roberts (1997) cautions about the potential impact of representing the language of stigmatised or minority groups using non-standard orthography. She recommends that informants be given the chance to be involved in the choice of how their material is represented. In the Deaf situation where the transcript is in a different language this is only an option where the informant is fluent in both languages. Monolingual BSL users can not be presented with an English transcript for approval or verification.

It was decided to represent extracts from field notes and interviews in standard English while retaining as far as possible the main vocabulary elements and images chosen by the participants. This appeared to be the best way to avoid any risk of perpetuating erroneous notions among readers unfamiliar with BSL that it is not a full and true language capable of expressing abstract and subtle ideas with clarity. The disadvantage of this decision was that to some extent the distinctiveness of individual contributions became submerged. Linguistic studies of BSL are not sufficiently advanced for there to be clear ideas about how to represent nuances linked with age, gender, region or class in translation and transcription. Any attempt to create such individual 'voices' felt like excessive manipulation of the material, with the researcher imposing her own judgements about the linguistic style of the signer.

Ladd (2003) notes that there are a number of features inherent in BSL which may need to be modified in translation in the interests of brevity and clarity in English. However, to the reader able to appreciate the poetic beauty of the original this appears to do violence to the text and diminish its richness. These features include:

- frequent use of storytelling and elaborate description to make a point;
- dramatic re-enactment of events where the signer assumes the roles of the participants;
- repetition which often forms a rhythm and spatial rhetorical devices that link ideas within a text;
- features of the creative lexicon of BSL with potential for neologisms, simultaneity, and other possibilities not easily expressed in written, linear form.

2.6 Portraying Personal Meanings and Real-life Complexity

Having selected the standard ethnographic tools of participant observation and interview, the question remained of how the stories of the Deaf Church and its members should be reconstructed. The thesis draws on a number of distinct strands from the research methods literature to guide the representation and analysis.

Firstly, it has drawn upon on what has been characterised as the 'new ethnography', described by Goodall (2000) as "creative narratives shaped out of a writer's personal experiences within a culture" (p.9). The conscious inclusion of the author's experiences and personal responses highlights the participatory nature of the research in contrast to the traditional detachment and invisibility of the researcher. It also challenges the researcher to a greater degree of transparency, demanding reflexivity throughout rather than as a preliminary or retrospective consideration, in line with the argument that "strategies for ensuring

rigor must be built into the qualitative research process per se" (Morse et al, 10).

A second theoretical strand influencing the construction of these 'creative narratives' comes from narrative research methods and has been termed 'narrative as inquiry'; that is, the act of writing as a research method in itself which generates data in the form of research texts, rather than 'writing up' results and findings after research (Richardson, 2000; Speedy, 2005). Explanation and analysis are blended into the narrative in a multi-layered text, reflecting on the experiences portrayed rather than separating out data from discussion in distinct sections (Ellis, 1995). In a sense this inverts the traditional view of what is deemed admissible evidence in research. However, exploring where experiences feel familiar and where they disturb the expectations of the researcher can be a powerful method for highlighting areas of cultural difference and exposing the subconscious assumptions of the writer.

In addition, this shift in what constitutes valid data can then be extended to the participants and our representation of their contributions. Lewis (2003), for example, states that since the records of sign language conversations are only glosses or the meanings of the conversations recorded to the best of the author's powers of memory:

> This obviously means that these sources are unverifiable, so I have tried to use them sparingly in conjunction with written sources. (p.25)

Clearly such an approach would undermine the aims of the present research, disempowering monolingual sign language users and giving precedence to written accounts which will necessarily be the voice of those who know enough English to potentially be influenced by hearing ways of thinking.

By contrast, lengthy passages reconstructed from interviews, conversations and incidents, remembered and translated, form the 'data' for the present study. These creative accounts are all based on events and quotations recorded in the field notes but are fictionalised in the sense

that the timing is often compressed: incidents and remarks separated in time have been drawn together to portray a 'typical' event or around a particular theme. This is done, in Carol Smart's (2007) phrase, in an attempt to "deploy the data evocatively rather than simply as evidence" (p.185) in a way which will enable the reader to enter into the Deaf world, which previously may have been entirely unfamiliar. Smart acknowledges that this method of representing and reflecting upon everyday personal life may result in what she terms messy texts which both break the neat flow of arguments on the page and introduce elements of ambiguity and contradiction. However, such an approach is transparent, reduces the temptation of research analysis to simplify and acknowledges the complexity of real life. Material taken from field notes written by the researcher or the creative research stories compiled from such notes are identified in the text by use of an italic font. Direct quotations from research participants are distinguished by the use of indented italic font.

2.7 Insider and Outsider Accounts

> I could only know what it means to be a deaf person from the outside in, by means of mental construction and empathetic leaps; I could not know it from the inside out. Yet both kinds of knowledge are illuminating for both parties, the outsider and the insider...deaf people have a privileged access to what are the crucial issues and where the natural fault lines lie; they can guide the outsider to the richest vein. (Lane, 1992, 1999, p. xix)

While I have attempted to be transparent about my level of communication skills and Deaf community experience, the fact remains that the research is written about the Deaf community by a hearing person. However, this outsider perspective has to some extent been balanced by working in a department for Deaf Studies which focuses on research aiming to benefit the Deaf community, and under the guidance of a Deaf supervisor. This has enabled those themes which are most important from a community perspective to be identified and prioritized, cultural resonances of particular actions or language use to be clarified and any unconscious influences on the hearing researcher from the

"unfounded traditional accounts" (Lee, 2001) to be challenged. Access to this insider perspective has also been invaluable in ensuring that the concentrated focus of the topic investigated here is interpreted with an eye to the broader context of the Deaf community as a whole.

2.8 Ethics

The British Deaf community is relatively small, and there are many connections between the Deaf clubs through church, sport and national organisations. Consequently anonymity is a problem. Since the identity of the researcher can not be hidden it is not difficult for anyone to establish the areas, clubs and churches with which I am connected and begin to identify the participants and situations portrayed. Those Deaf individuals who have given their time and shared their histories are happy to be identified. However, naming them may also reveal the identities of others in the field notes who have not given explicit consent, so all the participants have been given pseudonyms and some personal details have been changed. Over the years through which this history is traced there have been a number of missioners and chaplains working with the six Deaf church groups at various times. Again to preserve anonymity in the specific events recounted they are fictionalised and treated as a single character 'The Missioner' or 'The Chaplain'.

A further ethical dilemma centred on the nature of the participant observation. While for much of the time I was present in the field as a researcher there were occasions when I was in similar situations with the same people but as an interpreter and therefore bound by a strict professional code of confidentiality. However, in the majority of cases the interpreting was in the context of a public church service in which anyone could have participated and witnessed the same events. But I was aware that some club members might equate the person of the interpreter with the interpreter role and assume confidentiality. The distinction between public and private contexts was perhaps more helpful in this regard. Anything signed around the table in the Deaf club or in church was potentially visible to the whole room and is generally considered to be a

matter of public record. Conversations out of the public view, unless explicitly stated as being for the purposes of the research, were treated as private.

One set of events was excluded from the field notes; the regular 'Learning Together' sessions for discussing questions of faith open to all Diocesan church members. There was no discussion of group rules but this was clearly intended to be a safe space for exploring potentially sensitive issues. In a comparable situation in the hearing world there would be an expectation that matters aired in the group would remain confidential. Since I was not able to broach the topic with the Deaf participants to discover their expectations without diverting the discussion from its purpose, the contents of the group discussions were excluded from the research material.

3 PROLOGUE: THE DEAF MOSES

3.1 The Deaf Church Origin Narrative

The Deaf Church here began around 1860
But how did it come about?

The story is of a man
a Deaf man
a Deaf cobbler
a wonderful master craftsman

Because of his skill people came
both rich and poor
for him to make shoes and clogs

The master cobbler was standing outside his shop
A boy appeared
in scruffy clothes
no shoes or stockings
a Deaf boy

The cobbler took him into the house
cleaned him up
made him some shoes

The boy lived with his mother in the workhouse
His mother asked if he had stolen the shoes
The boy took his mother to meet the Deaf cobbler

They all talked
realised that there were other Deaf people scattered about
And that was the beginning
the first seed of the Deaf Church

In the Bible God tells Moses
to bring his people out of slavery
to free them and bring them to the Promised Land

In exactly the same way
God in some mysterious way told the cobbler:
"You are an educated Deaf man
You could found something that grows for Deaf people"

The cobbler began to teach Deaf people
in his mother's house
teach them the Lord's Prayer,
the Bible,
the word of God

People started complaining about his business
One rich woman was angry
her shoes were not ready
She went home to tell her husband the master potter

He asked "This man is Deaf?
Neglecting his business?
Teaching other Deaf people who never had an education?"

So the master potter went to see the master cobbler
They met
talked
and the master potter was very interested

"Your business will not suffer
because you have accepted the work of an apostle
I will pay your salary
as long as you continue to teach Deaf people"

The cobbler accepted
First he went to the workhouse
found other Deaf people around the area
found more and more
more and more came to be taught

A few of them had rich parents
they had been sent for a private education
Those who could sign well were set to work teaching others

The cobbler went further afield
on foot, pony, train
he kept going

His aim was to find a place: a home for the Deaf

Moses stood up on the mountain and asked God
"Please show me the Promised Land"
God showed him but he never went there
he died
never reached the Promised Land

The Deaf cobbler wanted to find a new centre
but it was not to be
like Moses he died before he got there

So they had to bring in another man
and then others
and at the end came our Missioner

Our Missioner was not happy with the old place where they met
a room above the employment exchange
on Sundays they turned the room into a chapel

The Mayor came to the harvest service
the Deaf congregation flocked in
so many they could not all fit
so many people they thought the floor would collapse

So the Mayor set a challenge
to find ten people to each give one hundred guineas
and he would give the same

The Missioner began
asking the descendants of the master potter who had started the work
they gave it straight away
asking the other famous firms
they gave it straight away

In six months they had the money
so the centre was built
built by the good hearts of Christian people

3.2 Introducing the Oldest Member[6]

The Oldest Member sits near the entrance to the main hall of the Deaf club with his back against the wall. From this vantage point he misses nothing: he can talk to everyone who comes in and out and see everything that happens in the club room. At 87 he has witnessed many changes in the club. It was opened when he was school leaving age, just ready to enter the adult world of the Deaf club, with its church, social life, politics and committees. There is not much about the history of the club or its members about which he does not have a story or an opinion.

At the Over 60s club on Thursdays the members like to occupy their regular seats. The Chairman and his friends have a table near the stage from which they can oversee the activities of the day, public announcements and the bingo games. Harry, the Oldest Member, is at a table surrounded by the other long-standing members of the Deaf church congregation. They tend to defer to him in many things; waiting for his opinion before venturing their own, or allowing him to be the spokesperson for the church with outsiders. He is used to having the attention of the group, whether presiding at church services, or as the main storyteller over tea afterwards. It is nearly always the Oldest Member who initiates and recounts the stories of shared memories from school days.

3.3 Context of the Narrative

Field notes soon identified Harry as occupying a central position in the church. It is his account of the founding of their Deaf Church that is reproduced above. Harry had previously held an established leadership role in the church and was still the spokesman for the group in many situations. This made him an obvious choice as a key informant in the ethnographic study. I requested a formal interview with Harry and his

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[6] The title is used with affectionate reference to the P G Wodehouse character, the teller of tales in the golf club.

wife Irene, also a key figure and official leader in the church, to talk about their experiences of Deaf Church.

It is important to note that the origin narrative was not solicited. It was clearly seen by both Harry and Irene as the natural starting point for anyone wishing to understand the Deaf Church, an essential element of my initiation into the shared knowledge of the group. Before the interview Irene told me that she had two written pieces about her own life experiences that I was welcome to use, but that her husband would be able to tell me about the history of the Deaf Church. I interpreted 'history' to mean a list of dates and names of those instrumental in the physical construction of the building. As such I did not anticipate that it would be directly relevant to the research aim of gaining greater understanding of Deaf Church culture and practices. However, it seemed that discussing this topic might offer a comfortable way for Harry and Irene to ease themselves into the interview situation.

I had allowed the whole day for the interview if necessary, knowing how important it was considered in Deaf culture to observe the usual courtesies, taking time over the greetings and sharing news before getting down to business (Ladd, 2003). I also thought that this preliminary conversation would be an opportunity for the couple to air any uncertainties about the interview process. But once Irene had provided us all with tea and biscuits Harry started to make some remarks about the church and its history. His wife responded that he should "save the information for the tape" and directed me to another room to begin the interview. Picking up on their exchange about saving his stories for the interview I began: "*Now* you can tell me about the history of the Deaf Church!" The entire origin narrative was immediately relayed without further questions or prompts.

3.4 Folk Explanations: Collective Remembering as a Resource for Resistance

> Myth is the emotion-laden assertion of man's place in a world that is meaningful to him, and of his solidarity with

> it...Through it men are related to their environment, to their ancestors, to their descendants, to the beyond which is the ground of all existence, to what is permanent beyond all flux. (O'Dea, 1966, p.42-43)

The chapel and Deaf centre were constructed at the end of the 1930s. The oldest members of the church congregation recall the opening of the centre. One might anticipate that the history of the Deaf Church as related by them would date back to this event. However, the origin narrative begins much earlier, in the 1860s. Clearly the Deaf Church and its history is seen to comprise much more than the bricks and mortar of the centre chapel or even those people who have worshipped in it.

Rather than being the starting point, the construction of the Deaf church building is the culmination; the resolution of the events and struggles described in the narrative. The 'seed' of the Deaf Church, that which sets the events in motion, is the awakening of a realisation within the Deaf Cobbler that he is not alone. There are others, Deaf like himself, who in isolation struggle for communication, education and fellowship. Together they can fulfil their God-given potential; socially, intellectually and spiritually. It is this coming together of a Deaf People that is the beginning of the Deaf Church. Thus the origin narrative is indeed an 'emotion-laden' narrative of the place and meaning of the Deaf Church in the life of this community, how it came into being, and the reason for the passionate commitment its members feel towards it. It reaches across the ages from Deaf 'ancestors' to the present day, from the dimly veiled past to present tangible realities, and to the 'beyond': the Deaf Church as a direct manifestation of the Divine will.

The particular importance of folklore has been noted for cultures and communities which do not keep written records. In the Deaf context Breivik (2005) comments:

> The cultural traditions of Deaf communities are transmitted to new generations of deaf people through folklore, myths, rituals, capsule life stories, and other artefacts... Signed and written stories both inform and are informed by Deaf traditions. (p.2)

The Deaf Church origin narrative here has parallels with other Deaf folklore. Padden (1990) discusses the widespread telling in American Deaf communities of the story of Abbé de L'Epée. The meeting of the French priest with two Deaf sisters was the catalyst for his subsequent endeavours in Deaf education. The names are then recalled of those to whom his methods were passed on, a chain of connections and transmission, down to Laurent Clerc who came to America with Gallaudet to establish public education for Deaf children. Thus, L'Epée is symbolically claimed as the ancestor of their own present day communities. This story is frequently related at the beginning of important Deaf club events, a collective remembering of the reason for the existence of the community and a way of passing on the tradition to younger Deaf club members and newcomers.

According to Padden, recalling the special circumstances of the community receiving its language, education and collective identity forms a locus of resistance: it serves as a reminder that such things are precious, a source of pride, and come with a responsibility of stewardship. In this way such folk explanations are of great significance for the lives of minority groups and for safeguarding their cultural resources. The heritage of the group and pride in it help to counter discourses of deficit and inferiority imposed by others.

Padden states:

> When these stories are told, it is clear that they are not merely anecdotes, but variations on a stylized folk-tale, to be rendered in heightened, lyrical form. (p.194)

These features are also clearly visible in the Deaf Church origin narrative. The language in which the tale was told was not that of everyday conversation. The delivery was measured, rhythmic, with certain themes given emphasis by repetition and elaboration. The start of the story was signalled by a rhetorical question. The narrative appeared to flow without hesitation as something frequently rehearsed. It is for this reason that the narrative has been reconstructed in verse form, to convey the sense of

heightened dramatic language and to attempt to capture something of the balanced rhythmic repetitions.

Padden characterised the language of the L'Epée stories told in America as 'essentially religious', incorporating images of light and themes of journey and transformation. The Deaf Church narrative has similar themes; the journeying of the Cobbler in search of a "home for the Deaf" and the transformation from isolated individuals into a Deaf community. It also makes explicit reference to the story of Moses. The Biblical reference functions not only as a comparison but also as a commentary, indicating how the narrator intends the story to be understood. It is to be interpreted as containing a profound meaning and symbolism beyond the actual events portrayed.

3.5 The Image of Moses in Narratives of Resistance

Levine (1977) discusses the employment of Old Testament stories and images in the folklore, stories and songs of Black people during the time of slavery. He describes the function of such narratives in enlarging the narrow confines of the world experienced under slavery "backward until it fused with the world of the Old Testament, and upward until it became one with the world beyond" (pp.32-33). Levine claims that the particular significance of the Old Testament figures is that they not only looked forward to heavenly justice, but that ultimately they achieved freedom from oppression in this world.

Such use of 'Moses' stories appears to be widespread in the cultural repertoires of oppressed peoples. Levine notes that it is not essential for the elements from which folklore is constructed to be original to a culture; what is important is how such external elements become absorbed into the traditions of a people to create meaningful explanations and a coherent world view. The Deaf Church origin story uses the Moses motif in a similar way to the slavery examples given by Levine. It characterises Deaf people as the Chosen People, a radical reversing of the worldview of their oppressors that Deaf people and their language were inferior and

deficient. Their lives are of immediate concern to God who calls a Deaf Moses to lead them to the Promised Land.

The Deaf Church origin narrative embodies the values of community and celebrates the potential of Deaf people to determine their own destiny. It celebrates the Deaf Church as an institution directly willed by God, and given into the hands of Deaf people to make the vision a reality. The chapel at the Deaf centre is seen as the fulfilment, long sought, of this struggle. Its status as the 'Promised Land' explains the passionate attachment of the Deaf congregation to the chapel. The chapel is the legacy of nearly 150 years of effort on the part of numerous Deaf people who have gone before, and it is the responsibility of the congregation to be good stewards and pass on what they have received to the next generation.

3.6 Folklore as the Repository of Values – Deaf and Hearing Versions Compared

McAdams (1993) notes:

> Myths capture a given society's basic psychological, sociological, cosmological, and metaphysical truths. A society's myths reflect the most important concerns of a people. (p.34)

Some of the main themes in the Deaf Church origin narrative have been considered as forming a discourse of resistance and embodying collective values. However, these themes become more evident when the story as told by the Deaf church members themselves is compared with the written record compiled by Deaf centre welfare workers.

The published account (NSDDS, 1968) occurs in a booklet to celebrate the centenary of the Deaf Society. It is not by a named author but being an official publication of the Deaf Society it can be assumed to represent the views of the Board of Management at this time, who were all hearing. This hearing account concurs with the Deaf narrative on all the major factual points. The celebration of the centenary in 1968 matches the Deaf

dating of the origin of the Deaf Church to the 1860s. The hearing version incorporates the story of the Deaf Cobbler, and names him as Charles Davis. It states that the first meetings were in his house and that later prominent families in the district, including a member of the Wedgwood family, provided the Cobbler with a salary. It describes the various premises in which Deaf groups met and the eventual founding of the current centre following an appeal for public donations by the Mayor. The two versions, the centenary story and the transcript of the Deaf Church origin narrative, are reproduced in full in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 for comparison.

Since the two accounts share much factual content it may be that one was derived from the other in large part or that they originated independently. Some of the Deaf Elders remember the centenary and the published booklet, some still have their own copies. The Deaf story narrated could be a signed version of the written account. On the other hand the printed version could be an interpretation of the Deaf story. Some points of the printed account certainly read like humorous asides in a conversational telling rather than details derived from historical records. The Board of Management which created the booklet could look up archival material but would be unlikely to have personal knowledge of the events related. Ladd (2003) describes examples of historical information about Deaf communities being passed down among the members, oral histories which one of his informants described as "a sort of chain" (p.319). He discusses the role of such histories in the formation and sustenance of Deafhood. Ladd suggests that many of these narratives were lost by the 1960s. However, in this situation the Deaf Elders are recalling their own memories from the founding of the centre in the 1930s when they were surely witness to the stories the older generations told about the early days of the Deaf Church. So it seems very likely that the Deaf Church origin narrative is tapping into such a chain of memory.

Fragments of a third account about the founding of the Mission are provided by Lysons (1965). He gives the date as slightly later, 1872, and cites a magazine[7] of 1875 as the source of his story that

> a deaf and dumb shoe maker sought out others...and gave religious instruction to them in a room at the National School in that town. (p.58)

Lysons notes that in many ways the founding of the Mission was typical of the pattern for the early Deaf societies, based in a populous industrial area and being what he describes as 'unsectarian', that is having no particular denominational affiliation. However, unlike many of the early centres for Deaf adults it was not aided in its initial development by a local school for Deaf children. The school was not established until some time later in 1893. Lysons draws attention to this to demonstrate that the commonly held assumption that an area would first have a school and then a mission did not hold true in all cases.

In view of Levine's claim cited above, that it is not essential for the raw material of folklore to originate within a community, it could be argued that it matters little which version came first. The significance lies in the way the material is selected and constructed into an account that is meaningful to the teller. It has been noted that the two extended versions of the story told from the Deaf perspective in the interview and from a hearing perspective in the Board of Management centenary booklet are very similar in essential points of content. However, they contrast greatly in tone and emphasis.

The individual human story of the Deaf cobbler is somewhat lost in the hearing version. The primary emphasis of the hearing narrative is the theme of welfare. The tone is set from the title page which states:

> For a hundred years the Society has cared for the deaf and dumb people... this is a brief history of a century of progress

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[7] Branson, J. The Staffordshire Local Mission to the Deaf and Dumb. *A Magazine Intended Chiefly for the Deaf and Dumb,* Volume III 1875 no 35, p.170

> and humanitarian endeavour in this field of Welfare. (NSDDS, 1968, foreword)

The Cobbler is introduced and named but first the scene is set locating him firmly as dependent upon the charity of hearing people. He is fortunate enough to have received an education thanks to the benevolence of the leading industrialists of the district. Since there was no local provision at this time, the fees were paid for some Deaf children to attend a residential school in the nearest large city. On leaving school and returning to the district, the Cobbler, Charles Davis, encountered many Deaf adults who were suffering poverty and unemployment on account of their lack of education and training. According to a local newspaper report quoted in the centenary pamphlet he muses

> "How many in these towns are there afflicted as I am, and is there no provision made for us? After leaving school does no man care for the souls and wellbeing of the poor mute; are we to be left to ourselves after leaving school?" (NSDDS, 1968, p.4)

Lysons (1965) does argue that the growth of Deaf education was an important factor in the early development of the missions, but not, as has been claimed by some, that a school always preceded the foundation of a mission. Rather, Lysons sees education as the catalyst, the essential prerequisite for Deaf people becoming agents in realising their own ambitions rather than remaining as passive recipients of charity. In this respect perhaps the framing of the hearing account to highlight the history of the founding of schools for Deaf children is justified. However, Lysons draws attention to another vital influence of education. The desire of Deaf people to gather together and share fellowship in adult life was frequently motivated by a wish to recreate the sense of community they had experienced in the residential schools. It is precisely this gathering together of a Deaf People that can be seen as a core value in the Deaf version of the origin narrative.

The 'seed' of the Deaf church is the realisation that although seemingly an isolated individual the Deaf Cobbler is not in fact alone. He is part of a potential community, a Deaf collective. The quest to found a church and

centre represents the desire for both a physical place and an emotional space where scattered Deaf individuals can be gathered. The freedom to which the Deaf Moses will lead them is at least in part the freedom from an isolated existence and the Promised Land the place for the coming together of the community. As a "home" for Deaf people, the Deaf centre church is a place of belonging and being fully one's self. This collective aspect of Deaf culture is repeatedly reinforced in the statements and actions of the group, from collaborative strategies for making the smallest decisions to the use of such self descriptions as 'us Deaf' as a positive and forceful marker of shared identity.

In the printed version of the origin story the reader is constantly reminded of what is portrayed as the lamentable plight of the poor afflicted deaf. They are saved from this situation by the beneficence of local gentry and industrialists who first of all financed the education that enabled the Deaf Cobbler to teach others, and then organised the Mission. While in this version Charles Davis, the Deaf Cobbler, remains the first instructor of the Deaf community in religion, his "noble endeavour" requires an official structure and sanction. A committee is formed which ratifies his appointment as "Missionary to the Mutes". The noteworthy hearing people listed at such length are not only providing financial support. They are actively involved, regulating, offering respectability and order to an ad hoc, small-scale initiative. In this account all the progress, the growth of the 'seed', is attributed to hearing intervention.

The Deaf account emphasises that the work among Deaf people was founded by someone who is himself Deaf. This man recognised the need and had a vision for the future, which the narrator represents as a Divine call to action. Like Moses, the Deaf Cobbler is to lead his people to freedom and give them their own place in the world, a home. He is to give Deaf people a Christian education. God gives this commission directly to the Deaf Cobbler. Deaf people are not the object of a hearing missionary endeavour. The help and generosity of hearing people is acknowledged but the work is always initiated by Deaf people themselves.

It is also interesting to note the relationships between the Deaf and hearing characters in the two stories. The hearing version emphasises welfare and assistance to Deaf people who are portrayed as largely helpless. In the Deaf account there is a balance in the phrasing indicating that the two main characters are of equal status: "So the Master Potter went to see the Master Cobbler". The Potter talks to the Cobbler as one business man to another. The Deaf Cobbler does not ask for help. It is freely offered when the Master Potter sees the value of the work which has been started.

The Deaf version of the origin story can be seen as claiming a share of the credit for past achievements. It is a narrative that resists the depiction of the Deaf community as the helpless recipients of charity by recording their part in initiating and bringing to fruition the project to build a Deaf church. Thus it challenges the outsider account of Deaf Church history from a Deafhood perspective. Not only is this important for understanding the past, it is a manifesto for the future. Like the L'Epée stories described by Padden, the Deaf narrative emphasises all the links in the chain from the Deaf Cobbler to the founding of the Deaf church and centre. A value strongly embedded in the origin narrative is that of intergenerational transmission, passing on what one has learned. Each new generation inherits the responsibility to continue the work and make it "grow for Deaf people". The narrative asserts that Deaf people are capable agents of their own destiny: what they have achieved for themselves in the past can be built upon and extended. The act of telling this story shares these values with new community members, and forges of them new links in the chain of memory, making them partakers in the responsibility for its continuation.

4 IN THE LAND WHERE YOU ARE STRANGERS

"All your days you shall dwell in tents; that you may live many days in the land where you are strangers." Jeremiah 35:7

> While the deaf child of deaf parents discovers the unnerving preoccupations of the hearing world upon entering a deaf school, the deaf child of hearing parents discovers with joy the solidarity of the deaf world, which replaces the incomprehension and alienation of his hearing home ... The discovery of a deaf community is fraught with emotional and symbolic significance; it is a rite of passage that is told over and over in deaf autobiography. (Lane 1992, 1999, p. 94)

The origin narrative celebrates the coming together of the Deaf Church. The 'home for Deaf people' is not only the physical founding of a permanent and purpose-built Deaf chapel and centre, but is the gathering of a Deaf community. The ideal of the Deaf Church in the origin story is a place where its members can truly belong, where their identity as Deaf people is fully accepted and respected. In contrast, the accounts related to me by the Deaf Elders of their experiences prior to becoming part of the Deaf community and its church often reflected a deep sense of dislocation and alienation. Stories of isolation and misunderstandings within their families were contrasted with the joy and a sense of homecoming they experienced when encountering other Deaf people at the residential Deaf school.

However, the sense of a common bond between Deaf people in this nascent Deaf community at school was repeatedly challenged by the oral system of education. Communication in sign language was forbidden and divisions set up between the children by stigmatising and punishing Deaf cultural behaviour and values. The oral system not only limited the educational attainments of the pupils but also impacted upon their spiritual formation: they were denied meaningful access to religious education in a form they could understand and were immersed in an atmosphere which devalued their Deaf identity.

4.1 Home and Family

4.1.1 Isolation and Difference

The majority of Deaf children are born to hearing parents, and this was the case for all the core members of the Deaf church at the centre. Only one had a Deaf sibling. The childhood memories of home and family recounted by the Deaf Church Elders focused on isolation and a feeling of being different. Some had a sense that their family did not want to accept or acknowledge their deafness.

Celia, a hearing member of the chaplaincy team described this sense of isolation and difference in her mother's life:

> *My mother, Ethel, was the only Deaf person in her family and felt she was always put on one side as different, a problem, a bit of a nuisance. So she never liked me to sign with her in public – she said she did not want people to see that she was Deaf.*

Irene, a life-long member of the Deaf Church, recounted her family's difficulty in accepting that she was Deaf. They sought a different diagnosis and possible treatments. They were reluctant to allow her to attend a school with other Deaf children:

> *I have been profoundly Deaf since birth. When I was nearly a year old my mother noticed that I always seemed to ignore her speaking to me and I did not speak at all myself. So my mother took me to see an ear specialist at the infirmary. After some tests my mother was told that I was too lazy to listen or speak. I still have his written note in my possession. When I was just over two years old my mother was told by another specialist that I was Deaf. She could not accept it.*
>
> *I was sent to the residential school for the Deaf but my mother was never happy about it and had me removed after nine months. With my father's approval, my mother, brother and*

myself moved to London for two years so that I could have further tests at Great Ormond Street hospital. The results showed that I was profoundly Deaf and that there was no treatment or operation that could make me hear. My mother was completely shattered. We moved again and when I was nearly seven I went to a local private school for hearing girls and although they were marvellous with me I could not read or write at the age of eight. The local authority told my mother about the residential school for the Deaf and I went with my parents to visit the school but they did not like it and refused to send me there. Eventually I was admitted to a different residential school when I was nearly nine.

Robert, the youngest of the core members of the Deaf Church, recalled his family seeming uncertain how to relate to him, sending him to tag along with his hearing brother to activities such as Boys' Brigade. Presumably they thought that his would provide Robert with company and a sense of being involved. However, it compounded his feelings of isolation as he was unable to make sense of what was happening.

4.1.2 Trying to make sense of the world

Stephen attended school with the others but is now living in another part of the Diocese and so attends a different Deaf church. He described how the childhood illness that caused his deafness also resulted in frequent periods of hospitalisation. Separated from his mother and unable to communicate freely with the hospital staff, he was encouraged to occupy himself with craft activities. It was also at this period that his lifelong attempt to unlock the mysteries of the written word began:

At Christmas my mother and father gave me a Rupert the Bear book. I loved the pictures and I tried to read. I loved comics, the Hotspur, Beano, Desperate Dan. Also the film star annuals with the pictures of John Wayne, Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers. In the summer holidays I went to the library. I

wanted to know the stories behind the films I had seen. Who was Ivanhoe? But the book was hard to grasp. I found "Reach for the Sky", but again I did not understand the language.

The difficulties of communication within families seem to have led to the Deaf children missing out on much information that was taken for granted by others. Ladd (2003), for example, cites the widespread belief among children who had never met Deaf adults that they would die at sixteen. Stephen's account of meeting his father for the first time gives the sense that he was habituated to everything coming upon him unprepared, as if the only knowledge was that which he could gain for himself:

My father was with the army in Rangoon for six years. The first time I saw him when he came home he was wearing a bush hat and was sunburnt. My Mum said "This is your Dad". I was astonished, thinking "Oh! My father is Black!"

Even such basic information as his own birthday was the subject of misunderstanding and confusion:

The secretary told me I had put the wrong date of birth on my application. I explained that when I was in the residential school my parents always sent me a card on the 21st. I always thought that was my birthday until someone asked me for my birth certificate. I could not find it so I went to the Register Office. They told me it was the 20th. I said that was wrong but they showed me. When I asked my Auntie about it she said I was born at night, a midnight baby. But I stick to the 21st, I prefer that, it makes me a day younger!

For some, missing pieces of family history were not discovered until many years later. Carol was in her fifties when her father died. Carol had a happy relationship with her family and their home was often the meeting place for all her Deaf school friends during the holidays. Before the

funeral the hearing family members met with the vicar and from their discussions he prepared a detailed eulogy about the early life of the deceased, his exploits during the war and how he met Carol's mother. After the service the vicar handed his typed script to Carol to keep. She was very moved and surprised to realise that she was learning this information for the first time. No-one in the family had ever thought to communicate it to her before.

It is not difficult to imagine that those children whose families were unwilling to accept them as Deaf, encouraged them to behave as their hearing siblings and peers, and were able to communicate little information directly to them, would have arrived at school confused about their identity and confused about how the world worked. Even those like Carol whose parents tried to involve them in family life still missed out on much everyday communication and information.

4.2 Starting School – Encountering the Oral System

Stories of school still form a frequent and regular part of the conversation among the Deaf church members even though most are in their 70s and 80s.

Stephen described his memories of school:

> *I started school in June, the summer before I was six. I knew all the boys in school by their numbers. We all had numbers in the back of our shirt collars. I wondered why we all had numbers. The beds in the dormitory, everything, was done by numbers. Thinking about how I felt at that time, I had no brothers or sisters at the school, my parents were far away, I was sad. I missed my parents. But when I looked round everyone was signing. The big boys, some of them were bullies, but I made some friends. We did not mix with the girls, only in the classroom.*

As well as the teachers there were four supervisors who looked after us outside the classroom. But the supervisors had no love, they were rough and hit the boys. I have met a lot of people from that school who say they hated it, but for me if I had not gone there I would never have become the person I am now. God had something in store for me, even though we can not see past the end of our noses and do not know what the future holds. The school helped me to learn practical things like shoe repair, woodwork, looking after children. So I did learn, but slowly. My speech was still terrible. There were no hearing aids then. But school helped me to grow up and to come out of my shell.

Stephen immediately emphasises that the positive aspect of school was seeing the other children using sign language and through sign language being able to develop friendships. The contrast between the incomprehension and frustration of oral communication and the ease and naturalness of signed communication among themselves quickly created strong bonds between the pupils. Brennan (1992) notes the irony of the positive effect of what was essentially for most a negative educational experience; it cemented a sense of unity and common identity:

> The very fact that BSL has not been used in schools means that Deaf people live with the reality that within their major educational experiences they have been denied the use of their preferred language... It is, above all, this educational experience which seems to provide the sense that many Deaf people have that hearing people belong to a different and alien culture... This shared sense of oppression of language, and hence of human potential, is at the very heart of British Deaf Culture. (p.4)

Stephen's account indicates that the boys and girls were in some cases taught together. He would have been at the school during the 1940s. Older people recalled that there was never any mixing between boys and girls. The Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb (1889) recommended that mixing of the sexes was "in all cases inadvisable" (Lysons, 1973, p.78) following evidence from Alexander Graham Bell

about intermarriage and the supposed risk of perpetuating congenital deafness. Harry, recalling the situation some ten to fifteen years before Stephen joined the school, stated that the staff were extremely nervous about any contact between boys and girls:

> *Locked doors. Boys and girls separated. If they caught you talking to a girl you were dragged off. "What have you been doing? Better take her to the doctor to see if she is alright." To see if she has been interfered with!*

It is interesting to note that the school numbers by which each child was identified are still known and referred to among the Deaf church members. At times they are used for clarification. On one occasion I mentioned that I had seen a man previously connected with the church and fingerspelled his name but at first no-one recognised it. Then one of group remembered him and used his school number. The others instantly recognised and remembered who was meant. Some of the school numbers still in regular use to identify people have been modified into a name sign.[8] This development would seem to be particularly worthy of note. The residential school at that time followed a completely oral system; sign language was outlawed both in and out of the classroom. The stories still told and cherished by the church group tend to be those which focus on solidarity between the Deaf children. Conflict with the hearing staff over the use of sign language is a frequent theme. Here, in a striking turning of the tables the Deaf Elders have taken the numbers which replaced their names, and claimed ownership of them, adapting and adopting them as part of the forbidden sign language.

Irene described the oral education policy operated by the school:

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[8] Such modification can be made by adding movement or changing location of the sign. For example the index finger forming the number 1 is then brought down to meet the extended thumb and tapped twice. The number 13 which would be signed with fingers beginning in a closed fist and then flexed upwards and closed again, is relocated to the bottom of the signing space and with fingertips pointing to the signer's left is waved by movement from the wrist.

Sign language was not allowed at school. Once I signed to the Headmaster and he hit my hands, so I had to keep my hands behind my back and try to speak. I picked up signs from the other Deaf girls (it was also forbidden by the staff for us to talk to the Deaf boys) after school hours behind the locked doors when the teachers were off duty. Signs helped me to become more aware.

Sign language was so precious that the children developed strategies for sharing it in spite of the risk of punishment. In Irene's account we also see the importance of learning from other Deaf people. It is the older children who initiate the younger ones into the signing community. What is passed on is not only the language itself. Irene states that through sign language she became more 'aware'; signed language was the means of acquiring knowledge about the world around her and how to manage at school.

Irene's account also contains hints of a topic that will be explored more thoroughly in the following section. She states that the children signed when the teachers were off duty, that is when the supervisors were caring for them. Her phrase 'behind the locked doors' still indicates an atmosphere of secrecy and risk but less so that with the teachers. This could be because it was easier to find a hidden corner outside the classroom in which to sign unseen by others. Ladd's (2003) informants recount strategies for signing in the playground, dormitories and toilets. But it is possible that the supervisors were more tolerant, turning a blind eye to the forbidden activity. Ladd reports differences between schools in the strictness with which the oral policy was enforced outside the classroom. The supervisors were responsible for the children for longer periods of time than the classroom teachers. It is possible that some compromise of the oral ideal was necessary to get the children through the tasks and activities of day to day living.

Harry described how the children all saw themselves as Deaf but the staff categorised and divided them into "partial deaf" - those children with some residual hearing, or who lost their hearing having heard speech -

and the rest, "deaf and dumb", viewed by the staff as unlikely to derive much benefit from their education. The teachers concentrated on the potential oral successes and neglected the others. All efforts were focused upon the acquisition of speech at the expense of education:

> *In the classroom, there would be say fifteen children in the classroom. Me, four or five others, with good English, knew some English words. We were one group. The others were neglected, they concentrated on us. That is what was bad. Now if they had a signing teacher it would have been different, but no, they were ignored. So a Deaf boy, deaf and dumb, we do not say that now, we say 'without speech', would have been there from age five to sixteen. Eleven years but if he could only say mum or dad, that was ok, though it took him eleven years to learn it.*
>
> *When I left Deaf school and went to the Deaf centre a lot of people said I cannot understand why you, Harry, went to the Deaf school because you have good speech, vocabulary, some hearing. I always say, well, as I grew a bit older I wondered if I went there to make the numbers up, they got a grant according to the number of pupils. It was the same with Sid, Bert and a lot more of us.*

Harry's account of the seemingly inconsistent criteria for deciding who should attend the school matches the information from the Eichholz Report (1932) that partially deaf children were often placed inappropriately. The division of the Deaf children perceived by Harry was furthered by a discipline policy which punished use of sign language and rewarded 'good' hearing behaviour:

> *When they caught us signing or doing something naughty (though to us it did not seem naughty at all) they always said "What would your mother think? What is mother going to say? What are you going to be when you leave school, good or bad? Good or bad?" It was cruel. I will tell you the truth.*

Looking back, it really was a crime to be Deaf, and to go to a school like that.

Harry recounted how being caught signing meant an entry in the Headmaster's mark book. At the end of the month there would be a special assembly where names would be read out and for each bad mark the perpetrator had to take a step backwards. The school used to receive free tickets for football matches and 'good' boys with no marks against their name were allowed to go. One story Harry often tells is about a particular boy could not stop signing. He had to take so many backward steps that he was almost out of the assembly hall. After months of frustration he took matters into his own hands. The other boys kept watch while he stole the mark book, climbed over the fence and burned the book in the boiler room. Since the book could not be found to prove whether any of them had earned a punishment that month they were all taken to the match.

Many of the school stories in circulation among the Deaf Elders resonate with Ladd's (2003) concept of '1001 Victories' (pp.307-310): accounts of the group sticking together, obtaining and sharing information, using humour to survive their situation and passing on strategies for resistance. Occasionally the stories concede the victory to the teachers with a grudging admiration that the children had been outwitted. Harry tells a story of the boys trying to steal fruit from the trees in a neighbouring garden. One boy was held by his legs over the top of the school wall so that he could reach further. All was well until the neighbour's dog appeared on the scene and in the rush to escape the boy lost his cap. The neighbour complained to the Headmaster and produced the cap as evidence but no-one would own up to the prank. The Headmaster made all the boys line up and show their caps. The quick-witted culprit remembered that one boy was in the infirmary and so borrowed his cap from his locker, escaping detection. The Headmaster was baffled that every boy had a cap. However, in the end the Headmaster won the final victory by waiting a few weeks until the boys had forgotten the incident.

He produced the cap and innocently asked who it belonged to. Not suspecting the trap the culprit put up his hand.

The years of being taught that signing was 'bad' behaviour has clearly had an impact on the group. Some have, to an extent, absorbed this value, though most have managed to reject its hold on them. As noted above, Ethel was still somewhat embarrassed at being identified as Deaf when her daughter signed to her in public. Lucy, also in her 70s, recounted that her parents were shocked and upset when they realised she used sign language; they insisted she should use lip reading and speech instead. When she explained to them that the latter methods were for mixing with hearing people and that she only signed with Deaf people they accepted this. The majority of the church group would not agree with this notion of conforming to hearing ways in public. They are Deaf and therefore they sign. They were shocked when Robert described visiting Lucy in hospital. A nurse had made the effort to communicate with basic signs and gestures to offer Lucy a cup of tea, only to met with the indignant "I can lip read!" To the rest of the group any attempt by the hearing world to recognise and use sign language is evidence of progress and to be encouraged.

Lucy would appear to be unusual among the Deaf Elders in allowing her attitude towards using sign language to be influenced by her hearing parents. Others in the group also had parents who were not in favour of the use of sign language. Harry tells how at school he received six strokes of the cane across his hands for signing because according to the teacher he was able to speak. When his father came to school for the one hour visit permitted to parents on Thursdays Harry complained about this treatment. His father responded "Serves you right!" and clipped him round the ear. Maureen recalls that her family had a different attitude. Her mother felt that the oral policy of the school was wrong and at home told her "You are Deaf. Use fingers!"

At the church Christmas outing the group members sit round a large table in a brightly decorated pub waiting for their meal to be served. The conversation is animated, full of fun, waving and tapping one

another to get attention. The Oldest Member looks across the table and with a twinkle in his eye signs to Maureen "You naughty Deaf person, signing, not using your voice." They all laugh in recognition of this reminder of school days. Surely they must be savouring the victory – they are still together as a group, proudly using their language in public, in spite of all the punishments and humiliations meted out to discourage them.

4.3 Mentoring In School

An important feature of Deaf school life which resulted in enduring bonds appears to have been a system of mentoring whereby older pupils were assigned by staff to take care of younger children. This mentoring relationship was frequently mentioned in the accounts the Deaf Elders gave of their time at school. Ladd (2003) notes that such a system was referred to by only one of his informants, but suggests that it would appear to merit further investigation.

Stephen refers to caring for younger children as part of his responsibility as a prefect or monitor in school:

> *When I was about 12 or 13 I became a monitor. I had to make sure the little boys cleaned their shoes and check they had washed their ears. Some of the monitors were unkind and would clip the little ones round the ears.*

Stephen did not make a connection between these duties and his relationships with specific people. Rather he summed it up as a valuable experience: childcare was part of the set of practical skills he learned in school. However, the unkindness of some of the monitors and the lack of any love in the relationships with the supervisors who looked after the children outside the classroom did lead Stephen to apply for a job at the school in later life. He wanted to be a House Father and treat the children well but his application was rejected, an outcome he attributed to their unwillingness to employ a Deaf person.

When others mentioned the mentoring system Harry also recalled that he had been responsible for looking after two younger boys. But he did not identify them or make any connections between them and the rest of the group. By contrast, the women church members described those they had looked after and the people who had looked after them at school as significant relationships in their lives. For them the mentoring appears to have been an important factor in creating the bonds within the group. There were a number of examples in the field notes of the women explaining the bonds between them in this way. The following was recorded at the Over 60s club:

A woman I had not seen before came to sit at the table regularly occupied by the church members. Vera had brought two photograph albums which she was showing to the group. One included some pictures taken outside the residential school building, perhaps at a reunion or open day. The newcomer, Rita, attracted my attention to the pictures and said "That is my school. The doors were kept locked, like prison." A number of the Deaf club members use the sign prison when referring to the Deaf school. Then she pointed to Vera and explained that it was Vera who looked after her when she started school. Vera used to wash her, but she was rough! Vera also looked after Irene. Rita and Irene were Vera's bridesmaids, and Rita was also bridesmaid at Irene's wedding.

Lucy attributes her membership of the Deaf church to the mentoring relationship. When she left school and started coming to the Deaf club she saw Irene's name on the church committee list. Since Irene had looked after her at school she immediately felt she had a connection within the group. This gave her the confidence to start attending church as she felt assured of a welcome.

It is probable that the aim of the mentoring system was to introduce new children to the ways of the school quickly and easily and to reduce the burden of caring tasks for the supervisors. Most of the children started school around the age of six and may have needed considerable help with personal care. However, it appears that the mentoring system also had an

impact unforeseen by the oralist staff; creating opportunities for new children to mix with older signers. It seems consistent with the accounts of signing behind locked doors at every opportunity to surmise that the older children would direct the younger children through the care tasks with the aid of signs. It is not difficult to imagine how this would have rapidly incorporated newcomers into the signing group and strengthened ties between age cohorts which might otherwise have remained separate. Members of the other Deaf church groups in the diocese who had attended different Deaf schools also mentioned people who had looked after them, so it would appear that such mentoring arrangements were widespread.

4.4 Religion in the Residential Deaf School

The residential school was founded by donations from local industrialists rather than any religious charity, and as such was not bound by any particular religious rules or denominational affiliations. However, formal religious practices were part of the everyday life of the school. Jackson (2001) states that with the exception of a school for Jewish children and the Roman Catholic Deaf School at Boston Spa in Yorkshire, all the Deaf schools in England accepted pupils of any religious affiliation, but "many schools followed the Protestant faith, incorporating some religious teaching in their curriculum" (p.67).

4.4.1 Public Prayer, Private Prayer

The Deaf church members interviewed all recalled set times of prayer forming part of the school timetable. There was a daily morning assembly with prayers and grace before meals. These prayers were spoken by the staff. Irene explained:

> *Every morning the Lord's Prayer was said (no signing) in the assembly hall, led by the Head. Also the prayers of grace were said regularly in the dining room by the supervisors (also without sign).*

The children understood little. Even those with some skill in lip reading would have struggled to follow the formal English words of the Prayer Book across the distance of the dining hall. Stephen recalls how long it took him to master the words of the most frequent prayer:

> *At assembly at 8.30 we would have a prayer, the Lord's Prayer or something like that, led by the headmaster or one of the teachers. I was only a small boy then and I did not understand. Later, I started to learn the Lord's Prayer. I would have been about nine or ten. I learned the Lord's Prayer and would pray at night before I went to bed. Not brilliant prayers. I would say "God is love. God is kind." Just simple things. I knew little English. But I knew there was something there, God.*

Already by this age Stephen seems to have absorbed from his educators the notion that prayers should be spoken in English, leaving him feeling that his own attempts at prayer were inadequate and unworthy.

An additional barrier to the experience of prayer was that the school regime left no opportunity for privacy. Irene recalls how she was interested in her Bible study classes and excelled in them but the school environment made it difficult for her to study or pray by herself:

> *A teacher encouraged me to read books after school hours in the day room in the evenings. But sometimes it was difficult to concentrate on reading while other girls played in the same room and I could not use another room because the doors were kept locked and the staff had the keys. I seemed never to have a moment to myself at all. I slept with the girls in the dormitory, so there were no private moments at all.*
>
> *I began to doubt God and was angry with Him because I thought He was cruel for letting me be Deaf. At this time I was very frustrated and felt I was treated like a criminal for being Deaf because of the many discriminations we suffered*

from the staff at school. At home on holiday I told Mother that I was unhappy and did not want to go back to school, and about my feelings that God was being cruel to me. Mother had a good talk with me. She could sign a little (she made up her own signs) and was good at finger-spelling. She said that God is good. He loved me as he loves all boys and girls.

The treatment Irene experienced at the residential school not only limited her opportunity for prayer and study, but for a time also seriously undermined her faith. For her the constant privations came to outweigh the joy of being with other Deaf children, particularly since they were not allowed to communicate freely. Irene began to question her own value as a Deaf person and wonder whether there could be a God who would allow her to be Deaf and thus experience such oppression. The resolution of this crisis of faith lay in the affirmation of her dignity as a Deaf person. Irene is reassured by her mother that God loves her as she is, as a Deaf person, and she does so through sign language.

4.4.2 Sunday Services

Irene described the pattern of Sunday worship for the pupils of the Deaf school:

Older Deaf girls and I were forced to attend the Parish church every Sunday morning, with the blind pupils of the school. We would all sit in the pews along with the local hearing congregation. The priest would preach from the pulpit and I would watch his mouth open and shut and open again just like a goldfish. Then I would become restless and bored but our teacher would tell us Deaf to keep still. To this day I have never understood why we had to go to the hearing church just to sit there with no interpreters at all.

Irene uses the negative sign 'forced' to describe her unhappy experiences of attending church. Unable to access the content of the service, she

could not understand why the Deaf pupils were forced to endure this charade of taking part.

It would appear from Irene's account that only the older children attended the parish church but there were also religious services in school on Sunday evenings. The accounts of how and by whom these services were conducted varied. Irene said:

> *There were church services at school every Sunday evening which was a little better than being at hearing church. The teachers led the worship.*

Irene's initial description of these services suggested that they were signed. She said that when she first came to church at the Deaf club she could not understand the signing because at the Deaf school they had only seen what she characterised as 'simple sign' at the religious services in school. This idea of the school services incorporating some basic sign language would explain why Irene found them more accessible than the services in the parish church. However, during a later interview with Irene and Harry they were adamant that the teachers never signed.

It is difficult to reconcile Irene's memory of knowing 'simple sign' from church services at school with Harry's insistence that the school was completely oral in every respect. But in the interview where this was stated he immediately went on to focus on the situation in the classroom, the official oral policy of the school. Harry is one of the oldest church members with the earliest recollections of life at the Deaf school. So it possible that they were describing different situations and that the strict oral policy was relaxed a little in later years. A further possibility is that the school staff permitted a certain pragmatic flexibility in particular situations.

Firth (1966) suggests a certain degree of inconsistent practices and attitudes even in the most hard-line oral schools; the barriers between the signing Deaf community outside the walls and the children within appear to have been more fluid than an oral-only policy might suggest. Firth

talks about the reluctance of some Missioners or Welfare Officers to visit schools to prepare the Deaf children for the transition to the adult world as they felt that they presented an unwelcome reminder of the existence of "oral failures" who needed their services (p.72). On the other hand he claims many of the children would have already been to the Deaf club for events such as Christmas parties, and that the Headteacher or other school staff often served on the Board of Management for the Deaf Institutes. Firth mentions sharing the experience of the Deaf children in having his hands rapped for signing to them when visiting the school. However, this is juxtaposed with the statement that:

> People who have recently left school will often go back into school to talk to their former teachers, and will sign and fingerspell to them. Older members of school staffs will be quite conversant with the deaf manual language, and have adult deaf people as their friends. (pp.72-73)

It would seem that further research is needed to clarify the extent to which the oral policy was enforced in the various schools.

Stephen, who gave extensive detail of life at school, made an important distinction that it was not the teachers but the supervisors who led the Sunday services. There were four supervisors for the boys' house who woke the boys and helped them to get ready in the morning, supervised meals, looked after them at bedtime and organised various activities outside school hours. Among the activities mentioned by Stephen were cricket matches and long walks to a country park a few miles out of the city.

Stephen describes the supervisors as having 'no love' for their charges, but in the stories the Deaf Elders tell about the residential school, their relationships with the supervisors seem to have had a different quality to those they had with the teachers. The relationships with teachers seem to be characterised by fear and frustration centred upon the disputes around the use of sign language. In Harry's story reproduced above the boy who burned the mark book was not allowed to articulate his frustration. Caught in a system where there was no negotiation he took matters into

his own hands. The victory was secured by force. The accounts of life with the supervisors feel very different. Stephen tells the story of his frustration with the restrictions of school when he was a teenager. When he was at home in the holidays he could go out on his bike or go to the cinema. At school the doors were locked. One night he sneaked out and was caught. The supervisor asked why he had done this and where he had been. He explained that he had been to buy fish and chips, a treat he was used to at home and missed at school where they never had good food. The story does not relate whether he was punished, but Stephen does end by saying that following this incident the pupils were served fish and chips in the dining room from time to time. It would seem that explanation and negotiation were possible with the supervisors.

It is possible that the different quality of relationships with the supervisors stemmed from some degree of relaxation of the oral policy to facilitate everyday interaction. Given the hardships it created for the pupils it is not surprising that they should continually emphasise the completely oral regime of the school. However, the memory of 'simple sign' in the school religious services seemed authentic. While it was impossible to question the supervisors of that time I did elicit information from a member of the Deaf community with good speech who managed to obtain work in this supervisor role at an oral residential school around the 1960s. She told me that contrary to the policy of the school she did sign with the children at bedtime because she felt sorry for them that they were so young and so far from home. She felt that they needed the reassurance of sign language in an unfamiliar environment.

The status of the Sunday religious services in school is somewhat ambiguous. They may have been considered part of the official timetable. However, if the Sunday services were treated as an additional, leisure time activity then it may have fallen to the supervisors to organise the services as they saw fit. It appears likely from the accounts of the Deaf church members that the supervisors used some degree of signing in the religious services. What is harder to determine is whether they were doing so with the knowledge and sanction of the teaching staff.

The teachers seem to have maintained a completely oral stance themselves but the possibility remains that they permitted the supervisors to compromise for the sake of religion. Harry's description of how little education any except the partially deaf pupils were able to access suggests that without the use of sign language few would have been able to grasp even basic facts about the Christian faith. Knowing that they were responsible for the spiritual welfare of their pupils the staff may have allowed such 'unofficial' access to the Christian faith through sign language, fearing the wrath of God more than they valued their oral ideals. It seems likely that the supervisors were using 'simple sign' in an attempt to tread a middle way between the theories of the Milan Congress that speech was the only proper way to convey spiritual matters and the incontestable evidence of their own experience that sign language was "the only practicable way in which religious services and lectures could be conveyed to the deaf" (Lysons, 1973, p.74). The accounts of the Deaf Elders suggest that whatever the ideological arguments, the supervisors were giving the pupils access to religion in a language they could understand.

4.4.3 Faith through the Visual

Irene and Harry both recall the teaching of scripture knowledge as an important part of the school curriculum. Harry had received a thorough grounding in Biblical teaching:

> *When I left school they had taught us all about the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.*

However, it must be remembered that he was part of the minority group who achieved a certain measure of success with the oral system of teaching. For others like Stephen their understanding of God and the Bible came more gradually, by other means:

> *I found God in the school. In the hall, the headmaster's parlour, and other places around the school there were pictures on the walls. Jesus holding a lamp, knocking at a*

door. I would look up at the picture and wonder what it meant. There was Moses in the basket. His sister was setting the basket down and Pharaoh's daughter, the princess, was hiding in the trees watching. There was Samson and the woman, Delilah, watching him pushing down the pillars. Jesus feeding the five thousand. David hitting the giant Goliath with a stone from his slingshot. The Red Sea rising up and Moses dividing it with his staff. I saw the pictures but I did not know they were Bible stories. When I was twelve my parents bought me a King James Bible but I could not understand it at all.

Stephen attributes his faith to his time at school but not to the formal scripture lessons nor to the religious services. He was first drawn by a visual experience, the pictures of Biblical scenes on the school walls. This is reminiscent of Stephen's earlier accounts of trying to make sense of the world around him, seeing films and trying to reconstruct for himself the story they were trying to convey. In order to try to fill in the missing information Stephen went to the library and attempted to read the written versions of what he had seen at the cinema. Here he employs the same tactic. He attempted to understand the Bible in the same way he later worked his way through vocational classes at the technical college – with the aid of a dictionary.[9] However, he struggled as the specific theological meanings in this context and the historical terms pertaining to Hebrew custom and culture were often not to be found. There was no Christian dictionary available to him. His knowledge grew through a gradual piecing together of the clues he could glean from the paintings and the written word.

The visual memories of the Biblical pictures in school seem very powerful, recalled in such vivid detail so many years later. This experience resonates with the few accounts to be found of Deaf people's own spiritual

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[9] Ladd (2003) notes the importance of this strategy of using the dictionary among other Deaf elders, see pp.371-373.

experiences in the literature. Molloy (1996), a Deaf priest from New Zealand, writes

> If there was a single word which could give immediate insight into what I would call Deaf Spirituality, then that word would be: *visual*. Admittedly this appears to be a contradiction in terms. For what is visual about things of the spirit? (p.81)

Molloy concludes that while 'things of the spirit' are often thought of as invisible and intangible, the Christian faith centres on the spiritual made visible; God becoming man at the Incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ. In the teaching and actions of Jesus abstract truths and ideas are made concrete and within our grasp through parables of everyday experience and visible miracles. Molloy feels that for Deaf people it is vital to have the historical and cultural detail, the visual context, in order to understand the Bible and imprint its stories on the memory. One Chaplain interviewed recounted experiencing something similar in leading Bible study with Deaf Christian groups. Where hearing people would focus on the content and meaning of the Bible passage immediately, he found that his Deaf congregation often wished to establish the visual details clearly first, discussing for example the exact proportions of the Ark and the location of its doors and windows. It was only when the visual context was in place that participants begin to examine the significance of the narrative.

Roy also recalled how it was something he had seen that made him want to explore matters of faith:

> *When I was at Deaf school, travelling to school I used to pass the church. Outside the church there was a big cross, a man on a cross, and figures next to it. I would look at the cross but I had no idea what it meant. So at school I asked the teacher. He handed me a Bible and told me to read it and find out for myself. It was difficult, there were too many big words so I could not really make sense of it. When I asked the teacher to explain it to me he could not be bothered. I wanted to find out more about this person, this man on the cross, but how? I am*

dyslexic, I had trouble understanding the words in the Bible, the teacher would not give me the information. I resolved that when I left school I would go to church and find out for myself.

The importance of the visual for making a personal connection with faith is also emphasised by Irene whose account juxtaposes formal teaching of religion with an immediate recollection of the pictures in school. Thus her story of her faith journey ends with a reference back to her earliest awareness of spiritual matters, the pictures on the school walls:

At school I was taught about God. There were some lovely pictures of Jesus on the classroom walls and I always gazed at them....God has planted a little seed in me which has grown very slowly and steadily over the years since I gazed at the pictures of Jesus on the classroom walls at the school. I know now that God has given me a purpose in my life so I can spread His word to Deaf people.

This emphasis on religious knowledge as a category of precious information to be shared for the benefit of the community recurs throughout the narratives of the Deaf Elders which form the following chapters. While there is an evangelical concern in many Christian groups, what comes through here appears to have a specific Deafhood dimension. There is a particular care for spreading God's word to other Deaf people in the immediate community rather than something more universal. As with other types of Deaf community and cultural knowledge, the greatest importance is attached to making it available to Deaf people in the future. The need to pass the torch to subsequent generations of Deaf people seems both urgent and heartfelt.

5 I'VE BEEN TO THE MOUNTAINTOP AND I'VE SEEN THE PROMISED LAND: THE DEAF CENTRE CHURCH IN THE ERA OF MISSIONERS

"I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!" Martin Luther King Jr.

In the Deaf Church origin narrative the people, brought together by the Deaf Cobbler, eventually established a home for themselves; the Deaf centre and its church. In this Promised Land they hoped to be able to meet together, to use their own language and to explore a relationship with God in an authentically Deaf way. The previous chapter described the memories of the Deaf Elders about their time at the Deaf school. They had formed strong bonds which for many developed into lifelong friendships. They had experienced ties between Deaf people that transcended differences of family background or geographical boundaries. They had come together as a group but had not experienced school as a place where they were free to be themselves. This chapter continues their journeys into the adult world of the Deaf club and church, part of the Deaf world where sign language was not only permitted but expected. But to what extent, in what should have been the Promised Land, were they allowed to be in control of their own church and to worship in their own way?

5.1 Joining the Deaf Church

The Deaf Church Elders were emerging from school into the adult Deaf world from around the time the centre was opened at the end of the 1930s and through the following two decades. They would have encountered a thriving community. The centre was open four nights a week. There were numerous clubs for various interests and hobbies. There were links with other Deaf centres both regionally and nationally for sports competitions, and some members ventured further afield participating in or supporting

the teams in the Deaf World Games. Others were actively involved in the British Deaf Association. Members enjoyed frequent trips to places of interest and there were shared group holidays. For many Deaf school leavers becoming involved in the life of the Deaf centre was a natural progression, and for some joining the Deaf church followed in the same natural way.

Joseph left school at the age of sixteen in 1942. His hearing brothers and sisters were all away in the armed forces or doing war work. His family attended a Catholic church but Joseph describes joining the Deaf church at the centre "straight away". His experiences at school had left him with very negative memories of being in a hearing congregation, being forced to attend but able to understand nothing. For him it was an obvious choice to look to the Deaf club to provide for his spiritual needs as for every other aspect of life.

Irene described her first experience of Deaf church and how her involvement progressed:

> *I left school at sixteen. I wanted to be a florist. The Missioner for the Deaf found me a job at a factory so I had to accept it. I found working among hearing people a big difference from the Deaf world and I had to struggle to overcome this change in my life. The firm sent me to night school to learn my trade but I found it hard going – there were no interpreters in those days.*
>
> *There were a number of Deaf women working in the different departments at the factory. One of them took me with her to the Deaf church at the club. In those days the church was full and there were services every Sunday at 7pm. Everyone used to come by bus as none of us Deaf had cars back then but it was all right as you used to feel safe going out at night, not*

like today[10]*. Coming to church for the first time I was quite nervous and sat at the back. I remember the older women all used to wear hats for church.*

The Missioner led all the services. There were usually two men[11] *at the front, one using signs in the order of the English words and the other fingerspelling everything. When we had a Communion service an elderly priest from a nearby hearing church would come to lead it. Our Missioner interpreted but sometimes the sermon was too long and boring as I could not understand what it was all about. I found some of the church signing difficult to follow as we only saw simple sign at the services in school. But I kept going to church regularly for some company.*

After some time the Missioner asked me to sign a hymn. I was so nervous I felt sick. The first time I did it mostly by fingerspelling. Afterwards I told him I would not do it again it made me feel so horrible but he just said "You will!" When he asked again a month or so later I did agree, but this time I started to use more signs.

I got involved with the Church Council.12 There were meetings once a month. The Council organised special services and trips. It was through the Church Council that I met my husband who was a member too. After we married we moved away from here because of his work. We started to go to a different Deaf centre but there was no Deaf church

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[10] The services now take place in the afternoon as a response to this anxiety among the Deaf elders about going out at night.

[11] From Harry's accounts and old church photographs the second man leading the service with the Missioner would be either an assistant welfare officer or a Deaf man who was good at fingerspelling, chosen by the Missioner.

[12] Firth notes that the Deaf Church Council, sometimes called the Deaf Club Committee organised the affairs of the Deaf members (some clubs had both committees but this was rare) (Firth, 1966, p. 101) However, it was led by the Missioner and included other hearing people so the extent to which this was the Deaf members organising their own religious or social lives is debatable.

there. Without the church I felt that something was missing in my life and he felt the same.

Irene's account emphasises the importance of personal connections and obtaining information from other Deaf people. Irene found the factory environment difficult but was aware of other Deaf workers there and so did not feel completely isolated. It was through one of these other Deaf women taking Irene under her wing and telling her about the Deaf church that Irene became involved. A similar example of the significance of such personal connections was given in the previous chapter with Lucy starting to attend church because she had an existing relationship with Irene through the school mentoring system.

It appears that it took some time for Irene to feel comfortable with the style of worship at the Deaf church led by the Missioner. At first she was unsure what was happening and watched from the back. Her horror as a rather shy, private person being compelled to perform in public is evident. She also seems to have felt constrained by the type of language she saw being used, trying to emulate the Missioner's style by fingerspelling or following the English word order. Sometimes she found this style of language difficult to follow, which led her to conclude that she continued to attend for "company" rather than the content of the services. However, moving to a club where there was no church she did feel a sense of loss and deprivation. For Irene both the opportunity for worship and the sense of belonging, being with other Deaf people, were important to her decision to be a church member.

Stephen also first encountered the Deaf church through a direct personal invitation, but in his case the approach was from the Missioner. After leaving school Stephen moved back to his home town and so attended a different Deaf club and church from the other Deaf Elders:

When I left school I used to go to the Deaf club. On Thursdays I went to classes at the technical college and after I would go over to the club on the bus or by bike to meet up with all the other Deaf youngsters. The Missioner asked if we were

interested in being Confirmed. Well, I did not object. The church was upstairs above the Deaf club. We were taught about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit. There were about eight of us but it was only for four weeks, for an hour each time. The Missioner asked "Do you accept Jesus?" They all nodded along. But I wanted more, I wanted more answers. He had not given us enough food for our brains to chew over. The others went for Confirmation but I was not ready, not yet.

Stephen's description of how he tried to add to his sum of knowledge with the aid of a dictionary, struggling to understand the King James Bible given to him by his parents, was quoted in the previous chapter. Perhaps Stephen accepted this approach from the Missioner to attend classes because it was an opportunity to gain more information in sign language. However, Stephen was disappointed that the Missioner did not teach enough. Given that the Missioner was not a clergyman perhaps what he taught was limited by his own knowledge and experience. Stephen's description of the others in the Confirmation class implies that they were no more enlightened or satisfied. They went along with what was expected of them to please the Missioner or because they were not encouraged to question him.

Stephen's account is unusual among the Deaf Elders. Others describe being dissatisfied but accepting what was offered to them. The many experiences of oppression seem to have fostered in most of them a sense of resignation. Here we see Stephen taking a more confrontational approach. He persisted in his refusal to be Confirmed until he understood more:

I went to Confirmation classes three times before I felt I was ready. The second time was with another Missioner at a different club. But it was the same again, the same as before. I was not ready. Then later with another man, he was Missioner and Principal Officer. He taught me and it was exactly the same again. I was not ready. So I waited. I got married and had a child. I went to the local hearing church,

St Jude's, and asked if they would baptise my son. Then my wife and I prepared for Confirmation with the vicar there. We went on Tuesdays for 2 hours for 12 weeks. It was marvellous! My mother-in-law looked after the baby and I interpreted for my wife. The priest was very patient with me. I had to keep stopping him and asking him to repeat things, then when I understood I signed them to her. It was a lot of information.

Later, wanting to share his hard-won knowledge and renewed enthusiasm with his former school friends, Stephen went to their Deaf club but found he was not welcomed by the Missioner:

I wanted to encourage the Deaf people to come on a church event, to learn more about church. But when I went to the club the Missioner did not want me there. He asked what I was doing there and said "You are an immigrant bird". It took me a while to understand what he meant. I asked him "What are your Deaf people achieving? They never move out, they are stuck on a web. You are the spider. The Deaf are the insects stuck on the web. They need to go out and broaden their experience."

This incident suggests that some Missioners would guard their territory jealously. It calls to mind Firth's (1966) comment that Missioners would often refer to the community in which they worked as "*my* deaf" (p.40). It is also possible that they were wary about Deaf people who they saw as vulnerable being led astray by false doctrines, or in this case falling under the influence of a known rebel.

5.2 Reasons for Belonging

The above accounts given by Irene and Stephen suggest that the decision to attend church was not solely a question of personal belief. Other factors were significant including the expectations of the Missioner and the opportunity to have the companionship of the other Deaf

worshippers. In an era when businesses and places of public entertainment were closed on Sundays the Deaf centre one of the few places to meet one's friends. The club was open on Sundays but what was available reflected the ideas of sober Sabbath behaviour customary at this time. Firth (1966) paints the picture of club members preparing for the Sunday service:

> Two deaf men enter bearing the folded table-tennis table. They are rearranging things in readiness for Sunday, when there shall be no club activities of any description other than a cup of tea and a decent chat after the service. The younger element would welcome billiards and table-tennis on Sunday after Church, and the Superintendent is secretly wondering if it would not be a good idea to stretch a point to encourage them in Churchgoing. But the older men are adamant; no club or games on Sunday, only talking. And only biscuits with the tea, no sandwiches and frivolous cakes! (p.93)

The clear expectation was that anyone wishing to share in the social aspect on a Sunday should first attend church, as evidenced by a situation recorded in the Church Council Minutes:

> Sunday 4 December 1949
>
> Proposed: That the main doors of the club be locked at 7 o'clock on Sunday evenings. Aimed to prevent members coming late purposely to miss evening service.

And in 1962 the Minutes note that the Welfare Officer, who was secretary of the Church Council "stressed the importance of members of the council being regular attenders at Church and said that attendances had been very low, and hoped that members would take a greater interest in the Church in the future." Clearly the motivation for being on the Church Council was not necessarily a strong commitment to the church. As well as making decisions about church services the Council had a social aspect, arranging trips to other Deaf clubs with churches or to places such as cathedral cities. These social events would be open to church members. It would seem that others shared Irene's experience that she went to church 'for company'.

As noted in the literature review some authors, including Firth, suggest a community attitude which feared that being in receipt of the Missioner's help in secular matters depended on being seen to fulfil their spiritual obligations by attending church on a Sunday. While none of the Deaf Church Elders mentioned direct compulsion from the Missioner to attend there was evidence that some felt rather intimidated by him. Robert describes the Missioner as a strict, hard man. Irene felt obliged to obey the Missioner's instruction to stand up in public and sign a hymn despite her shyness. The Missioner had complete authority concerning the Deaf club and its activities. He also had a great deal of control over the members' lives outside the club, as shown in Irene's account of the Missioner choosing what job she would do. It seems it would have taken a great deal of determination to resist complying with the Missioner's wishes as Stephen did.

Harry did, however, make reference to the role of the Superintendent's Warden, the Deaf man appointed by the Missioner to have specific responsibilities in the Deaf church:

> *One chap, the Church Warden, he was strict. He would ask them "You did not come to church on Sunday. Why not?" He would take no excuses. "You had better be there on Sunday." They were scared of him!*

It would seem that within the church and committee structure there were people picked out from the group who were given power and status by the Missioner in return for their support of his aims. This reinforces the accounts given by Ladd's (2003) informants from clubs in other regions. It also suggests something of the atmosphere described by a Deaf man to Lysons (1965) that the more educated members of the community were often coerced by the Missioners to set a good example of church attendance to the others and were "likely to be embarrassed by the pressure and to feel guilty about not going" (p.193).

There is also the possibility that church attendance reflected a feeling of obligation to the community as a whole, as well as to the Missioner or any

other authority figure. In the relatively small community of the Deaf club one's absence is noted. Perhaps repeated absence would be seen as a lack of commitment to the group, that Deaf friends or club events were not sufficiently valued. The Deaf Church members do take great care to offer explanations if they are unable to attend church services or social events, making clear that there are good reasons why they are prevented from doing so. This matches Becker's (1980) account of the positive value of sociability in Deaf culture and the social strategies employed for maintaining community ties.

5.3 Worship in the Missioner Era

For some neither the lure of Deaf companions nor pressure from the Church Warden was sufficient to keep them loyal to the Missioner church services which they found incomprehensible or lacking in variety. Robert explained:

> *I used to come to church when the Missioner led it, but then I gave up. He was very hard, very strict. He would bang on the table and sign "Watch me!" Everything was fingerspelling. They did not use BSL signs then, it was mainly spelling. I did not understand at all. I work with my hands. My job does not involve reading and writing. I never use writing in my work. The other Deaf are the same, we do manual work, not jobs where you read and write.*
>
> *Later, when Harry started leading the church he and Irene asked me to come back and help them, to work for the Deaf church. They explained things to me, told me what the words meant. So I started to learn more. I watched Irene and learned from her signs.*
>
> *I have tried to learn what words mean by looking in the dictionary. The words often have more than one meaning listed and I have to figure out which one is the right one, which would make sense. For a lot of Deaf the words used in*

church are difficult and they do not know what they mean. It is not their fault. Deaf work with their hands and are not used to reading and writing.

Like Irene, Robert found some of the service content boring, either not matched to Deaf experience or signed in a way that was difficult for most to follow. On the whole the recollections of the church members do not suggest that that services led by the Missioner were a particularly edifying experience. It is significant that for Robert the frustration and incomprehension were only resolved when the church was being led by Deaf people for Deaf people, and Deaf leaders were teaching Deaf congregations with shared language from shared experience. Again, this account reflects the importance of personal connections within the group: the turning point for Robert was a personal invitation from one Deaf person to another. He responded willingly to the request to return to church because it was presented to him as an opportunity to work for the good of the community. By being part of the church Robert could make his contribution to the pool of collective resources that Mindess (1999) describes as such as important facet of Deaf culture.

The only real opportunity mentioned in these accounts for the Deaf congregation to have a visible part in leading a service under the Missioner was by signing a hymn. However, not all the churches in the Diocese used hymns. Stephen, describing the church he attended, recounts:

With the Missioner everything was always the same. The Missioner did not use hymns, just Bible reading and the 'Red Book'.

The 'Red Book' referred to here is the *Prayer Book for the Deaf, the Order of Morning and Evening Prayer* "conveniently arranged and shortened for use at Divine Services for the Deaf", as stated on its red cover. Lysons (1965) notes that the Prayer Book was commonly referred to in this way in many of the Missions. It was authorised by the Church of England for use with Deaf congregations in 1931. Its use appears to have

been widespread and it was certainly employed in the Deaf centre churches in the Diocese under study. Lysons, summarising the situation in the 49 centres with Deaf churches in 1962 states: "Worship is almost always based on the Order for Evening Prayer used in the Church of England" (p.186). Lysons suggests that using the Prayer Book had three main benefits for Deaf congregations: that the same pattern of service and repetition of texts aided understanding; that comprehension of spelling and signs could be facilitated by following the printed book; and that it ensured a balanced scheme of worship following the Church seasons.

This suggestion that the 'Red Book' could be read to supplement comprehension calls into question how it was intended to be used by Deaf people. The suggestions contained in the book itself are somewhat contradictory. The foreword states that the book "is so arranged that it can be followed conveniently by those to whom it is interpreted", which suggests that the intention was for the congregation to follow the book and easily be able to match the words to their signed interpretation. This is consistent with the accounts given by the Deaf Elders of a Deaf man working with the Missioner to lead the services, fingerspelling the texts from the book. However, a further cover note in the Prayer Book states that

> There has been no attempt to simplify the language to correspond to the limited vocabulary of the majority of the Deaf and Dumb. It is left to the Reader to interpret and make it understanded of them.

This seems to suggest that for most of the congregation the archaic English would prove difficult and require a more comprehensive and explanatory interpretation than a simple sign for word transliteration. However, the Church Council Minutes indicate that the congregation did indeed try to follow the printed books and the signing at the same time, as there are frequent discussions about the shortage of the books until the British Deaf and Dumb Association produced a reprint in 1967.

It was difficult to find detailed accounts of the content of the Missioner services held in the centre chapels. In addition to the fact that they

followed the 'Red Book' Lysons notes that the services rarely exceeded one hour. He attributes this to the effort of focusing the eyes and the intense concentration required to follow the services. Given that the services were mostly delivered through fingerspelling this would seems to be a reasonable observation. In the chapel under study the Church Council Minutes and Missioner reports recorded little about the content of services, listing only the types of services held. One order of service was tucked between the pages of a handwritten register of Deaf club members from 1955. It is a small blue card typed in black and red capitals and corrected by hand. The direction about which tune to use would seem to indicate that the hymns may have been accompanied by music at this time.

ORDER OF SERVICE: 12TH OCTOBER

INTROIT:	250 (TWO VERSES) ALLELUIA
CALL TO WORSHIP	
HYMN:	457 CHRIST WHOSE GLORY
PRAYERS	
READING	
HYMN:	280 BREATHE ON ME
	TUNE: CARLISLE (513)
COLLECTION:	DEDICATION
LESSON	
HYMN:	806 WHAT SHALL OUR
MESSAGE	
PRAYERS	
HYMN:	699 LORD OF CREATION
THE BLESSING	

Stephen describes the Missioner services at his Deaf centre as 'always the same' and contrasts this with his visits to his local parish church:

> *At the hearing church I could watch the choir, they had harvest supper, special services like Easter Sunday.*

However, the Church Council Minute Book for the main church studied here notes various special services taking place. A service of celebration marked the first anniversary of the opening of the centre. There was a licensing of Lay Readers. Confirmation services were held every few years led by a bishop and often including candidates from other Deaf churches in the Diocese. There were also regular services designated as Ladies' and Gentlemen's Sundays, and a proposal for a Sportsman's Sunday. Unfortunately the Minute Book gives no indication of what might have been distinctive about these special events. On a number of occasions the Lord Mayor of the city accepted invitations to attend and give the address at the Harvest Sunday service.

The Deaf Elders recall the Harvest Festival as particularly significant, with the chapel so full that extra chairs would be needed at the back behind the pews. Special guests would be invited, particularly the factory owners who employed many of the Deaf congregation. As was noted in the Deaf Church origin story, the owners of the leading factories in the town made significant donations to finance the building of the centre and were often invited to be on the Board of Management. For the Deaf Elders the presence of these guests was a mark of the importance of the occasion, an affirmation that their doings were of note in the neighbourhood. Most take the view that no-one from outside the club comes anymore because they are not interested in Deaf people and their lives.

The Communion services referred to by Irene are recorded in the parish register of the neighbouring hearing church from which the vicar came to officiate. The registers from 1939 and 1968 list these special communion services and show additional information such as the number of communicants, the name of the celebrant and sometimes the collection

total or the Bible text on which the sermon was based (see Appendix 6). During the period when these services were held regularly, 1939-1959, the number of communicants for Easter Sunday ranged from 62 to 85. Since it is likely that the congregation also included younger non-communicants and some who chose not to receive, it would seem that the congregation probably numbered around a hundred. A report to the Board of Management written by the Missioner in 1975 described the weekly church services and members' social evening which followed, stating: "The attendances on these occasions average 10% of the deaf on our register and at least 25% on special occasions."[13] This would appear to correspond with the national picture described by Lysons (1965) for the early 1960s where it was estimated that in the North Deaf church attendance was around 10-20% of Deaf people registered with the Societies, while in the South where centres were more numerous and easily accessible it could be as high as 60%.

Church Council Minutes indicate that the Missioner was chairman of the Council, and later when there was an assistant welfare officer he was vice-chairman and secretary. Over the years other Council members included the vicar of the neighbouring parish church and staff from the Deaf school. A hearing woman (whose connection to the church is unrecorded) was in charge of the Altar Guild. So it appears that opportunities for members to take the lead in running their own church through the Council or to have a prominent part in services were limited.

5.4 The End of an Era

The accounts given by the Deaf Elders seem to indicate a time of uncertainty and reduced spiritual provision after the various welfare reforms that brought about end of the era of missioners. This supports the conclusion reached by Lewis that there was not a seamless transition to a new system and that for a time the loss of the religious aspect of the missioner role was not addressed. It seems somewhat surprising that the

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[13] At this time there were 422 Deaf members on the society register, as distinct from the separate register of partially hearing members considered to be a separate 'department'

implementation of a new system took so long in some regions. Lysons (1965) records that the Church of England was very much involved in the debates of the 1960s about the separation of spiritual and temporal welfare work. He quotes the Annual Report of the Church of England Council for the Deaf (1963):

> "The long term view is that the Church of England must accept full responsibility for the spiritual care of the Deaf and Dumb and provide a qualified Chaplain to the Deaf in every Diocese." (p.197)

Lysons states that by 1963 two Dioceses had already done this. It seems likely that although the Church of England recognised the need to accept responsibility for the spiritual care of Deaf Christians, different systems for doing so operated in different regions. In those areas where the Church of England was already making grants to the Societies this probably continued. According to Lysons there was also uncertainty as to whether chaplains should be appointed by and for each Diocese, or whether this should be the responsibility of a central committee providing a national coverage in a similar way to chaplaincy for the Armed Forces.

Harry suggests that the transfer of responsibility to the Local Authorities emphasised specific aspects of welfare in which religion was no longer a priority:

> *In 1948*[14] *the Government said to the local authorities that the time has come for you to look after the Deaf. If you do not want to look after Deaf people then give grants to the Societies. Well, when the local authorities took over they did not want to know about the Church. They gave grants, but not for the building, really for staff salaries because the staff were doing the work of the local authorities. The local authorities were not happy, well, I am not saying if that was*

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[14] "Not until the formal abolition of the poor law by the National Assistance Act of 1948 were local authorities given permissive powers to provide for the welfare of adult deaf persons other than under poor law auspices." (Lysons, 1973, p.1)

right or wrong, but they were not interested in church services and religion.

Stephen also links the major change within the Deaf church to wider social forces:

> *Everything changed with the Deaf church after 1974 with the new Welfare Act, when Social Services came into being. The old welfare system, the Missioners, that all finished. We waited. By then I was a People's Warden at the hearing church. The Bishop came and he asked me what happened with the Deaf about Confirmation, Baptism and so on. I told him we needed a chaplain in the same way that there were hospital chaplains, industrial chaplains and army chaplains. We needed a chaplain for the Deaf. We waited. Then I saw in the church newspaper that it was going to happen. A chaplain came. Later I felt God calling me to go back to the Deaf church, to go back and help the chaplain build it up.*

Here, again, we can see the influence of collectivist cultural values at work. Stephen had left the Deaf church during the time of the Missioner when there was little opportunity for him to contribute to its life or for his own spirituality to develop there. However, when the situation changed and Stephen felt he could offer something to build up the Deaf Church and benefit the Deaf community he immediately left his official position in the hearing church and returned.

The recognition of the need for a completely new system of chaplains may be a projection of current knowledge into the past. Nonetheless, the dismantling of the Missioner system did mean that the spiritual needs of Deaf people were no longer subsumed under a general 'welfare' provision. Increasing specialisation and professionalisation of the various areas for which the Missioner had taken responsibility paved the way for a new era of chaplains whose sole concern was the spiritual well-being of Deaf people.

6 ON THE THRESHOLD - THE DEAF CENTRE CHURCH IN THE ERA OF CHAPLAINS

"The threshold of the house of God I prefer to the dwellings of the wicked" Psalm 84: 10

The previous chapter looked back on the Deaf Church in the era of missioners through the eyes of the Deaf Church Elders. From their narratives about joining the Deaf centre church and their experiences of the missioner-led services it was possible to draw out certain threads about belonging and the reasons which may have contributed to church membership. The focus now moves to the present day and the era of chaplains. The last 30 years have seen many changes in the Deaf community and the majority society surrounding it. However, throughout this time the Deaf Church in the centre under study has clung to its traditional home and tried to maintain its ways of worship.

The era of chaplains is the context in which the fieldwork for this research has taken place. This chapter examines some of the day to day detail of the church, its members and their worship, continuing the Deaf Elders' stories of their spiritual journeys up to the present. As these traditional Deaf churches and their members decrease in number it seems vital to document such information. These accounts from the field will then be used to explore some broader themes of belonging and belief in the Deaf community.

6.1 The Missioner Inheritance

When the Diocese took responsibility for the Deaf churches and appointed a chaplain for this work at the beginning of the 1980s it inherited responsibility for congregations based in four Deaf centres. These congregations had little sense of themselves as being connected as part of a diocese. Before this time the only real contact between the Deaf churches was occasional trips to visit other centres, or when one missioner invited the missioner of another centre to preach for a special service. In many ways the Deaf churches had been overlooked by the

Diocese as not fitting into its administrative structures and so maintained an existence largely independent of the Diocese and of one another. It was only the rare events requiring direct input from the Diocese that caused the missioners to work together. For example, they would have a joint Confirmation service in order to present sufficient candidates to invite the Bishop. For the most part the missioner guarded his own territory and 'his' Deaf jealously, as shown in Stephen's narrative in the previous chapter.

The dawn of the new era of chaplains meant a significant change in the nature of this relationship. The chaplain had to divide his time between all the congregations. No one church could claim exclusive rights to the attention and services of the chaplain. In addition, during this time two more churches were set up in new locations to extend the work of ministry among Deaf people. These were not based in Deaf centres but met in Anglican parish churches. With six Deaf churches to be maintained by one or two chaplains practical considerations dictated that a certain amount of co-operation would be necessary. Agreement would have to be reached about which centres the chaplain would attend on any given Sunday, and if they all wanted the services of the chaplain at the same time, for example at Christmas or Easter, then these would have to be joint gatherings. In time a Diocesan Church Council was set up with representatives from each congregation. The Diocesan Council organised special services and social activities in much the same way that the Deaf centre Church Councils had in the past. Connections already existed between many of the members of the various congregations, either from the Deaf school which had a large catchment area, or from sports and social events. While being part of the Diocese appears initially to have had little impact in terms of connection with the wider hearing church, it seems that the sense of being Deaf Church together was growing between the various congregations.

6.2 Troubling the Term 'Chaplain'

A significant difficulty in talking about this phase in the history of the Deaf Church lies in describing the chaplains and their role. There are great differences between individuals and also in the way in which the role has evolved in the period of about 30 years since the chaplains took responsibility for many of the Deaf congregations. The title Chaplain for the Deaf (later changed in many dioceses to Chaplain with Deaf people or Chaplain among Deaf people in an attempt to incorporate a notion of shared mission) is often used interchangeably with the term Deaf Chaplain. This risks confusing the role with the individuals who hold it, who may or may not themselves be Deaf. There are now a number of ordained clergy who are themselves Deaf among the ranks of the chaplains. However, it would be simplistic to say that any clear divide in attitudes towards leadership style can be observed between those chaplains who are Deaf and those who are hearing.

Among the hearing clergy there may well be those who still operate very much in the mould of the missioners, seeing themselves as the leaders and teachers in all things, looking after 'their' Deaf. Others view themselves more as colleagues and allies; a collaborative model that focuses on enabling and encouraging. For some this model of co-operation between equals does not go far enough: the ultimate goal is for Deaf people to assume full control over every aspect of Deaf Church. Thus they see their own role as overseeing the transitional period during which Deaf leaders can access training for church leadership, inherited management structures can be dismantled and new ones determined by Deaf people themselves can be set up.

During the fieldwork a wide range of leadership styles was observed among chaplains who are hearing. In the Diocese under study the appointment of a new Chaplain led to a reappraisal of working practices and objectives. At a meeting to discuss and agree directions for the future the Chaplain stated:

I know there has been some confusion about the role of the Chaplain since Reverend [previous chaplain] left. I believe that God has called me to undertake three key tasks (and I have discussed these with the Bishop):

to unify the Church among Deaf People around Holy Communion services and other special services;

to offer 'Learning Together' sessions to help us grow in our Christian faith through our understanding of Scripture;

to identify, call out and train members of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community to lead the Diocesan Church among Deaf people.

This commitment to Deaf leadership was evident in the months that followed, with key members from each church congregation being identified and invited to participate in training to lead services.

In contrast, at a national meeting of Deaf church members and chaplains, I was surprised to observe the extent to which older styles of leadership still prevailed and behaviours appropriate to hearing rather than Deaf culture were followed. For example, in a small group preparing a church service the Deaf participants were handed pens and paper and asked to write down ideas for prayers of intercession. The leader then went round the group asking them to sign what they had written, assigned the suggested themes to the traditional categories of 'for the church', ' for the world' and so on, and chose people to sign them in the service. When I broached this topic with one of the Deaf leaders of the event I was told that the Deaf church nationally encompassed a range of views. In some areas the chaplains were still following the old ways, while others favoured change.

Neither can it be said that all chaplains who are themselves Deaf operate in a fully Deaf cultural way. Most have been trained by accessing generic courses with interpreters, learning accepted Church of England practices to deliver services in exactly the same way as would be done for hearing

congregations. Not only have they been encultured into hearing ways to some extent through their training, for many their own experiences of church have been formed by the 'Red Book' services of the Missioners or the ways of chaplains who are hearing.

In this study the term chaplain is used to mean an ordained minister of the Church of England who is appointed by a diocese to have responsibility for the spiritual and pastoral care of Deaf people, either full or part time, paid or as a non-stipendiary minister.

6.3 Introducing the Church Members

On a wet Thursday morning the members of the Deaf Over 60s club are gathering for their weekly social event and shared lunch. Irene shakes the drops of water from her raincoat and smoothes down her neatly curled hair. She is accompanied by her husband Harry. Harry takes a seat at the table nearest the door with his back against the wall. As one of the oldest and most prominent members of the Over 60s Club he always occupies this place from which he can survey the entire hall and greet everyone as they come in and out. At 78 Irene is ten years younger than her husband. As she goes to hang up her coat she glances round the already busy club room noting who is here and who is missing, trying to spot her best friend Vera. There is an animated bustle of activity though it is only 11 o'clock and the main event of the day, the bingo game, will not begin for another hour.

Vera is near the stage at the far end of the hall, buying her bingo tickets. Irene notices how Vera is struggling to open her purse, her hands bent with arthritis. Sometimes it feels strange to Irene to remember how many years have passed since she and Vera met at the Deaf school, all the time they worked in the same factory, being a bridesmaid at Vera's wedding. Memories that can feel like yesterday, yet this week saw the birth of Vera's first great grandchild, an exciting event eagerly awaited and she is making sure that all the club members share her good news.

Her husband Len is buying cups of tea from a trolley in the centre of the room and stopping to chat with the person serving.

Len is in fact not Deaf. But for the sixty years of their married life the Deaf club has been at the centre of all their activities. When they were young they came here four nights a week. In addition there were club holidays and day trips, parties, and all manner of sports. Len signs as well as anyone in the club. As far as the other members are concerned he is Deaf: he simply has skills in speaking which he can use to benefit the community. He is often called upon to make the telephone calls needed to book trips and holidays for the club. Reciprocal favours and the sharing of skills for the benefit of all are important aspects of Deaf culture (Mindess, 1999). Len's ability to use the telephone is a skill that can be put to use for mutual benefit like any other.

When Len left school at 14 he went to work at a local factory. He was sent to assist a Deaf man, Samuel, who was in charge of a particularly crucial part of the manufacturing process. There were about twenty Deaf employees there at that time, some of them in highly skilled trades. At lunch times they would congregate in Samuel's workshop, signing and laughing as they ate their sandwiches. At first Samuel would communicate his instructions to Len by casting a handful of sand onto the workbench and writing in it with his finger. But having seen his Deaf colleagues communicating together Len asked to be taught their sign language. So it began, one or two new signs each day. As Len got to know the Deaf lads better he was invited to join in their activities and trips. This was how he met Vera.

Vera often brings photographs to the club, either recent ones of family celebrations or older pictures over which they all reminisce. Among the pictures being circulated today is a photograph of that first meeting: five people dressed in their Sunday best standing arm in arm on the breezy seafront; Samuel and his wife, Len and Vera, and another woman. Len recalls that the other woman was hearing and worked at the same factory as Vera. They were competing for his attention and the other women kept telling Vera "he is hearing. No good for you." Their

situation is unusual; there is a high incidence of marriage where both partners are Deaf. More pictures. Vera as a baby in the arms of her older Deaf brother. Vera with the infant class at the Deaf school, tiny girls carefully posed in their dark gymslips. Two rows of couples, seated, the women wearing hats. Harry identifies the picture as Deaf church members, taken around 1960. Len recalls that one of the women was hearing; there were a few hearing women around that time who married Deaf men but the relationships did not last.

Harry is soon deep in conversation with Ada, another of their group of school friends. Ada, a little older than Harry, has lost none of her animation and vitality and her dark eyes sparkle with pleasure at being here at the club. A widow, Ada lives alone, and relishes this weekly opportunity to meet with her friends. But she relies on others for transport so it is not always possible. Today she has come with her gentleman companion, Jack . He looks rather frail beside her, but as always is neatly dressed in a suit and tie. A reserved, thoughtful man, his communication consists mainly of fingerspelling.

The flurry of conversation between the three couples round the table does not reflect a long separation; the club members meet every week for bingo and lunch. But in the time between they have little contact with their neighbours who do not use sign language, no casual conversations with strangers in the street or passing the time of day with staff in the corner shop and post office. Being Deaf, such everyday encounters with those who do not sign can become hard work. Even their interaction with family is limited. Many indicate that their grown up children remember or use few signs. This can be seen when the family members come into the club to meet the Deaf Elders and drive them home. As children they would have been familiar with the Deaf club and know many other members of the community. But now they communicate to their parents through speech and expect them to lip read. However, the Deaf Elders take great pride in recounting how naturally their grandchildren learn to recognise signs and realise that this is the mode required to communicate with their grandparents.

When a two year old runs to Granny and signs 'cake' she is sure to oblige!

As the others settle down with their cups of tea, Irene picks up her basket and leaves the hall, making her way up the two flights of broad stairs to the upper floor. At the top of the stairs she turns the key and pushes back the heavy doors, entering the chapel. The chapel is smaller than either of the two large social rooms downstairs, its dark wooden pews seating perhaps a hundred people. They occupy the centre of the room, with aisles at either side. There are large windows along both sides of the chapel but the heavily frosted glass seems to let in little light. Irene walks the length of the chapel inspecting that everything is in its proper place, pausing here and there to straighten the seat cushions made by another of the group, Maureen. So many things in the chapel have been made or donated by the Deaf congregation. Len made the cupboard which houses the communion chalices and altar linens. Just being here in this place is to be surrounded by memories and familiar faces. Sixty years of memories: Irene has been a member of the church since she left school and first joined the Deaf club.

Irene ascends the carpeted step onto the raised sanctuary area, separated from the main body of the chapel by a wooden communion rail. Taking her cleaning things from the basket she starts to polish the brass candlesticks on the altar, and the vases and plain cross on the shelf attached to the wall behind. She changes the altar cloth for a clean one. When Irene was young the church committee had an Altar Guild which undertook such duties. The hearing lady in charge of the Guild would send out little cards to remind members when it was their turn to come and clean or wash the linens. Now there is only Irene. But she loves caring for 'her' church and refuses any offers of help from outsiders. Straightening up slowly, Irene breathes in the scent of polish with quiet satisfaction, locks the door and begins to make her way downstairs again.

At the foot of the stairs Irene sees Maureen who is just arriving. They hug as is the custom for greeting and farewells. Maureen explains that

her husband, Robert, is still trying to park the car. The Deaf Centre is situated in a narrow street of Victorian terraced houses now mostly occupied by immigrant families or let to students from the nearby university. Being close to the city centre parking in the street is restricted. The Deaf Centre, a two-storey red brick building, is set back a little from the road behind iron railings. The small area enclosed by the railings can conveniently accommodate perhaps a dozen cars. Some of these spaces are already taken by the vehicles of the Deaf centre staff when around fifty people arrive for the Over 60s club. The local residents must be puzzled or perhaps entertained by the antics of the members who squash as many cars as possible through the gates, some spilling out across the pavement. Should anyone need to leave before the end of lunch the moving of any one car requires a lengthy procedure of relaying messages inside to locate the owner, followed by careful manoeuvring aided or hindered by spectators.

Robert finally parks the car and joins the others. He is the chairman of the Church Council. Robert and Maureen, Irene and Harry, Vera and Len and Ada and Jack are the four couples at the centre of church life. They organise the rotas for bringing altar flowers, making the tea, and signing hymns at services. They arrange trips and meals for the members. Being a couple seems to somehow confer extra status within the group. The couples are the nucleus around which the unpartnered widows and widowers orbit. Robert and Irene represent the church at meetings for all the Diocese Deaf churches and take a prominent part in the special shared services arranged for Christmas, Easter and other major festivals. Numbers have fallen in recent years: the older members have died or become too frail to attend regularly and there seems little enthusiasm for church among younger people at the club. Len found a film of the Christmas service in 1999 which showed about forty people present. Now there are eighteen regular members.

The four women seated at the table appear quite similar to one another in their choice of dress, neat in their pleated skirts and pastel coloured sweaters. One day when it snowed Vera was most apologetic that in

view of the cold weather she had come to church wearing trousers. When another member of the church group arrives she presents a sharp contrast to the other ladies. Only a few years younger than Irene, her style of dress is completely different. She is a much more substantial figure dressed in trousers and anorak, and moving anywhere seems to require a lot of space and fuss to accommodate herself, her walking stick and shopping bags. Lucy was educated at the same Deaf school as the other church members. However, her experiences were somewhat different after she left school. Lucy's mother did not like her mixing with other Deaf people. Lucy attended Deaf church but was less involved in other club activities and her relationships with the rest of the group seem more distant. It was only later in life, after her mother's death, that Lucy married an older Deaf man, and was widowed after a few years.

After a slow progress around the hall to greet all her acquaintances, Lucy finally settles in a chair a short distance from the table occupied by the core church members. At this moment arcs of coloured light start to strobe around the room to attract everyone's attention to the fact that bingo is about to begin. Those members who are still moving around chatting and buying tickets take their seats. First the Over 60s club chairman takes the stage. He is in charge of working the bingo equipment, but before the game begins he takes the opportunity to make a few announcements. "You all know that yesterday was Dorothy's 70th birthday. Happy birthday to you. There will be a buffet after bingo." Dorothy stands up to take a bow as all the members applaud by waving their open hands at head height. Usually a simple lunch is prepared by a team of volunteers or members bring their own sandwiches. A catered buffet is a special treat.

Birthdays are a major cause for celebration in this group. On club days people always bring cards for anyone celebrating a birthday. Len tells me that Vera has a list at home of all the members' birthdays and presumably others have a similar system. The church members also seem very aware of the exact age of others, perhaps because they remember these people from school. I visited a former church member,

a woman of 89, in hospital. She has been out of touch with the Deaf community for a few years since being widowed as she had no means of transport to come to the club. I was trying to engage her by mentioning names of people she would know. I told her I had seen Ruth the week before and she replied "What, she is still alive? She is three years older than me!"

Janet, one of the Deaf representatives on the Board of Management, comes on to the stage. She spends some time making sure everyone is paying attention, saying that her announcement is important. The previous week it had snowed leaving the members uncertain as to whether the centre would be open. Janet explains that in such cases the members must not bother the office staff. They have their own jobs to do and are not responsible for the various clubs that meet in the building. A discussion breaks out between the officers of the Over 60s club about the best way to notify members if for any reason the Thursday meeting has to be cancelled. A rustle of movement spreads around the room as people turn to their neighbours to discuss the problem, and then become impatient at the delay as they want to get on with the bingo game so that there is plenty of time to enjoy the celebration lunch after.

The concentration is intense as bingo begins, the first time the room is quiet. Heads turn rhythmically from their tickets to look up at the electronic screens where the numbers are displayed. The game proceeds rapidly and some turn to make sure that their older neighbours have not missed anything. Of course, in sign language some conversation can continue across the room while the game is underway; "I only need 3 more numbers!" While everyone is occupied and seated there is leisure to observe how the members have arranged themselves in their customary places.

The four couples at the church table nearest the door have now been joined by another of the congregation, Joseph. He does not play bingo or stay for lunch, but likes to drop in spend a little time with his friends. Joseph and his wife were formerly among the core couples in the church but since her death he comes less frequently, busying himself with his

garden and helping his grown-up children with small jobs around their homes. For many years Joseph organised the Social club's football team and was himself selected to play for the English side at the Deaf World Games. Sport is still a major topic of conversation among the Deaf Elders and Harry frequently introduces Jimmy, now over 90, to newcomers by saying "He was goal keeper in our school football team."

The table nearest to the stage is occupied by the chairman, his wife and their friends. Also near the stage is the table where the bingo and raffle tickets are sold by a slightly younger group of women, relative newcomers to the Over 60s but lifelong members of the Deaf club. They are still actively involved in caring for their grandchildren and will sometimes bring the youngest ones with them. Over by the tea trolley and serving hatch a table is occupied by three Deaf sisters, their partners and extended family. At the tables along the wall to the left of the stage are some younger Deaf people who have disabilities. There are two men with learning disabilities accompanied by a carer, a Deafblind girl, and a young man in a wheelchair. Since they do not work during the day they are free to come to the centre. They seem to find a welcome at the Over 60s club despite the age difference.

Susan, another church member, appears in the doorway and stands waiting for the game to finish so that she does not block the view of the bingo numbers by walking through the room. Irene looks over her shoulder and greets her, immediately adding that she has missed the announcements. During a pause between bingo games Irene relays all the information to her. Mindess (1999) states that "information, because of its relative scarcity, is a precious commodity in the Deaf community"(p.88). Many sources from which hearing people absorb information almost unconsciously, such as listening to the car radio while driving or overheard conversation, are not accessible to Deaf people. Other routes to information may rely upon the use of written English, for example newspapers or television subtitles. The Deaf cultural strategy to overcome these restrictions to accessing information has been described by Becker (1980) as 'peer learning': the sharing of

news with other community members is part of the expected pattern of interaction, often the opening gambit in any conversation (p.66). During my visits to the club I was frequently greeted with "Hello! What news do you have?"

One type of news expected to be shared is when any member of the community is in hospital. On one occasion I witnessed such an exchange between the church members and the Chaplain. Maureen explained that she and Robert had been to visit another member of the congregation at home following an illness. She reported on his progress. The Chaplain, well versed in Deaf ways, responded with his news. He stated that Sharon had been transferred to a hospice and was very poorly. Maureen immediately went and started to relay this news to Robert, but had to come back to the Chaplain to check the person's name. Clearly she had no idea who Sharon was since she was a much younger person who had only recently moved to the area. But even so, the sense of obligation to pass on the information was all important.

A woman in the centre of the room waves to indicate she has won. As her ticket is checked there is much laughter and teasing about the fact that she is sitting at the 'lucky table' where someone won the jackpot the previous week. Teasing does appear to be a significant form of interaction in Deaf culture (Ladd, 2003). It is used in the club a great deal, both among the Deaf Elders where it often evokes shared memories, and to cement relationships between people of different age groups within the Deaf community where there is less common ground. This latter pattern is also seen in interaction with people on the fringes of the group, for example the hearing people who come to the church.

After the bingo game it is time for lunch. The tea trolley is wheeled out again and people begin to circulate once more, sharing news with those they did not have time to talk to earlier. Before departing the members take care to discuss when they will next meet. In the past when communication between Deaf people was only possible face to face or by post, knowing when and where one would next meet Deaf friends was

important. So the farewell round of hugs is accompanied by "see you next week" or for the church members "see you on Sunday!"

6.4 The Sunday Service

Robert, the Church Council chairman, unlocks the doors of the Deaf centre an hour before the service is due to begin. Most of the congregation arrive early, about 45 minutes before the service. This gathering time is used to make the necessary preparations for worship but also to greet friends and share news. The time of the service has varied over the years. Traditionally it was held in the evening but as the members grew older and public transport on Sundays operated less frequently the services were moved to late afternoon so that people could travel in daylight.

The long established members sit at the same table that they occupy at the Over 60s club, near the entrance to the hall. More chairs are drawn up and the circle around the table is widened to accommodate additional people as they arrive. Those with particular jobs move away after the first flurry of conversation and attend to their responsibilities. There is a rota for making and serving refreshments after the service, so two people work in the kitchen setting out the tea things Others take their turn to provide and arrange a few flowers in the brass vases. The church leaders prepare the necessary items for the service itself, marking the relevant page in the large Bible or putting out the silverware and altar linens for a communion service. They also check that there are volunteers to sign the two hymns and the Bible reading. People may have prepared in advance or be chosen on the day. Both Deaf and hearing members share these roles.

Robert oversees the preparations, and when everything is ready he comes downstairs and flashes the lights to indicate to the congregation that it is time to take their places in the chapel. The church members gather their bags and walking sticks and head slowly towards the stairs. Some linger in the entrance hall, taking the opportunity for a few

moments of private conversation out of sight of the rest of the group. Sign language can be a very public form of communication. Conversations can be visible across a room. There is not an option to lean over and whisper to a neighbour. In the Deaf club confidential information can be imparted in a private space but being seen going into another room may itself be a clue that you have something to say that you wish to keep secret.

As the congregation gathers upstairs the Chaplain, Irene and Robert wait in the small vestry room next to the chapel. They are joined by those who are signing a hymn or reading during the service. All stand in a circle so that they can watch the Chaplain sign a brief prayer commending their thoughts and actions to God. Once the congregation members have collected their service books and hymn books and settled into their seats the worship begins. The group of people gathered in the vestry makes its way in procession into the chapel in single file following Robert who carries the cross. The Chaplain brings up the rear. As the procession enters the chapel all stand and the animated conversations which have continued from downstairs begin to die away. When they reach the front the people in the procession form a line along the communion rail, bow to reverence the altar and then move off to their places.

As in most churches, people tend to have preferred places which they occupy regularly. Here it seems to reflect the hierarchy of the community. The Chaplain and Irene who assists with the service have seats at either side of the sanctuary. Those who are signing hymns or readings sit in the front bench. A Deafblind member of the congregation also sits in the first bench directly in front of the lectern. Robert joins him there and relays the service to him. The couples who form the core group sit in the second bench, except Harry who tends to sit further back; a vantage point from which he appears to be keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings. Other Deaf men may join him there. Hearing members tend to occupy three benches further back, first those who have been coming for many years, then regular but more recent members and

finally visitors who come because they are learning sign language. Thinking about church members who have died, it is easy to look around the room and picture them in their former places.

The Chaplain usually wears plain coloured robes rather than elaborate vestments. If one is using sign language in a public formal setting, interpreting, lecturing or performing, it is customary to wear plain clothes which contrast with the skin colour so that the hands are clearly visible. The previous Chaplain wore a blue-grey coloured robe for this reason. The current Chaplain wears a modern white alb with a stole. He wears the same in his hearing church with the addition of a chasuble, the vestment customarily worn when presiding at a communion service. The Deaf chapel does not own such vestments. In the days of the Missioner communion services were infrequent and presumably the hearing vicar who came to officiate would have brought his own vestments. Irene wears a cassock, surplice and the scarf of a Lay Reader. In old photographs of the chapel the Missioner and other leaders are dressed in a similar way, the traditional Anglican attire for Evening prayer.

The Chaplain stands at the altar and signs 'please sit down'. This ensures that all have a clear view of the signing. The congregation remains seated throughout except when moving to greet one another at the sign of peace or to receive communion. Altogether there are around 20 people. The chaplain welcomes everyone, perhaps commenting on how many people have come, the weather, or some topical event. Members of the congregation might respond and the atmosphere at this point is in sharp contrast to the formal entrance procession which has preceded it. The Chaplain explains which type of service they will be having, evening prayer or holy communion, and the page number in the service book. Then the formal part of the service begins with the opening prayer.

The service follows the standard Church of England Common Worship format but where there are choices of text the ones which are briefest or

in plain English are usually selected. [15] *The signing tends to be a sign for word translation, following the English word order rather than the natural structure of BSL and will include fingerspelling of words such as 'by' and 'of'. Irene stands at the lectern and leads the congregational responses or any prayers that all present make together. The congregation members have the choice of copying the signs or translating directly from the service book themselves. So remaining seated not only helps with visibility but also means that those members who wish to follow the words can balance their books on the back of the bench in front or in their laps and leave their hands free to sign. Because of the visual nature of sign language prayers are offered with eyes open and never with heads bowed. However, since the prayers are addressed to God rather than the congregation the pattern of eye contact differs from signing in other contexts. Instead of looking towards the congregation, those leading the prayers may have their eyes focussed on the upper right hand corner of the signing space, the traditional location for signs relating to God or heaven.*

After the opening prayer there is a hymn. The hymns are signed from the pulpit, on the opposite side of the altar from the lectern. The person leading the hymn signs the hymn number and waits for everyone to find their place in the book. The words are signed without music, following the English word order. The best signers use a distinctive style: it is clearly a poetic performance, heightened beyond merely conveying the sense of the words on the page. The signs occupy a larger than usual space and flow into one another in a rhythmic fashion. Some of the Deaf members can be heard voicing the words. Hearing members who attend regularly may sing the hymns in time with the signing which can mean some sudden changes of speed as the length of the signed and written lines do not always match. The Deaf congregation members tend to watch the hymns rather than joining in the signing unless the leader indicates that the hymn has a repeating chorus for which they are

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[15] The orders of service used in this Deaf church for Evening Prayer and Holy Communion are reproduced as Appendix 3 and Appendix 4.

invited to 'follow my sign'. On special occasions such as harvest festival or Christmas a few members may stand together on the altar steps to form a signing choir, following the signs and rhythm of the Deaf leader standing facing them. In the past the choir was a major feature at special services. They had choir robes and being choir leader was an important responsibility.

There is only one Bible reading. The usual Anglican practice is that if for any reason the full set of readings is not used at a communion service then the Gospel of the day should be read. However, if the service is Evening Prayer the Chaplain tends to follow the same system and read only the Gospel. He feels that this will speak more directly to the experience of the congregation than the Old Testament which may require a degree of knowledge about historical context. The reading is followed by a short sermon. The sermon often begins with an interactive episode where the Chaplain introduces the theme by asking a question. For example, in Advent the Chaplain might ask if people have made all their preparations for Christmas, receiving responses about such things as writing cards or how the number of grandchildren for whom they need to buy gifts. After this introductory exchange the Chaplain then delivers his address linked to the theme of the day and the Bible reading.

The sermon is followed by a simple question and response form of the Creed. Then there are prayers of intercession which are always open to participation by the congregation. First the usual prayers for the Church and for the needs of the world are offered. After each prayer the Lay Reader leads the response "Lord in your mercy receive our prayer", considered to be a more appropriate formula than the usual "hear our prayer". During the prayers for the sick the Chaplain will share the news he has collected on his travels through the Diocese, naming members of the other Deaf churches who are ill or in hospital. Members of the congregation respond in a similar fashion, naming people from the centre and its clubs, adding details such as the nature of their illness, whether they are still in hospital and so on. Because the congregation

members are all facing the front people in the pews behind can not always see what is being signed, so this information has to be relayed back by the Chaplain or Lay Reader. This is followed by prayers for the dead, and the same pattern can be seen; information and details about forthcoming funeral services or the situation of the bereaved families is exchanged.

When the Chaplain announces the sharing of the sign of peace this is the signal for everyone to stand up and greet each individual in turn, moving around the room, signing 'Peace be with you', and shaking hands or hugging. In a hearing church a brief pause is left to allow interaction with a few people seated nearby, shaking hands with them but not leaving one's place. In the Deaf Church this continues until the participants are quite sure they have greeted everyone in the room. Lewis (2002) reports that these interactive sections, the intercessions and the peace, appear to be among the high points of the service for the Deaf church members, when they are most focussed and animated.

After this the collection is taken, with the collection plate being brought round by one of the most senior men in the group. While hymns or readings may be shared by hearing people attending the service who are known to have reasonable signing skills, certain jobs such as the taking the collection and extinguishing the candles are always the responsibility of one of the oldest among the Deaf men. Perhaps this is because traditionally these jobs were part of the role of the Church Wardens who were always male.

The Chaplain prepares the bread and wine while the collection is being taken so that the Eucharistic Prayer can begin as soon as everyone is settled again and able to concentrate their attention on his signing. At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, Tom, a Deafblind member of the congregation, is guided forward to lead the Lord's Prayer. The congregation members kneel at the altar rail to receive communion, or stand if they are unable to kneel. The movement around the room and the need to squeeze past people in confined pews can lead to a certain amount of conversation building up and the Chaplain may have to

attract everyone's attention before the service can proceed to its conclusion.

After the final hymn and blessing the Chaplain asks if there are any notices. Robert and Irene are the main organisers of church activities and represent the church at Diocese meetings, so they may give details of forthcoming services, Diocese events and church trips. Frequently the notices give rise to lively discussion about which members will be going to the event, the best time to meet or how to organise such things as refreshments. If the debate seems to be going on for too long the Chaplain will suggest that the discussion be continued downstairs over tea.

The service ends with the dismissal and blessing. The procession reforms and all stand. When the procession has left the chapel the congregation remains standing until the candles have been extinguished. There seems to be no tradition of staying to make private prayers for a few moments after the service. Once the candles are out people collect their books and go downstairs for refreshments. Those in the procession return to the vestry where another prayer is offered and all shake hands in a formal manner and thank one another for their contributions to the worship. The collection is counted and the official entry made in the church register of the date of the service and the number of people attending.

6.5 Deaf Experiences of Church in the Era of Chaplains

6.5.1 Opportunities for Leadership

Irene describes the arrival of the first chaplain in the early 1980s as a time of change, with new opportunities for Deaf people to train for leadership and ministry:

> *The Chaplain asked me to join a Diocese Deaf Christian group and to go with them to London for the weekend to attend a special service for the Deaf in St Paul's Cathedral in 1981. I*

went and that really started the ball rolling because the weekend was something different and the Chaplain always believed in Deaf people's rights and was against discrimination. At that time I felt that something inside me, a sort of frustration I think, was released from my body because of his standing by Deaf people and their rights.

The Chaplain organised our first pilgrimage for the Deaf to the north for a week in 1984 which was marvellous. That pilgrimage made me more aware of the Saints Chad, Aidan and Cuthbert who worked to make God's church stronger and taught about God's love. He also organised Deaf Christian family weekends that helped me to be more aware of God's word. With his encouragement I became choir leader of the Diocesan Deaf Church. Sadly, he had to retire because of ill health. A new Chaplain arrived and he introduced the Bishop's Certificate course to the Deaf. It seemed like a good opportunity for me so I joined the course and studied for the next two years. At the end of the course I was awarded a certificate with merit. In between the courses I had to attend the Deaf Lay Ministry Training courses at different places around the country, run by the Committee for Ministry among Deaf People.

After finishing the Bishop's Certificate course I went with five other Deaf candidates for a weekend of evaluation with a panel consisting of the Bishop and other hearing church people. Four of us were accepted to train as Lay Readers. This meant another two years training with hearing candidates. We were tutored by different clergy from hearing churches in the Diocese, with the help of interpreters. In 1992 Stephen and I formed the first Deaf-led Christian group for the Diocese. Finally in 1994 the four of us became Licensed Readers. Now I am able to assist with the worship in the Deaf church and to proclaim the Good News to the Deaf

congregation Things have changed a lot since the days when Deaf people did not have their freedom as I do now. More and more hearing people are becoming aware of Deaf people and that we do worship God because we are all God's children too.

Irene's account describes a number of new activities in the Deaf Church under the chaplains. In particular there were increased opportunities for training on formal courses either with hearing people or on similar parallel schemes for Deaf candidates. Irene portrays church life under the chaplains as less oppressive with chaplains opposing discrimination and standing by Deaf people as allies rather more than the missioners had done. For Irene this all amounted to a new sense of freedom for the Deaf congregations.

Stephen's account of becoming involved in the leadership of the Deaf Church emphasises that although times were changing and more opportunities were opening up for Deaf people, the obstacles were still considerable. For this pioneering group each step presented hurdles to be overcome. There were problems of gaining acceptance and agreement to go forward for training, and problems with the courses designed for hearing candidates and accessed through interpreters.

Later I felt God calling me to go back to the Deaf church, to go back and help the Chaplain build it up. Then I was ready to start training as a general helper. A group of us all went off to study a course called Ecumenical Council with Deaf People Bible and Theological Study. I have the diploma. We went to St Paul's in London and the top man, Dr. Leonard, he presented me with my diploma, Bible and badge. Then later when the next Chaplain came he got a group of about 25 Deaf Church people together to talk about doing the Bishop's Certificate Course. When I arrived to start the course there were only 8 of us, the others had dropped out. I was told it was the same on the new Deaf theology course recently, there

were 9 but it dropped to 4. I think the Deaf find these courses hard.

Later I went on Reader training. That was difficult. I had been to see the Bishop 12 times before I became a Reader. I felt God was calling me to be a priest but I was not sure. I felt I was trying to make a journey but that the traffic lights were always on red. I was waiting for a long time for them to change to amber and green. I talked to the Chaplain and he told me I was not good enough, I could go for Reader training but that it was impossible for me to become a priest. But I knew they had accepted another Deaf man. So I said "I am not sure, but perhaps God wants Deaf people to become priests?" Things were changing so later I went back to see the Bishop again and decided to wait and train to be a Reader instead with some other Deaf people. After twelve and a half years as a Reader God called me again. I went to see the Bishop again and he said I was ready to go forward and train as a priest.

First of all I had to go to on a selection weekend with an interpreter. Oh, it was difficult! Exercises, questions, things to write, times of prayer, interviews with the selection panel. I had to explain to them when they were too far away for me to lip read and that English is not my first language, I use BSL. They did not know what that was.

I waited about 2 weeks and the day before Christmas Eve they told me I had been accepted. A lovely Christmas present from God! I was to start training in January. It was very emotional, I had tears in my eyes. I went all through the training. I did not miss anything though looking back I do not know how I did it. I am sure it was the presence of the Holy Spirit with me.

Under the Missioners some Deaf people, including Irene's husband Harry, had been encouraged into leadership roles. As one of the 'partially deaf' children he achieved some measure of success under the oral education system of the Deaf school and had good speech. Later, as a member of the Deaf Church Council he was singled out by the Missioner and encouraged to train to become a missioner himself. The existence of a favoured group (Ladd, 2003) gathered around the missioner was noted in the previous chapter. Certain men were selected to assist the missioner as he directed, either as Church Wardens or to help deliver parts of the Sunday services. The accounts of this process in the Deaf Church seemed reminiscent of the 'divide and rule' ethos of the residential school described by Harry. A sense of a social stratification within the church between the missioner's chosen group and the rest came to the fore when Irene and Harry discussed the Sunday services:

> *Harry: Every Sunday there were services and Deaf people took part. Like now, reading the lesson, leading the responses...*
>
> *Irene: We never shared the services, we Deaf*
>
> *Harry: You did not, but we did, led the responses...*
>
> *Irene: The Missioner did it, but we never did.*

Here Irene refers to herself as part of the disenfranchised Deaf group who were not permitted an active role – "we Deaf" - and Harry emphasises this further by making the distinction "you did not" in contrast with "but we did" meaning those few chosen by the Missioner.

Ultimately, however, such attempts to divide the group, either in school or in the Deaf Church and club, seem to fall in the face of the collectivist orientation of the Deaf community and its culture. Even when recruited into the ranks of the missioners, Harry's focus was always on the collective life of the Deaf community and in particular his responsibility to share what he has learned with other Deaf people:

At the Deaf club I joined the Church Council, became secretary, took part in services, lectures and so on, and to my surprise joined the welfare services for the Deaf. I was really kidded into it by the Missioner: "You can sign well, come on..!" But then, where I worked, there was bad news, people being finished, numbers being cut, so I thought about Deaf welfare work and decided to do it. I wrote a letter to the secretary of Great Britain Missioners and he wrote back saying please come. I went to talk to him and he took me on himself. So we moved to a town up north, stayed there about 18 years, then got the chance to come back here when a welfare job came up in this area. I worked here, as I said earlier, studying, understanding the Bible, giving it to the Deaf. The point is giving it to the Deaf, Deaf learning from Deaf.

Later on I was ordained, staying in different places to study, with the Bishop watching me like a hawk. They had kept encouraging me to go forward but I was too keen on football, too keen on cricket, enjoying myself. Anyway the time came when I was accepted by the Bishop to go to the theological college to train. I was ordained and became honorary chaplain for the Deaf. So that is how it went on. My only regret is that I am getting old. I can still teach them, give it to the Deaf, but I am getting old, like the Cobbler, so they have to bring someone else in.

The significance of the collectivist nature of Deaf culture for the Deaf Church will now be examined further.

6.5.2 A Pilgrim People

Irene's account of how her faith developed pays particular attention to the aspect of fellowship between the church members. She refers to the shared experience of pilgrimage, extended opportunities to meet and learn together on Deaf family weekends, and exploring faith alongside the

other Deaf candidates on training courses. All of these experiences and the confidence engendered by receiving recognition as leaders with official standing within the Church of England nationally enabled Irene and Stephen to take the next step of setting up a Deaf-led fellowship group for the Diocese.

The importance of mentoring, in which more experienced, older Deaf people teach succeeding generations, has already been touched upon in previous chapters. In Irene's description of her spiritual journey we see another aspect of Deaf peer learning in a church context. Great importance is attached to making the journey of faith together, exploring belief as a group, both deepening intellectual understanding and generating shared faith experiences such as the pilgrimage. In addition to encountering God individually in the solitude of her own prayer and deliberation, encountering God through community and in communion with others seems very significant to Irene. This collective aspect of Deaf faith was also indicated in the previous chapter where both Stephen and Robert, having left the Deaf Church during the time of the missioners, describe being drawn back by the desire to contribute to building up the Deaf Church for the good of the community.

Broesterhuizen (2005) suggests that this dimension of faith in relationship with others comes through very strongly in a number of Deaf accounts of spiritual experience:

> The Deaf [former] Catholic priest Peter McDonough writes that deafness was a terrible disability for him during his younger years, but later in his life became a source of spirituality, in his personal life and in his relationship with the Deaf community. He writes about the richness of Deaf culture with its feeling for concreteness and incarnational faith. The Deaf religious sister Veronie Franken writes about Deaf people's special feeling for relationship, by which the bond with other people becomes a source of experience of God, the pillar of cloud that accompanies us in our exodus from the land of slavery and oppression. (p.314)

For all believers, Deaf or hearing, the experience of human relationships can be a resource for exploring and entering into a relationship with God, and the Church can offer a lived experience of fellowship in which God's presence is mediated through one's fellow pilgrims on the journey. However, it could be argued that this community dimension of faith in relationship with others is even more important in the context of Deaf culture with its strongly collectivist orientation (Mindess, 1999). As has been shown, for the Deaf Elders faith was not learned and absorbed from their hearing families, nor was it fully apprehended by individual research, reading and arriving at a decision. The peer learning strategies described by Becker (1980) were paramount: learning from other Deaf Christians in the community, discussing matters of faith and sharing experiences of worship were the greatest influences on belief and the desire to make a contribution to the collective pool of community resources was a major motivation for belonging. This is far removed from the notion of religion as a purely private matter so prevalent in British individualist culture. It would appear that for the members of this congregation belonging to a community of believers was fundamental to their way of understanding and living faith.

6.6 Language and Liturgy in the Deaf Church

6.6.1 Liturgical Language

Liturgy, the public prayer and central acts of worship of the Christian church, consists of more than simply a form of words. It usually includes ritual actions, visible signs and tangible elements which combine to connect the physical world of the believer with the ineffable mysteries of the transcendent Deity. But as Crystal (1965) states:

> Of all the signs, however, language has the most central role to play; it is exceptional to discover acts of public worship without it. (p.150)

Crystal notes that in most cultures there are distinct language forms for dealing with the sacred, either a different language or an abnormal form

of the language used by that community in other circumstances. There is a need for liturgical language to have a "marked" style that differentiates it from that used for everyday purposes. This is important both in terms of showing respect for the one being addressed and in reminding the worshipper of the nature of the activity engaged in, thus promoting reverence. Such language tends to have distinctive features of both register and style. Church register frequently includes aspects such as archaisms, specialised vocabulary for theological and liturgical ideas and formulaic phrases "hallowed by tradition, popular appeal and continuous use" (Crystal, 1964, p.153). In terms of style the language use is correct rather than colloquial, tending to employ the most conservative grammatical patterns and vocabulary.

The Congregation for Divine Worship (2001) instructions on translating liturgical texts into vernacular languages states:

> If indeed, in the liturgical texts, words or expressions are sometimes employed which differ somewhat from usual and everyday speech, it is often enough by virtue of this very fact that the texts become truly memorable and capable of expressing heavenly realities. (n.27)

The aim of the translator should be to "contribute to the gradual development, in each vernacular, of a sacred style that will come to be recognized as proper to liturgical language." (ibid.)

The use of sign language in worship will now be considered, paying particular attention to the language styles used in the traditional Deaf church services, and the problems of working from written English texts.

6.6.2 Language Use in the Sunday Service

To what extent can the language use observed be said to show the marked style described above? In general, in formal situations the style of sign language adopted tends to include more two-handed forms and fewer non-manual features. It also frequently incorporates more influences from English and uses more fingerspelling (Sutton-Spence and Woll, 1999). This was the type of language most usually seen during the

traditional Deaf Church services. The language observed in church showed a marked preference for two-handed signs, a distinctly formal style applied not only to words such as 'Lord' but also to more common everyday signs such as 'thank'. The Deaf Elders feel that a formal style, signing carefully and in a dignified manner is required for church. They are clearly scandalised when they see interpreters who use what they refer to as "pub sign" in church: one-handed signs and colloquialisms delivered in a relaxed conversational manner.

While older Deaf people tend to use more fingerspelling than younger generations (Sutton-Spence and Woll, 1999), a greater use of fingerspelling was noted in the church services than is usual among this group in everyday conversation. The incidences of fingerspelling appeared to fall into two categories. The spelling of certain English words which would normally be incorporated into the grammar of BSL rather than having separate signs was used for frequently repeated liturgical formulae. References to Jesus as Son of God, a frequently occurring phrase, used finger spelling for the word 'of' rather that the BSL structure 'his' denoting possession. In addition the word 'Son' was produced by finger spelling rather than using the sign for a boy child, emphasising that in this context the word has a particular meaning. Specialised vocabulary including Jewish terms such as Sabbath and Passover and archaic terms particularly in hymns were all frequently spelled. It is only in recent years as more Deaf people have begun to take their places among the ranks of the clergy that theologically educated Deaf people with training and experience in liturgy are coming together to discuss the most appropriate signs to express such specialised terminology.

During the Sunday services the set prayers of the liturgy and the hymns were, to a large extent, signed to match the word order of the written English. The welcome and notices, which took place in the chapel but were not part of the official liturgy, were signed in everyday conversational BSL. The sections of the prayers of intercession where members of the congregation suggested people who should be prayed for and described their needs were also in BSL, but these ideas were then

incorporated into the official prayers using signed versions of traditional English formulae. The sermons were delivered in formal BSL. One set part of the service which showed a greater variation and flexibility in language use was the Bible reading. This will be discussed further below. Similar patterns of switching between purer sign language forms and more English-based systems for different parts of the service were observed in Monaghan's (1991) study of an American Baptist church.

6.6.3 Signed English - the language of the Missioners

As described above, the Deaf Elders certainly consider that liturgical signing should be formal in style. However, their attitude towards whether the use of language should be signed forms of English or closer to BSL patterns seems to contain a number of different strands. One important factor is that most of the Deaf Elders do not generally think of their own sign language in any context as British Sign Language. Only Stephen and Robert used this term to describe their own language. Most consider BSL to be something that has been created by the universities; it is the language used by interpreters and Deaf professionals, not by the grass-roots Deaf club members. They themselves describe their language as 'old sign' or 'school sign' or simply 'English'. Of course, English in this context does not imply speech. Harry, always a harsh critic of the oral system, looks at the situation of many young Deaf people and demands "Why don't we give the Deaf English?" To his way of thinking an education taught through signs and fingerspelling would give Deaf pupils the tools to understand written English. To the Deaf Elders the written word is the key to accessing opportunities in a hearing world. After all, that is how the Deaf Elders managed their affairs before the development of sign language interpreting as a profession; writing notes, reading textbooks, consulting a dictionary.

The strong English influence on the type of signed language observed in the Sunday church services probably reflects two main issues. The first is the style of language the Deaf Elders observed the Missioner using during

church services. The second concerns the fact that Church of England services follow fixed English texts.

Firth (1966) notes that the language employed by the missioners in meetings and church services was made up of the "accepted vocabulary of conventional deaf signs" deployed "in relation to grammatical English by using together spoken words, lip reading, and the fingerspelling alphabet" (p.126). Firth does acknowledge that understanding such a system depends entirely on already knowing English. Thus it would have been largely incomprehensible to some members of Deaf church congregations. This is the type of language the Deaf Elders described in use in the Missioner services and which they continue to use themselves for leading prayers and hymns. So their choice of language style would appear to be based on the language they grew up with in church, the style hallowed by custom and usage.

Their attachment to such customary styles was evident in discussions among the Deaf Elders about how hymns should be signed. As noted above, they signed hymns in the order of the printed English words though with added features that marked out the poetic nature of hymns as distinct from prose texts. From time to time they would see other people without a traditional Deaf church background sign hymn texts which had been translated into BSL. For example, younger Deaf club members who did not come to church formed a signed singing group which performed in public to raise money for the centre, particularly at Christmas when they signed BSL versions of traditional carols. The Deaf Elders also attended many funerals where they would see hearing interpreters sign hymns. After one such funeral the Deaf Elders stood in the cemetery discussing the service. Stuart, not a regular church member, stated that he did not like it when interpreters signed BSL in church. His wife agreed and said this was perhaps because she was old-fashioned. She liked to be able to relate the signs to the printed words of the hymns which was impossible when the meaning of the words was signed in BSL structure. This couple do not use any speech or signed English forms in

other contexts yet had strong views about what style of signing was appropriate in church.

It is possible that the very strong views on how hymns should be signed, which were observed as a frequent source of heated debate during the fieldwork, reflect more than just a language attitude about what is appropriate in church. While the Anglican liturgy has undergone changes in recent years from the 'Red Book' language of the *Book of Common Prayer*, through the *Alternative Service Book* translation to the current *Common Worship*, hymns remain as strong emotional anchors to past experiences. For the Deaf Elders, the English of the traditional hymns and their SSE renditions have become a type of fixed text; they have a resonance and meaning to which they are deeply attached. This link is severed and the hymns become unrecognisable if people start to sign them to match BSL structure. In the past the Deaf choir was an important part of church life and was often in demand to perform at hearing services. Firth (1966) describes the signing of the best known and loved hymns as a frequent part of the repertoire used in social settings along with story telling. Even those Deaf people who no longer attend church can sign hymns they remember from their youth.

6.6.4 The Influence of English Texts

The disagreements about how to sign hymns, and the account of the Sunday service given above point to a major issue for the Deaf Church as part of the Church of England. Traditionally, Anglican liturgy has been comprised of a number of fixed English texts (disregarding for the moment the very recent attempts to encourage freer 'fresh expressions' of worship), and it is within this context that the Deaf centre chapel operates. The written English text of the service then has to be translated for transmission to a signing congregation. In the service described above the congregation was also presented with the written form of the main parts of the service and the hymns. This is not an unusual occurrence. Simultaneous use of signing and written texts is documented for the 'Red Book' missioner services by Lysons (1965) and in the more modern

chaplain-led service described by Lewis (2002) where "the text of the congregational prayers and choruses or songs appear on the screen of an overhead projector" (p.155).

The influence of English texts upon the signing style observed can to some extent be isolated by considering those elements of the service which were not signed from written material. Topics addressed in the chapel but not part of the actual liturgy were signed in an everyday conversational form of BSL. The parts of the service for which there was no set English text, for example the sermon, tended to be signed in BSL structure, though still in a formal manner.

Of the sections signed from written texts, the Bible reading was the one set part of the service where language use seemed a little more flexible. Those members whose signing style normally incorporated a lot of fingerspelling tended to follow the English words exactly. Others, especially those whose knowledge of English allowed them a good understanding of the text, incorporated more dramatic elements with BSL features such as role shift. Often they produced a sentence following the English words and then elaborated, adding more visual aspects. For example, the reading of the Resurrection narrative from John's Gospel observed during a service showed clear placement, referencing by pointing to items previously set up and frequent repetitions which were not in the English text.

It is possible that the different style of language employed for the Bible readings reflects in part the nature of the texts themselves. At the Deaf Church services there was usually only one Bible reading, a passage from the Gospels. Frequently these are accounts of miracles, parables told by Jesus to an audience, or stories which feature interaction or conversation. Such narratives easily lend themselves to placement or role shift. However, in the Eucharistic Prayer we have a similar narrative of what Jesus did at the Last Supper, yet this was not changed into BSL in the same way as the Gospel stories. I am grateful to Mgr. Bruce Harbert, the

Director of ICEL[16], for the insight that the explanation of this feature may in fact reflect the intent of the texts rather than their form.[17] The scripture readings are the only set part of the liturgy intended purely to convey information. Selections from the Bible are read to the congregation to teach them of its contents. The rest of the fixed liturgy is performative (Austin, 1962), a set of illocutionary acts which include petitions, praise and blessings. The narrative of the institution of the Eucharist in the Eucharistic Prayer is entirely different in character to the Scripture reading: it is not simply a repetition of the story; for the believer these are the words which when pronounced make present the reality they describe. This theory of relating the type of language used to the intent of the texts seems to be one way of explaining what was observed during the Deaf church service. The notices which conveyed information were in BSL. So were the parts of the intercessions where church members were sharing information about their friends and families. The Bible reading showed significant influences from BSL but at the same time was constrained by the nature of the written English text.

6.6.5 Towards Liturgical BSL

Linguistic discussions of Church sign language have to date tended to concentrate on aspects of sociolinguistic and situational variation in general rather than considering how language is used to match the aims and requirements of liturgy itself and the nature of specifically liturgical language. The style of language use in church services has been cited by some commentators in the debate on the existence of a form of sign language 'diglossia' (Lee, 1982; Stokoe, 1969; Woll, 1990;). In the light of the above discussion about the requirements of liturgical language it is

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[16] A Roman Catholic organisation. "The International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) is a mixed commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences in countries where English is used in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy according to the Roman Rite. The purpose of the Commission is to prepare English translations of each of the Latin liturgical books and any individual liturgical texts in accord with the directives of the Holy See." (www.icelweb.org/whatis.htm Accessed 10 April 2008)

[17] Lecture given to North Staffordshire Classical Association, Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1 April 2008

possible that rather than being an example of a general 'high' style of language for formal situations, what is being observed is a marked form of sign language specifically for worship.

Those authors who champion moving away from written English texts and signed English systems and developing what they see as more culturally appropriate Deaf liturgies have given little consideration to what specifically liturgical BSL would look like. Lewis (2002) addresses the form and content of Deaf appropriate liturgy, and particularly the layout and furnishings of the building and the need for greater congregational participation. Lewis makes a case that authentic Deaf worship should be in BSL, the natural language of the congregation. However, she does not go on to explore what the features of liturgical BSL might be.

Some Deaf clergy, particularly those involved with the group Deaf Ecumenical Clergy UK, have devised their own BSL translations and liturgies. This is acceptable to the Church of England authorities since the General Synod in 2000 recognised BSL as a minority language that could be used for worship.[18] This development also fits into a Church-wide trend towards developing what are styled 'fresh expressions' of worship. Some of these new BSL liturgies have been introduced in the Diocese under study from time to time. Responses have been mixed. Some aspects of the new services have been welcomed as speaking more directly to Deaf people, particularly the use of drama and activities based around the lighting of candles or discussing pictures. The importance of visual channels for apprehending matters of faith is again emphasised here. However, the Deaf Elders seem happiest when these elements are incorporated into the traditional service structure. While the traditional written texts present obstacles to some, nonetheless the familiar order is reassuring. Attachment to what is known and loved is very strong. The Deaf Elders may not comprehend all the details of the prayers but know

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[18] General Synod of the Church of England (1999) Draft amending Canon No. 23: the language of Divine Service and other miscellaneous matters, GS 1323 B, London: Church House Publishing

the broad outlines of the service and what is expected of them at any point. New BSL liturgies which do not retain these clear signposts about the direction in which the service is progressing are experienced as confusing and distressing. Lysons' (1965) contention that the repetitive nature of the 'Red Book' services aided comprehension among the congregation would seem to have some justification.

Interestingly, with the new BSL liturgies a dilemma of language use arises when it is necessary to translate them into English. These liturgies are more often used outside the traditional Deaf Church context, especially where the Deaf congregation is sharing premises with a hearing parish. Written or voiced translations are then provided for any hearing parishioners who choose to attend the Deaf service. This raises the question of whether these liturgies should be translated into a traditional liturgical style of English to emphasise that worship in sign language is fully capable of reverence, dignity and richness, or whether they should be presented in everyday language to show that the liturgy is in the natural language of the worshippers and a 'fresh expression' for this particular time and place.

Crystal (1965) notes that attempts to modify liturgical language need to take into account not only issues of liturgy, doctrine and culture but also

> require a large amount of minute linguistic description and analysis for satisfactory results: one needs a knowledge of the forms of language and the pragmatics of language. This, then, is where the professional linguist can and should help the Church...this would be an essential perspective for a realistic and permanent liturgical vernacular. (p.155)

There would seem to be a good case for Deaf clergy with the liturgical, doctrinal and cultural knowledge to join forces with scholars of sign language linguistics in order to create worthy BSL liturgies that can stand the test of time.

6.7 Denomination in the Deaf Church

"The Church of England is the only Church in the world that interferes neither with your politics nor your religion" Anthony Trollope

At first sight the role of denomination in this study seems quite straightforward. The research has been conducted within six Deaf Anglican churches in a particular Diocese which are led by an ordained, stipendiary minister of the Church of England. However, a closer examination reveals a more complex picture.

A number of the Deaf Elders who regularly attended the Anglican Deaf Church at the centre were not baptised or confirmed members of the Church of England. Some chose to be married in Methodist or Catholic Churches. Some previous accounts of Anglican Deaf Churches do not investigate denominational diversity within their congregations (Advisory Board of Ministry, 1997; Lewis, 2002). Attendance at Anglican services seems to be taken as sufficient evidence of belonging to the denomination. Morris (2008) notes that it is not unusual to find Deaf people worshipping in the Anglican Deaf churches who identify as belonging to a different denomination. To what extent do the Deaf congregation members in the present study see themselves and their Deaf Church as part of a larger organisation, the Church of England?

6.7.1 Deaf Church Identity, Anglican Identity

The field notes do not offer a single example of any Deaf Church members declaring themselves to be a member of the Church of England. When asked about their religious identity and place of worship, the Deaf Elders generally sign "I am strongly committed to my Deaf Church" conveying not only a strong idea of belonging, but also a sense of ownership. For them the Deaf Church is an independent entity. Any sense of external constraint they experience is not attributed to the structures and regulations of the Church of England. Rather, the Deaf Elders blame the chaplains for trying to impose hearing ways on Deaf congregations.

A number of incidents in the field notes suggest that for the Deaf congregation allegiance to a particular denomination plays little part in their conception of Church. A number of such views were expressed in relation to my own status as a Roman Catholic. The Deaf church members know and seem happy to accept that as a hearing person I am involved in another church outside the Deaf world. They know that I do not take communion with them at the Deaf church. At first one or two people asked me about this and I explained that I am Roman Catholic and that it is not permitted. Yet they have suggested that I could be their next chaplain, or at least a licensed Lay Reader. When I respond that the Anglican Bishop would not ordain a Roman Catholic as his next Chaplain among Deaf People, they shrug this off as a seemingly unimportant consideration.

The Deaf Church members were not unaware of the existence of various denominations. A number of them mentioned the denominations to which their parents had belonged. Harry stated that his mother had been a committed Methodist. Vera and Joseph both came from Roman Catholic families. Stephen recalled seeing the many church buildings and wondering what the differences were between the various denominations. The activities of Jehovah's Witnesses were discussed by the church members on a number of occasions. The Deaf Elders believed that the Jehovah's Witnesses were deliberately targeting vulnerable Deaf people as potential converts and specially training sign language communicators for this purpose. The willingness of Jehovah's Witnesses to embrace sign language was not seen as a positive provision of access but as a calculated attempt to win over unsuspecting Deaf people. The point at issue for the Deaf Elders seemed to be not one of denomination but of group unity: Deaf people should be part of the Deaf Church and anyone attempting to lure them away to a hearing church was viewed with suspicion.

Lysons (1965) states that given the smallness of the British Deaf community any attempt to maintain denominational boundaries would be impractical. He reports that of the 49 Deaf centres with churches most catered for all Deaf Christians irrespective of denomination. Only two

centres had separate chapels, in both cases having one for Anglican and one for Roman Catholic worship. The Deaf club which forms the basis for the present study was one of those which had a separate Catholic chapel. Harry described how this came about:

> *The Centre had a Roman Catholic chapel. Lovely, small. Now that was also brought about through the actions of a Deaf man, a Roman Catholic Deaf man. Although he came upstairs with us before [to the Anglican chapel] he felt because of his Roman Catholic faith they wanted their own place so he asked the Superintendent. There were plenty of Catholic Deaf around here. The Superintendent agreed provided they did the necessary work themselves, so they refurbished the room, beautiful. It had, you know, the crosses round the walls and so on. So that is how it started. One of the local priests used to come and do the services. He knew a little bit of sign language.*

The Deaf man who instigated the creation of the Catholic chapel clearly felt strongly about his own distinctive faith. Yet he had been attending the Church of England services. Examining possible reasons for this focuses attention on the relationship between Deaf and denominational identities. At the time the Church of England services were the only ones accessible in sign language to Deaf people. However, it must be remembered that this was also a time when hearing Catholics were required to ask permission from their priest before attending a non-Catholic service, even a wedding or funeral. So the idea that Deaf Catholics accepted attending the Church of England services because there was no Catholic Deaf alternatives requires further examination: most Catholics if unable to attend Mass would not think of participating in the services of another denomination instead. Also, the obstacles for Deaf Catholics attending services in a hearing parish were in many ways less significant than for their Anglican counterparts. Mass was in Latin and the central part of the service was intended to be inaudible to the congregation. Only the server made the responses while the congregation

attended to their private devotions. It would appear that for the Deaf Elders in this study Deaf identity was a stronger factor in choosing a place of worship than any denominational allegiance. While a separate Deaf Catholic chapel was the preferred choice of some Deaf Catholics, the Anglican Deaf Church was preferable to worshipping outside the Deaf community.

Given the importance in Deaf culture of maintaining group unity (Becker, 1980) it would be interesting to investigate how the proposal to create the separate Catholic chapel was received in the club and how successful it was in attracting a congregation. However, I was unable to identify anyone still living who had worshipped there, and there were few references to the Catholic chapel in the Deaf club records and nothing in the Roman Catholic archives for the Diocese.

Even when the separate chapel had been created, some Deaf Catholics continued worshipping in the main Anglican chapel. Len and Vera, core members of the Deaf church at the centre, were married in a Catholic church where Vera's parents had been parishioners for many years. The parish priest could not sign so the Chaplain with Deaf people for the Catholic Diocese had to come and officiate. In their case the sense of being Catholic – or family expectations – were sufficiently strong for unusual arrangements to be made so they could be married in the bride's family church. Their children were later baptised there. Yet Len and Vera never attended the Catholic Masses when these were held in the Deaf centre, and are both fully involved, committed, communicant members of the Anglican Deaf Church.

The decision of Deaf Catholics to take part in the Anglican worship of the Deaf Church may reflect a number of factors. As in so many things, the role of the Deaf school seems central. In terms of religion, the school was a major influence in separating children from the original denominational allegiances of their families. Joseph never considers himself to have been Catholic though this was the religion of his parents:

My family, they were all Catholic but the Deaf school was Church of England. At school we were all mixed together, Catholic, Church of England, others.

While the school did not officially belong to any particular denomination it is clear from the accounts given by the Deaf Elders that the pupils were being exposed to a broadly Anglican tradition through daily prayers, scripture lessons and attendance at the parish church on Sundays. At the same time the residential nature of the school meant that they were separated from their families and so not absorbing the religious traditions and practices that would have surrounded them at home.

A residential school did exist for Deaf children who were Roman Catholic (St John's School for the Deaf, Boston Spa). However, none of the Deaf church members who identified themselves or their families as Catholic attended this school. Possible reasons for this might include unwillingness on the part of the local authority to fund out of area placements, priests not being active in demanding that Catholic education be made available, or family preferences for children to attend a local Deaf school rather than travelling further from home. Although children at the local school were only allowed home for a few weeks each year, if parents lived nearby they were permitted to visit for an hour every week. Such regular contact would have been impossible if their children were sent to another area.

After leaving school, for most of the Deaf Elders joining the Deaf club was the natural next step. In the same way that the Deaf club seemed the natural focus of social life, it is likely that the Deaf church was viewed as the natural and obvious place for Deaf people to worship, regardless of denomination. As has been shown, the motives for attending church were not simply religious. For many, the fear that the assistance of the Missioner in secular matters depended on attending church on Sunday played a part. Being a member of the main Anglican church offered the opportunity to hold a position of authority in the club by being on the Church Council. As one national Deaf Church leader commented: "People in the Deaf club respected the men working in the church.

Looked up to them. I wanted to be like that." It also meant the chance to take part in the many social events arranged by the Church Council. Membership of the new Catholic chapel would have conferred no such status or benefits. By the time the Catholic chapel was set up it would appear that a number of Catholics were already in the habit of attending the Anglican chapel and saw no reason to change. Above all, choosing to join the new Catholic chapel would have meant deciding to worship separately from the majority of the community. The close-knit ties of friendship may well have exerted a greater influence that any denominational distinctions.

6.7.2 Holding the Contradictions Together

In the era of chaplains, the traditional Deaf centre churches have made the transition from being run on broadly Anglican lines by missioners who were mostly lay men to officially being part of the Church of England, ministered to by diocesan clergy and subject to the full authority and rules of the Church of England. Yet many of the Deaf Church members can only be said to be Anglican in that they are cared for by Church of England clergy. The historical legacy of the long association of Church of England in the founding and funding of Deaf missions is well documented. I have argued that the residential system of Deaf schools also played a part in loosening the ties between many Deaf people and the denominations of their parents. However, one Chaplain interviewed disputed that the Anglican identity of the Deaf Church and its members was simply a matter of historical development or a default option for those holding broadly Christian views without any strong denominational preference. He felt that being part of the Church of England also served an important, positive function for the Deaf Church.

The Chaplain argued that the Church of England, while perhaps appearing rigid and restrictive with its fixed liturgy and strongly legislative framework, did in fact offer the most liberating structure for the Deaf Church. Participation in its services is open to any Christian. Most other denominations require some formal declaration of allegiance

and ongoing commitment to be a member: many Non-Conformist churches have very strong rules of conforming for their members. The Church of England encompasses a wide spectrum of theological views and liturgical practices. The Chaplain argued that only this broad church was sufficiently flexible to enable the British Deaf community in all its diversity to worship together, and to encompass the cultural variation of Deaf ways of worship.

I would argue that rather than the 'broad church' culture of the Church of England being able to encompass the Deaf community, the Deaf Elders have encultured the official Church of England identity to match their collectivist cultural values. The Deaf Elders take the view that the Deaf Church serves and belongs to the Deaf community. Its existence requires no further justification and explanation, nor reference to any outside body such as the Church of England. In a way, the division of the functions of the missioner into specialised roles has contributed to this attitude. The Church of England can easily be viewed as simply another external service provider, supplying a chaplain in the same way that an outside agency might supply the services of an interpreter. To this way of thinking the Deaf Church might be viewed as no more a part of the Church of England than the Deaf club is an appendage of the local Social Services department.

The examples cited from the fieldwork seem to suggest, from an outside perspective, some complex patterns of allegiance and somewhat unconventional attitudes towards the question of denomination and the official identity of the Deaf Church as Anglican. However, from the perspective of the Deaf Elders it would appear to be straightforward and self-explanatory: they belong to Deaf Church and Deaf Church is simply the gathering for worship of Deaf communities regardless of denomination. Whatever beliefs their families professed, wherever they were baptised, confirmed or married, their primary commitment is to the Deaf Church. Giving of one's time and energy to the Deaf Church is a contribution to the collective well-being of the community. Being a member of the Deaf Church is not only a choice to serve God, it is to

participate in the network of reciprocal service which sustains the community. Matters of religion, as all other things, are viewed through the lens of collectivist cultural values.

7 CROSSING THE JORDAN: FUNERALS AND MEMORIAL SERVICES IN THE DEAF CHURCH

"When I tread the verge of Jordan, Bid my anxious fears subside; Death of death, and hell's destruction, Land me safe on Canaan's side:"
William Williams

7.1 Do Deaf People Have Deaf Funerals?

Deaf Studies, the study of Deaf people, their language and their culture, has been carried out as an academic discipline in Britain for over 30 years. It might be anticipated that any attempt to research and represent the distinctive culture of Deaf people would include an analysis of customs surrounding death and disposal. However, the systematic investigation of death and disposal seems to be largely absent from Deaf Studies. Similarly the literature on the Deaf Church contains little about funeral rites.

It is possible that in a relatively young discipline with few academic departments or researchers other topics have taken priority. However, I would suggest that the topic has, to a great extent, been dismissed without proper investigation. Padden (1996), a leading author in the field of Deaf research, has stated: "Deaf people lack their own burial rites" (p.86). An uncritical, 'common sense' response to Padden's contention would be that, of course, Deaf people do appear to be buried in the same places and according to the same rites as the majority culture in which they live. Now that the emerging discipline of Deaf Studies has some more sophisticated analytical frameworks in place it would seem to be an appropriate time to approach this topic afresh. Is it true that were we to undertake detailed observation of actual funerals and interview Deaf participants that such research would reveal no distinctively Deaf behaviour or attitudes concerning funeral rites? And if such customs do not exist, why do they not? Would the absence of distinctly Deaf funerals undermine our claims for the existence of a genuine Deaf culture?

For Padden, her assumption that there are no distinctive Deaf burial rites does not lead her to call into question the existence of Deaf culture per se,

but rather to challenge the definition of culture in this context. She states:

> The type of cultural definition that notes food, burial habits, clothing and the like rests on a view of culture as carefully bounded and carefully separate from other influences. But in the modern world groups coexist and are influenced by each other. (p.86)

Padden's main argument seems to be that the components of modern Deaf culture in post-industrial western societies can not be expected to match the empirical findings or theoretical concepts from those pioneering anthropological studies in more traditional and isolated societies which form the classic texts of cultural investigation. The fact that they do not correspond in every detail reflects the difference in context rather than undermining the validity of the Deaf cultural project.

If we accept Padden's view that the manifestations of Deaf culture are shaped by coexistence with and influence from the surrounding majority hearing culture, then the questions we need to be asking are what exactly is the nature of this relationship, and what those outside influences or constraints are. Only then can we begin to understand what authentically Deaf funeral rituals would look like. The theoretical framework adopted for researching the Deaf Church in the current study is colonialism: a spiritual colonialism which replaces Deafhood visions of Church and culturally and linguistically appropriate ritual with hearing norms and liturgies. Where there appears to be no distinctive Deaf cultural patterns it may be that these have been suppressed by the majority culture. In this chapter the apparent absence of distinctive Deaf funeral rites claimed by Padden is re-examined in the light of colonialism by considering those factors which are preventing Deaf people from expressing their cultural preferences in funeral rituals and Deaf responses to those constraints. In particular the distinctive Deaf Church memorial services will be considered as a manifestation of the Deaf need for a culturally authentic funerary ritual, a desire otherwise thwarted by the intervention of hearing families and adherence to hearing church norms.

7.2 The Deaf Church Memorial Service

All the Deaf church members and chaplains interviewed during the course of the current research emphasised the importance of the Deaf Church memorial service. It is the custom to hold a memorial service for deceased members of the community, usually about a month after the funeral.

Harry describes the importance of the memorial service for the community:

> *I think it is something internal to the Deaf Community. We always have memorial services. Deaf people always ask about the memorial even before the funeral. They want to know when the memorial will be and it is amazing, they all come...though at any other time they don't come, some never come to church. But they remember that boy or that girl, their everyday life, not linked with church, and they go. I think it is an inner feeling between the Deaf, 'I have got to go and pay my respects to that person'.*

In the Deaf centre chapel in the current study the memorial service usually begins in the same way as other church services held there. There is a welcome from the chaplain, with a particular welcome extended to those who do not usually attend church, and an explanation of how the service will proceed. An opening hymn follows, usually "All things bright and beautiful" (a great favourite for Deaf community funerals and baptisms) or "The Lord is my shepherd". After this the main business of the memorial service begins. The Chaplain invites anyone who wishes to come to the front and sign about the deceased person. This is not done in the style of a formal eulogy, nor does it recount the person's life history in any chronological order. The time of sharing memories continues until everyone present has had the chance to contribute. The service then reverts to a more standard liturgical form, usually concluding with a shortened version of the communion service and a final hymn.

The sharing of memories at the service is in sharp contrast with formal eulogies at hearing funerals. There is no attempt to give a complete picture of the person's life. Each person shares their particular memories, usually mentioning only the contribution of the deceased person to the Deaf community and their involvement in club activities:

"George was a good carpenter. He helped to make the club bar downstairs."

"I was in the Deaf cycling club with Tom."

"Years ago we all went to Eastbourne..."

Harry contrasted the content and mood of the memorial service with that of the funeral:

> *Some Deaf say that a funeral is sad, yet some people are happy that the person is at peace. But at a memorial service they will say "I want to talk about Joe..." and they will talk about the past, happy times, Blackpool, anywhere they enjoyed themselves, they will talk about work "Joe helped me a lot..."*

During the fieldwork, varying explanations were offered for the type of material shared. One Chaplain suggested that perhaps Deaf people did not know all the biographical details about their friends. He stated that when a Deaf person died, the hearing family members provided most of the information for the eulogy rather than Deaf partners or friends because, even after a long association, the latter tended to say that they did not know much about the other person.

In certain respects there may be some truth in this suggestion. The narratives related by the Deaf Elders about their home life indicated that those with hearing families often had little communicated to them about their own family backgrounds and so may not have been able to share such information with Deaf partners or friends. However, I think a more likely explanation for the types of memory shared in the memorial service

is that the Deaf Church Elders have been together for at least 50 years. Much is taken for granted and therefore omitted in the 'high context' culture described by Mindess (1999). Basic information included in hearing eulogies such as year of birth, school attended, marital situation, names of family members, places of work and so on will already be common knowledge in the community. The Deaf memorial service is the gathering of a close-knit group with lifelong connections, in contrast with hearing church funerals which may draw together mourners from a number of highly-compartmentalised areas of the deceased person's life.

One specific example of omitting information that was already common knowledge was reported. During an interview one person commented that, in spite of the directness that characterises much Deaf communication, no-one would speak ill of the dead person at a memorial service because there was no need: everyone in the community would know what that person had really been like. However, the field notes contained a number of examples from club discussions where very direct criticism was made of people who had recently died. Speaking ill of the dead was not uncommon, even when the character of the person in question was widely known. Whether it was socially acceptable to do so seemed to be a question of context.

Harry's description of the memorial service characterises it as a coming together of the community, so significant that even those who do not regularly attend church feel drawn to participate by the "inner feeling between the Deaf". The memorial service is a celebration of this inner feeling; the consciousness of being part of the collective life of the Deaf community and an acknowledgement of one's responsibility to other community members. The ties that bind the community are further emphasised by Harry's phrase about remembering "that boy or that girl", evoking memories of school and calling to mind the life-long bonds of friendship between the Deaf Elders. If the memorial service is a ritual religious celebration of group unity it seems unlikely that anyone would draw attention to past conflicts or bad feeling. Rather, the memories shared by the participants deliberately focus on happy times, lasting

friendships and the contribution made by the deceased person to building up the life of the community. The memorial service would seem to be a clear statement of cultural values about what is important, and in Deaf culture this is the continued flourishing of the community and ties of relationship between Deaf people.

7.3 The Significance Of The Memorial Service

The description of the Deaf Church memorial service indicates that it differs from a funeral in both mood and content. They are different kinds of service which perform different functions. Investigation into how the memorial service developed and why it continues to hold such an important place in the life of the Deaf Church and its members revealed that hearing chaplains frequently held views which differed from those of the Deaf communities they served.

7.3.1 The Perspective of Hearing Chaplains

The hearing chaplains who had worked in the Diocese over the preceding 30 years all explained the existence of the Deaf Church memorial service as a response to various practical constraints affecting funerals with Deaf mourners. Two of the constraints most frequently mentioned were the problem of fitting everything necessary into the time allocated for a funeral, and the problem of informing the community that someone has died.

The first of these constraints was the question of time; whether it is possible to conduct a full service in BSL in the standard 30 minute crematorium slot. One Chaplain reported:

> *Whenever there was to be a full funeral service at the crematorium, I endeavoured to have a double session. It was my belief that no-one could provide a meaningful service that would speak to the Deaf people if everything had to be fitted into 20 or 30 minutes.*

Other chaplains had similar feelings. One said that when hearing clergy led a service which was interpreted for Deaf mourners it often required signing at a speed that was inaccessible to Deaf people and was not respectful to God. The chaplains concluded that in the case of an interpreted funeral or one restricted to the standard 30 minutes allocated at the crematorium, it would be necessary to hold a separate BSL memorial service.

The idea expressed by the chaplains that a funeral with a Deaf congregation would take longer could have two possible explanations. Either the chaplains were supposing that it would take more time to sign the same content than to speak it, or they were assuming that some form of additional content would be necessary. The first explanation, that it would take longer to sign the same content than to speak it, is not supported by linguistic research. Klima and Bellugi (1979) cite Bellugi and Fischer's experiments to compare the rates of language production between American Sign Language (ASL) and spoken English. They found that while the rate of articulation for words was roughly double that for signs, there was no significant difference between the modalities when propositions (units of meaning) were considered. It is possible that chaplains were acting upon a mistaken instinct that signing would be slower. Another factor may be that they were attempting to follow the English order of service word for word in signed English. In this case the slower rate of articulation of signs compared with individual words would come into play and might result in the whole service being longer.

The second possible explanation, that funerals with Deaf mourners required more time for additional explanatory material, was implied in some of the interview responses given by chaplains. One Chaplain commented:

> *The stuff that we throw at them at a funeral, apart from the odd hymn, is in a language which, even for hearing people, is unattainable. All the words we use in a funeral service that we could translate would not necessarily translate well for Deaf people.*

The problem the chaplains seem to be identifying here does not appear to be a difficulty of translation so much as a requirement for catechesis. They acknowledged that the contents of funerals were for many hearing people in 'unattainable' language and referred to concepts no longer part of the normal frame of reference for the majority. While the chaplains seemed to accept that for many hearing congregations funerals were only meaningful in terms of custom and usage rather than content, it was only when faced with translating the service for Deaf congregations that they were not willing to deliver this largely incomprehensible material without additional explanation. In view of the difficulties the chaplains perceived in conducting a funeral service in the usual time allocated, they felt that one important aspect of the memorial service was the opportunity to explain the customary readings and prayers for the dead in a way that was more meaningful to their Deaf congregations.

Another constraint identified by the Chaplains was that spreading the word that someone had died might be a slow process for the Deaf community. In the past Deaf people, excluded from telephone technology, could only communicate at face to face meetings or for those with proficiency in written English by post. Consequently they might not know immediately that a community member had died. In Britain the majority of funerals take place within around 10 days, so a memorial service would benefit those who did not know in time to attend the funeral.

This view is supported by Becker (1980) who states that "the number of people that attend a funeral depends on the popularity of the individual and the length of time it takes to spread the word" (p.96). However, she also notes that the impact of a death upon a community will vary according to how active the person was in the group. In Britain, funerals of those who were an active part of the Deaf community at the time of their death are major events. Indeed, some modern crematoria are only built to seat around sixty and are completely inadequate for such Deaf funerals where it is not uncommon to have people standing or even outside the building. This would seem to indicate that in fact Deaf people

do learn about a death quickly enough to attend a funeral and that explaining memorial services as a response to slowness in spreading the news is insufficient.

Field notes indicated a number of strategies for informing other community members about a death. Announcements about forthcoming funerals were made during church services, either as part of the prayers of intercession or as separate notices at the end. Similar announcements were also made on club days. When the Deaf father of one club member died she asked a hearing relative to telephone the Deaf centre staff so that it could be announced to the Over 60s club at their lunchtime meeting. Even among the Over 60s text messages have largely replaced fax and text phone technology and are regularly used to request and share information.

After one funeral I asked Irene and Vera how they received information about deaths and funeral arrangements. They seemed surprised by the question and replied that they looked in the local paper. However, when I pursued this idea with Deaf people outside the immediate area, they said that they would never do this. Perhaps it is peculiar to this particular area where the influence of the local newspaper remains strong. Hearing people who never buy the paper still have death notices placed in its columns. It is a service offered as a matter of course by local funeral directors. It is possible that in looking to the newspaper for information the Deaf Church members are sharing a cultural habit with their hearing neighbours in the region.

7.3.2 The Purpose of the Memorial Service: a Deaf Community Perspective

In order to check whether memorials were an important part of Deaf Church life in other areas of Britain and to explore their meaning further, three chaplains with experience of the Deaf Church nationally, two Deaf and one hearing, were interviewed. They all recognised the memorial service as something very significant in Deaf Church culture. However,

when the funeral was 'deaf-centred' they felt that often mourners did not pursue the idea of a memorial service in addition.

This notion of a 'deaf-centred funeral' was concerned with whether a funeral was aimed more to meet the needs of Deaf or hearing participants. The feeling that the needs of Deaf and hearing mourners were not always compatible and the question of whether one should try to achieve a balance or to prioritise the needs of one group over the other seemed to occupy a number of chaplains. One Chaplain, himself hearing, explained how he addressed this question:

> *I try very hard not to listen to the hearing people in a Deaf funeral. If I'm doing Deaf things then it's Deaf priority. Yes, I will talk to the hearing people because invariably that's where I glean most of my information about the life of the Deaf person who has died... If the person in the coffin is a Deaf person, then to me that is a 'Deaf funeral'. So the Deaf people are my priority.... That's why I was asked to do it, otherwise you may as well have a hearing vicar [not a Chaplain with Deaf people] doing it. That is my priority, to communicate with Deaf people the best way I can in that short space of time. The hearing members of the family are not always happy about this, they say they did not want a Deaf funeral, but if so why ask the Chaplain with Deaf people to conduct it?*

However, other chaplains indicated that more frequently they felt constrained by what hearing family members decided. When asked directly "Why do you think memorial services are so important to Deaf people?" one chaplain who is Deaf responded that he thought it was really because hearing people control the funeral. When Deaf people were able to have what they wanted at a funeral a memorial was not necessary. An example was given concerning the funeral for a family member of a Deaf chaplain which had been conducted by another Deaf minister. Following the funeral there had been no Deaf Church memorial service. It was not considered necessary because everything the Deaf mourners felt was significant had been done. In this case, Deaf people had the chance at the

funeral to come forward and share their memories. The funeral had met all their requirements and nothing more was needed.

The field notes offered an example of the opposite situation where a Deaf person wanted to use the funeral to share memories of the deceased but had no opportunity:

After the funeral for Jimmy which was held in the parish church, everyone went to the crematorium for the committal. Two more Deaf people, not regular church members, arrived. I did not know whether they intended only to come to the committal or if they had arrived late or got lost. While we were waiting to go into the chapel Janet went round the group talking about Jimmy, trying to gain agreement about his character, 'he was a real gentleman' etc. It became obvious during the service that she was expecting to have the opportunity to make this speech. Janet said after that there had been nothing in the service about Jimmy, that talking about him would make it 'more personal'.

So it would seem that the importance of the memorial service is in part a response to the perceived hearing control of funerals: if the funeral satisfies the cultural requirements of the Deaf mourners then there is no need for a memorial. Irene explained that memorial services were "to remember the dead, to say something about their life." This opportunity for everyone to share their stories about the deceased person seems to be central to the Deaf cultural view of how the dead should be remembered.

While this is important for hearing people too, traditionally it has tended not to be incorporated in church services but left for the less formal situation of the wake or reception after the funeral. However, this is changing. Jupp (2001) argues that as traditional Christian belief in the resurrection and afterlife wanes, funerals have come to incorporate more secular aspects of commemoration. Emphasis is placed on describing the life that has ended rather than anticipating the life of the world to come:

> Increasingly, funerals serve secular needs, of recalling the life, achievements and character of the dead person, sometimes in the light of his death (if premature) and often

> his past role in the community. The centrality of a secular rather than a religious criterion for commemoration marks a shift in attitudes to what should be a 'good' funeral. This concentrates on the biography of the individual, rather than on his fate in the afterlife. (p.221)

Irene commented on this trend in hearing funerals and related it to the decline in Deaf Church memorial services:

> *But now I have noticed at a lot of funerals they talk about the dead person's life. So I feel now memorial services are getting fewer because the vicar, family, anyone can tell a story about the dead person's life at the funeral now and they did not before. So you do not need our Deaf memorial service, that is my view.*

Irene was making a clear link between the content of the funeral and the perceived need for a Deaf Church memorial service. During fieldwork observations and interviews in the Diocese under study, frequent reference was made to the role of hearing families in determining the arrangements and content for the funeral. It was clear that whether Deaf people or their hearing families controlled the organisation and content of the funeral was contested ground. I would support the contention of the Deaf chaplain reported above that the Deaf memorial service has developed and continues to be of such great significance in the Deaf Church because of the domination of funerals by hearing family members. Deaf mourners are disenfranchised in many situations surrounding funerals and therefore the Deaf Church memorial service serves as an alternative ritual.

7.4 Disenfranchised Grief

The concept of disenfranchised grief emphasises the social dimension of bereavement; the need for one's grief to be acknowledged by others and the need to participate in the public rites of mourning. Disenfranchised grief is that which "is not openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly observed." (Doka, 2002, p.5)

The main reasons put forward by Doka as to why this might happen are:

1. That the relationship with the deceased is not recognised, particularly non-kin relationships;
2. That the loss itself is not acknowledged e.g. death of an unborn child, death of a pet;
3. Exclusion of the griever, especially where the person is socially defined as not capable of grief;
4. Where the circumstances of the death itself might cause anxiety or embarrassment;
5. Where the ways people grieve may not match social and cultural norms.

The funeral is a focal point for acknowledging the grief of the bereaved and offering them support. Doka claims that those whose grief is disenfranchised are excluded from such rituals, either explicitly in their not being present or implicitly where they are present at the funeral but their role and importance in the life of the deceased is not publicly acknowledged. This theory has been used to describe the experience of particular groups as well as individuals; for example, Read (2003) utilises this theory in her bereavement work with people who have learning disabilities.

One way that such disenfranchisement is addressed is through what Doka describes as alternative rituals:

> Alternative rituals can provide opportunities for mourners to transcend time or space and to express their own relationship, affirm an aspect of the deceased's identity, or meet their own spiritual and cultural needs. (p.141)

If Deaf mourners are disenfranchised during funerals then the Deaf Church memorial service can function as such an alternative ritual. The memorial service allows the Deaf Church to reaffirm the deceased's identity as a member of the Deaf community and to celebrate the person's life according to its own cultural traditions in the place that is the spiritual home of the group. The following examples are matched to three

of Doka's categories of disenfranchisement which appear to be at work in the Deaf Community.

7.4.1 The Relationship Is Not Recognised – Kin Versus Community

> In less complex societies, deaths are marked communally, providing the opportunity for all members to express and experience grief. In more complex societies, funeral rituals are no longer communal but familial, and, as a result, the right to express grief is limited to those in recognized kin roles. The grief of others is disenfranchised. (Doka, 2002, p.xiii)

The research revealed frequent examples of funerals being a source of tension between biological family and the Deaf community which many of its members described as 'like family'. The life story narratives of the Deaf Elders revealed that relationships with their hearing families were often strained. The enduring bonds of peer group friendship from school days (Becker, 1980) and the strong collectivist orientation of Deaf culture (Mindess, 1999) mean that tremendous significance is attached to relationships within the community. Ladd (2003) records the use of the term family to describe relationships in the Deaf school (p.298). Lane (1992, 1999) also notes that "the metaphor of family is fundamental and recurrent." (p.17)

The rise of feminist and cross-cultural studies has challenged traditional anthropological notions of kinship and especially the primacy of the nuclear family. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) note that "there are many historic echoes of the usage of family language, often by communities of marginalised or embattled people" (p.49). Their concept of 'families of choice' and Stack's (1974) work on 'fictive kin' describe networks which are not restricted to groups sharing ties of blood or of marriage. Those who behave as family are treated as family and given the same rights and responsibilities. This notion of kin as those sharing ties of reciprocity and mutual assistance has strong resonances with the importance attributed to reciprocity as a key value in Deaf culture (Mindess, 1999; Ladd, 2003).

Both my own field notes and the reports of chaplains working with the Deaf community revealed many incidents where hearing family members attempted to ignore the significance of these Deaf community relationships when making funeral arrangements. On some occasions families were unwilling to allow an interpreter or chaplain with Deaf people to be present at the funeral. Whether this was intended to preserve the funeral as an exclusively family affair, or was an attempt to hide the existence of deafness in their family which they perceived as something negative, was more difficult to establish. This extract is taken from an interview with Celia, a hearing chaplaincy worker whose parents were Deaf:

> *I am a hearing child of Deaf parents. By the time I went to school I was my parents' interpreter. My younger sister was not expected to take on this role and she never really learned to sign, she mostly used lip speaking... When our mother died, my sister did not want the Deaf community to have any part in the funeral. She felt that the funeral was a family affair and would not accept that hearing people were only part of our mother's world. But I could not imagine Mother's funeral without sign language, and so later I organised a memorial service for the Deaf community who had also been like family to her.*

Some, particularly older Deaf people, do not know about the availability of interpreters or how to book one for a funeral. One unresolved problem is who pays for the interpreter. Funeral directors may have some legal responsibility to make their services accessible but in practice it is suspected that such costs are simply passed on to the family. In the Diocese under study the Church of England has an agreement to meet interpreting costs for any Deaf person who requests it at a church funeral. However, the local authority will not fund interpreting for crematorium funerals. They claim that funerals are not covered by the Disability Discrimination Act as, unlike marriage, there is no legal requirement for words at a funeral. British law governs the permitted means of disposal

of human remains, and the local authority provides the facilities for this through cremation or burial. Any additional rituals accompanying this are seen as purely a matter of personal choice. As Walter (1997) notes, despite the fact that the majority of funerals are still conducted by a minister of religion according to some form of religious liturgy, the business of death is treated as "very largely a secular affair" (p.166).

Even if an interpreter is present and the participation of Deaf mourners not explicitly excluded, when hearing families members organise the funeral they may be unaware of the person's connections to the Deaf world, the names of their friends, or the role they played at the club. If these ties are not acknowledged within the funeral then the Deaf memorial could serve to rectify such omissions.

7.4.2 Exclusion of the Griever

Those considered incapable of comprehending death are frequently excluded from funeral rituals, for example the very young, or people with learning disabilities. Chaplains with Deaf people report examples of Deaf people being treated in a similar way. Two of the chaplains interviewed knew of family members trying to prevent Deaf adults from attending funerals. Behenna (1990, 1998) relates an account of a Deaf person who was not told that her father had died:

> "My father had died, but I didn't know. People looked sad and kept saying things I didn't understand. In the end I had to ask 'is my father dead?' I realised from their faces that he was, but had to ask to be sure." (p.3)

A number of chaplains indicated that when they visited a bereaved family, often this was the first time the Deaf family member had been able to discuss the bereavement and begin to express their feelings about it.

There can also be exclusion from participating in arranging the funeral. One Deaf lady reported that her hearing relatives had always treated her as somehow frail or vulnerable and took over all the arrangements for her mother's funeral. In another case a hearing brother made all the funeral

arrangements leaving his Deaf sibling no part in the decision making. It some situations the reason for this may be perceived barriers of communication, rather than hearing relatives considering Deaf mourners intellectually or emotionally incapable. However, Lane et al (1996) discuss how impoverished communication within families can in itself lead to behaviour which is controlling and limits autonomy.

7.4.3 Ways of Grieving - Cultural Norms

The main obstacle for Deaf mourners at funerals is the language in which the service is conducted. It has been shown that the question of providing an interpreter can be a major factor in the exclusion of Deaf people from funeral services, either through lack of proper funding or the unwillingness of hearing family members to include the Deaf community through an interpreter or chaplain with Deaf people. However, even if an interpreter is present, an interpreted service is still a translation from another language and culture. There is usually a time lag in interpretation, making it impossible for Deaf people to join in with responses at the same time as the hearing congregation (Lewis, 2002, p.158). Apart from the issues with the language itself, there can also be problems with customary behaviour at funerals linked to the visual mode of sign language. Where the service is conducted by a chaplain with Deaf people this can be taken into account and adjustments made to match more closely the norms of a Deaf Church service.

It is usual to stand at certain parts of hearing funeral services, for example when hymns are sung, or during the final commendation. This can make it difficult to see the person leading a service in sign language and information is missed. In Deaf Church services the congregation sits throughout. At funerals sentences from scripture are often read as the mourners process into church following the coffin. A Deaf service would not begin until everyone was seated. A Deaf priest explained:

> *I do not begin the opening sentences while the mourners are coming in. I stand at the front and wait until the Deaf have*

all come in and got their bearings. I make sure they know there is an induction loop for hearing aids, I make sure they can see me. I ask the hearing people to remain seated and explain that this is so Deaf people further back can see the signing. If a Deaf person is going to come up and sign a hymn I will tell the organist to wait for my nod that she is ready, not to jump in, because we have to wait for all the Deaf people to come in, then when the doors are closed we can begin. That's the Deaf way.

Behenna (1990, 1998) also notes the potential problems of making simultaneous demands upon Deaf people during funerals:

> I also like to leave a few minutes in case there is a need to stop the service for any reason. (Hearing people can cry copiously and still listen, but Deaf people cannot do both and it may be more important to cry than to watch.) (p.7)

Hunt (2005), a Deaf priest, describes this experience from the Deaf perspective:

> Funeral services for Deaf people are different from hearing services. My overall impression is how important the role of the person taking the funeral is. Whereas hearing people can bow their heads with grief whilst listening to the words of the service Deaf people are not able to do this as they are not given any time to grieve because their eyes have to be attentively on the chaplain or interpreter. Therefore their grief is hidden in the same way as their 'deafness'. I myself experienced this at the funeral of my beloved mother – my grief came later when my eyes were at rest from communicating and I was able to let my grief come to the fore. (n.p.)

As suggested above, another significant cultural difference between Deaf and hearing funeral services may be attitudes towards what should be included in the public ritual of the funeral and what belongs to more private or informal situations.

7.4.4 The Deaf Memorial Service as an Alternative Ritual

Parkes (1997) notes that in many religions and cultures there seems to be a need for a second ritual after a funeral:

> Second rituals help to signal the passage of time and allow for the idea that the bereaved may have fulfilled any obligation to mourn and are now free to move on to the next chapter of their lives. (p.237)

However, Deaf explanations of the role of the Deaf church memorial service do not seem to involve this sense of closure and reintegration after a recognised period of mourning. In fact even those most closely affected by death, for example the loss of a partner, will often be fully reintegrated into Deaf community social activities only a week or two after the bereavement and before a memorial service is held. Indeed, this was frequently the cause of further conflict with hearing families who felt it was too soon to return to normal social life. Deaf mourners needed to be surrounded by those people with whom they had the closest relationships, other community members who were like family to them, and with whom they could express their grief in their own language. So it would seem that this notion of a second ritual functioning to reintegrate mourners back into everyday activities does not adequately explain the role of the memorial service in Deaf culture.

The evidence from the data collected suggests that the Deaf Church memorial service, rather than acting as a second ritual of reintegration, actually serves as an alternative ritual as described in Doka's theory of disenfranchised grief. The examples given would seem to support the claim that the memorial service is necessary where hearing families control the funeral and that Deaf memorial services have developed and remain important because the Deaf community is often disenfranchised by funerals arrangements. The extent to which this happens may depend on the make-up of a particular family. As Celia, a hearing child of Deaf adults, explained:

> *If the Deaf person had lots of hearing family they would take over the funeral, maybe exclude the Deaf, so the memorial*

service was for the Deaf community who had also been like family to that person.

Given the relatively small number of inter-generational Deaf families this scenario of hearing 'take over' of funerals does seem likely and appears to be frequently the case.

Another reason for the significance of the memorial service as an alternative ritual may be its location. Deaf memorial services are always held in the chapel in the Deaf centre. Although this is the only place of worship for almost all the group, funerals for deceased members are rarely held there. This would appear to be another example of disenfranchisement with hearing family members choosing locations which have more significance to them or where they themselves will not be excluded by unfamiliar language and cultural norms.

The theory of disenfranchised grief seems to offer a useful way of analysing and explaining the Deaf experience of funerals and the importance of the custom of holding religious memorial services in the Deaf Church. Deaf people are disenfranchised by the language, culture and location of funerals, by the prioritising of kin relationships over community ties, and in some cases by physical exclusion of those socially defined as incapable of taking part in funeral arrangements and rituals. The Deaf Church memorial service acts as an alternative ritual, reaffirming the deceased's identity as a member of the Deaf community and celebrating the person's life according to the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Deaf community.

In addition to affirming the identity of the deceased as part of the Deaf community, the memorial service also makes an important statement about the solidarity and continuing collective identity of those who remain. Walter (2008) states:

> 'When someone dies, the group to which he belongs feels itself lessened and, to react against this loss, it assembles. Collective sentiments are renewed which then lead men to seek one another and to assemble together' (Durkheim, 1915, 339)... It is precisely when groups – from families to nations

> – are depleted by death that they reconstitute themselves, symbolically and practically. (p.317)

The memorial service with its celebration of shared experiences, reciprocity, contributions to the community and enduring friendships is an affirmation of the Deaf way of life and Deafhood values. An individual has died but the Deaf Church members continue to go forward together on their spiritual journey.

8 NO ABIDING CITY

"For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come." Hebrews 13: 14

8.1 A Home for the Deaf Church

In the Deaf Church origin narrative the Deaf centre chapel is portrayed as a home for Deaf people, the place where they belong. The Deaf Cobbler worked to forge a community by bringing together scattered Deaf individuals. At first they had to meet and worship in the Cobbler's house, then in a series of borrowed, temporary accommodations. The narrative culminates in the foundation of their own chapel and this is seen as the resolution of all their struggles. It is their spiritual home, a permanent resting place attained after years of wandering. Yet in recent years a number of traditional Deaf Church congregations have left the Deaf centre chapels and now worship in other places. What is causing these Deaf Church communities to abandon their homes?

This pattern of moving away from the Deaf centre chapels has also affected Deaf congregations in the Diocese under study. There are six Deaf churches in the Diocese. Four of these six congregations were based in chapels located in the Deaf centres. The remaining two were newer foundations, established during the era of the chaplains, and based in parish churches with no connection to any particular Deaf club or existing Deaf group. Examining the cases of the four churches which were based in the Deaf clubs reveals four different outcomes with only one congregation remaining in its Deaf centre home:

1. The church described in the Deaf Church origin narrative is the only one still worshipping it its original Deaf centre chapel.

2. The Deaf church continues to meet in the Deaf centre but not in the original chapel. When the centre was built it included a chapel which was

completed and opened for worship in 1939[19], the same era as the centre in the origin narrative, and was similar in design, occupying the upper floor of the building. When the first Diocesan chaplain was appointed in 1980 the decision was taken to relocate the chapel to a smaller space on the ground floor. Florence, the leader of this congregation, still describes the chapel as the 'new church' when showing it to newcomers, explaining that the old church was too big. The change of location is often explained by other church members in terms of improved accessibility, that it was better for the older members of the congregation not to have to climb the stairs. However a lift to the upper floor was later installed, so it would appear that the access problems were not insurmountable either in terms of building constraints or finance.

Florence's account which describes the size of the chapel as the main reason for the move seems the more likely explanation. The church members may have felt that the space was too large for declining congregation numbers at a time when the majority of centre users no longer attended church every Sunday. The decision may also have been influenced by pressure from other groups using the centre. The relocation of the church into the smaller space downstairs allowed the larger upstairs area to be turned into a social room with a bar and snooker table.

3. The Deaf Church has moved out of the Deaf centre and worships in an Anglican parish church. In this case conflicts arose between the church members and the managers of the centre about the space occupied by the chapel. The centre managers started to use the chapel for secular meetings and as a storage area during the week when there were no church services. Members felt that the sense of respect for the chapel as a sacred space had been lost. They would arrive for church services to find rubbish had been left there or that church items were missing. In the end they became so unhappy with the situation that they reluctantly decided to relocate.

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[19] Church Mission to the Deaf and Dumb in South Staffordshire and Shropshire Minute Book 1932-1941, held at the Staffordshire County Record Office

The Chaplain encouraged the move and negotiated an arrangement for use of the neighbouring parish church. The church was located in the town centre with good transport links and was a comfortable modern space with good amenities. The Deaf church continued to hold its own services separate from the hearing congregation.

4. The Deaf centre was closed. The building had structural problems and the cost of repairing it was prohibitive. The decision was taken to use the available money to fund services rather than to maintain property, so no new Deaf centre was planned. Attempts were made to resettle the church congregation in an Anglican parish church in the town. Attendance was extremely poor despite the fact that the church was chosen for ease of access, being much nearer to the centre of town and the bus station than the old Deaf club. The reluctance of the congregation to accept the change of venue seemed to be compounded by resentment at the part played by the Diocese in the decision to close the Deaf centre.

On one particular Sunday only the Chaplain arrived for the service. As noted by Becker (1980), if an event is planned it is usual for Deaf community members to check that others will be attending thus encouraging the continuing unity of the group. When the church members arrive for a service the leaders of the group already know who will be missing as they will have been informed beforehand. Yet on this occasion no-one had communicated to the Chaplain that none of the group would be present. Consequently he decided that in future he would only come to lead a service if the church members specifically requested one and the church ceased to meet on a regular basis. It was only later when an ordained Deaf person was appointed to work in this region alongside the hearing Chaplain that the church was revived in a new location.

The reasons related by the church members for the relocation of their place of worship are, as would be expected, framed in terms of the particular circumstances and concerns of their individual congregations. However, a broader analysis of the move away from chapels located within the Deaf centres would seem to indicate two sets of factors driving

change: those which originate within the Deaf centres, particularly conflicts with the centre managers; and those which are concerned with Church of England objectives and organisational structures. It should be noted that neither are initiated, or appear to be desired, by the Deaf congregations themselves.

This chapter will explore how the Deaf Church members attempt to negotiate tensions within the Deaf club setting between the spiritual and the secular and between the cultural expectations of the Deaf members and the actions of the centre's hearing managers. The desire of the Deaf Elders to remain in their traditional spiritual home, the Deaf centre chapel, and their resistance to change will be explored with reference to a particular episode taken from the field notes. The second set of factors driving the move of congregations away from the Deaf centres, those concerning the Church of England and its policies and attitudes towards sector ministry in general and Deaf ministry in particular, will then form the concluding chapter of the Deaf Church case study.

8.2 I Was Glad When They Said To Me Let Us Go to God's House

The Chaplain was becoming increasingly concerned about the health of certain members of the Deaf Church. For some, the stairs leading to the chapel were becoming a serious obstacle. Jack had another car accident and was forced to give up driving. He was now very unsteady on his feet, walking slowly with the aid of a stick. Before the last church service he had stumbled on the stairs. On a number of occasions the Chaplain had suggested that the Deaf Church should relocate. He had even made contact with the local parish church and obtained agreement that the Deaf congregation could meet there. He felt that there were all the required facilities: better physical access, toilets, a kitchen and a social room for tea after the service. The Deaf members would also have the opportunity to join in a wide range of events arranged by the hearing church. One of the Church Wardens from the parish church enrolled in sign language classes and started to come to the Deaf church. While the

Deaf Church members were happy to welcome him to their services, in their minds there was no question of giving up their traditional place of worship.

In the face of complete resistance from the Deaf Elders, the Chaplain shelved the relocation proposal. But as time passed and some of the congregation became less mobile the Chaplain introduced the idea that it might be more practical to hold the church services downstairs in the main hall. The Deaf Elders dismissed the suggestion. Church services should be held in the chapel. Then an incident occurred that convinced the Chaplain that the time had come to force the issue. The Deaf Church members had come upstairs and taken their places in the chapel as usual. The Chaplain and those who were signing hymns or readings were in the vestry, making the customary prayer before leading the service. As they began the procession Harry left his seat and made his way towards the door. Gasping, and clinging to the rail at the top of the stairs, he signed that he needed some air. I carried a chair from the vestry so he could sit down and Irene fetched a glass of water from the kitchen. Irene was very anxious and distressed, not wanting to leave her husband, so it was agreed that she should stay and look after Harry while someone else took her place assisting the Chaplain with the service.

The Chaplain was upset that the exertion of climbing the stairs had made him Harry so ill. The cold weather had probably made the situation worse. The temperamental heating system was having little impact on the upper floor of the centre. The tall windows on either side of the chapel were draughty even with the heavy curtains drawn. The Chaplain felt that the problems associated with using the chapel were too great and after the service he took matters into his own hands. "That's it. We are not doing this again" he told them. "This is ridiculous. These stairs are too much for your age group now. Let's try downstairs." The members reluctantly agreed that at least in the short term while the cold weather lasted they would hold the church service in the warmth of the social room downstairs.

When I arrived for the next Sunday service Vera greeted me in entrance hall. She gestured behind her towards the main social room looking disapproving, and explained "Church is in there today." In the centre of the room the Chaplain had set up a small table covered with a lace tablecloth on which were placed a single candle and a vase containing a few flowers. At one side of the table there was a music stand which was to function as a lectern and on the other side a large flip chart pad. The other tables from that section of the room had been pushed back to the walls and the chairs arranged in a semicircle. Irene staggered downstairs with a basket of hymn books and service books.

Robert flashed the lights as usual to indicate that people should take their places because the service was about to begin. The members moved over to the semicircle of chairs but then there was some hesitation. In the chapel the Church members tend to have preferred places which they occupy regularly. In the new setting they were having trouble deciding where to sit. With the chairs set out in a semicircle there was no hierarchy, no special seats for those taking an active part in the service. If this had been a meeting that included Deaf and hearing participants rather than a church service the seats in the middle of the row would normally have been left for Deaf members, as these directly faced the leader and would afford the best view of the signing. The hearing members of the congregation at first attempted to follow this customary behaviour. However, the items needed for the service, the chalice and paten and the collection plate, had been placed at the end of the row of chairs. So the most prominent Deaf members of the congregation who acted as chalice assistant or took the collection wanted to sit there. At last, after further discussion and swapping of places everyone was ready to begin.

About 10 minutes later the lights flashed announcing that someone was ringing the doorbell. The Chaplain stopped the service while Robert went to open the door for Lucy. Most of the congregation arrive early, about 45 minutes before the service is due to start. This allows plenty of time to prepare for the service, but only a few of the church members are

occupied with these practical tasks. Most spend the time greeting their friends and catching up on community news; the manifestation of a culture which is relationship rather than task-oriented. Taking the time to socialise before and after events is a mark of commitment to the community. Only hearing visitors to the church leave hurriedly when the service is finished.[20] *When it is almost time for the service to begin the main doors are locked since from upstairs the church members will be unable to see if any strangers approach the building. However, this is a major source of anxiety if anyone expected to attend has not already arrived. The Board of Management tends to overlook the chapel when any improvements are made to the centre. The Deaf Elders recently discovered that some Board members did not know of the existence of the chapel, despite being responsible for the Deaf centre premises. The newly installed flashing light system did not include the upper floor. Anyone arriving late therefore depends on knocking loudly enough for the hearing members to notice and alert Robert to go downstairs with the keys.*

Lucy's late arrival caused much disruption. Upstairs in the chapel she could have slipped into a pew at the back. Downstairs the semicircle had to be widened to accommodate another chair which involved everyone watching and moving. Since all eyes were on Lucy and she was breaking in on an already established circle, Lucy followed the normal social convention and embarked on a lengthy explanation of the chain of circumstances which had caused her to arrive late. When Lucy was finally settled in her chair the service continued.

The Chaplain took advantage of the semicircular arrangement of the chairs to initiate a more interactive sermon than usual. Upstairs participation by the congregation was normally limited to a few preliminary questions posed by the Chaplain to introduce the theme of the day before the main body of the sermon was delivered. Downstairs

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[20] A similar example of differing cultural attitudes towards the concept of time is given by Stack (1974) where one of her Black participants remarks that "White folks don't have time, they's always in a rush". (p.10)

the Chaplain wrote the theme of the service on the flipchart and then tried to engage the members of the congregation in discussion throughout. People were more involved giving their own views and experiences and the congregation seemed to enter into this willingly enough. However, the sense of hierarchy, the distinction between minister and congregation, seemed more pronounced than usual. When members of the congregation addressed questions to the whole group by way of provoking discussion the Chaplain replied himself rather than allowing others to respond. Also his responses were mostly of the type "The Bible tells us that...": definitive answers which effectively closed down the discussion. The result appeared to be more a formal question and answer session led by the Chaplain than interaction between the various members of the congregation. Some seemed impatient with this since they were not actually requesting information but contributing to the discussion.

During the time for notices at the end of the service, the Chaplain asked the congregation members how they felt about the new arrangement of holding the services downstairs, but they avoided eye contact with him and no-one replied. After an awkward pause Harry turned to the others and reminded them that it did not matter where the service was held. Wherever they met God was among them.

8.3 Reflections on the Church Service Downstairs

Three services were held downstairs at intervals during the following six months, the location depending on whether the less mobile members were present and the temperature in the chapel. After this the experiment was abandoned and the normal pattern of services upstairs was resumed. I interviewed the Chaplain again at this point and invited him to reflect on the experience.

The access and heating problems may have been the immediate reasons prompting the move downstairs, but the Chaplain was keen to emphasise that there were bigger issues at stake. The Chaplain wanted the Church

members to be more open to change. It seemed to him that the structures they were clinging to, both the physical setting and the forms of worship, were in many ways the creation of the missioners and alien to Deaf culture. He feared that the church traditions and language style made it difficult for existing members to obtain the spiritual nourishment they needed, and served to discourage younger members of the Deaf club from joining the church. Unless the members were willing to embrace change the Deaf Church would die out.

Reflecting on the account of the Deaf church service downstairs and comparing what happened with the aims of the Chaplain and the concerns of the Deaf Elders reveals a number of aspects worthy of comment.

8.3.1 Seating Arrangements

One change which the Chaplain felt to be a particular advantage of the move downstairs was the difference in the seating arrangements. Holding the service downstairs was an opportunity to rethink the use of space with reference to Deaf culture and sign language which relies on eye contact for communication:

> *It was a way of letting them see we can still do worship other than in serried ranks in pews. That way they could all see one other, cross-communicate if they needed to, which is basically what it was all about.*

Lewis (2002) points out a number of features common to many Deaf church services which she claims "are neither appropriate, authentic, liberating nor transformative" (p.155). The first of these is having Deaf congregations sitting in pews or rows. This may be the norm for hearing churches but Lewis challenges its suitability in a culture where interaction depends upon seeing the other person. This would seem to merit further investigation.

Reflecting on the field notes, it appears that the more flexible seating downstairs did offer the potential for greater interaction as the Chaplain hoped. However, the kind of interaction that actually took place during the sermon seems to have been shaped by the Chaplain's expectation that he would continue to lead and teach: a traditional model which rather undermined his aim of allowing the congregation to experience new ways of worship. The congregation members attempted to engage with the new, interactive style in a way that was authentic to Deaf culture. They posed questions to the rest of the group or made comments designed to promote discussion and thus facilitate the peer-learning process (Becker, 1980) whereby the group could review its collective knowledge and experience of the topic. They were prevented from doing so by the Chaplain's authoritative style.

I would suggest that a fundamental question remains which neither Lewis nor the Chaplain in this situation fully addressed: is interaction between members of the congregation a major part of traditional Anglican liturgy? A circle or semicircle of chairs may offer better eye contact for communication than rows of pews, but this rather presupposes that communication between members of the congregation is the priority. Lewis identifies two parts of the liturgy which lend themselves to extended interaction between members of the congregation: the prayers of intercession and the sign of peace. She reports that these interactive sections are the times at which the Deaf congregation appears most fully engaged and enthusiastic. While this may point towards the desirability of developing liturgies for Deaf churches which incorporate such interaction to a greater extent, the fact remains that the standard liturgies used in the Deaf churches do not prioritise interaction between congregation members. The service consists of material signed by an individual and directed to the congregation as a whole or to God. Alternatively, prayers may be signed by the entire congregation copying the signs of one leader. The service takes place in a communal setting but interaction between members of the congregation is not the focus. Rather, the liturgy centres around the individual's relationship to the

action taking place and their interior response and communication with God.

The Chaplain, in relocating the service downstairs, adopted a seating arrangement that is customary for social occasions or discussions rather than taking into account the nature of the liturgy. I would argue that this choice was not appropriate and that in fact the aims and requirements of the liturgy might well have been better accomplished with fewer visual distractions if all were facing in the same direction. Prayer can be a highly personal and at times deeply emotional experience. The custom in hearing churches of praying with eyes closed or head bowed allows a sense of private space within a public setting. It also serves to minimise exterior distractions. As was previously noted, the Deaf Church members pray with eyes open, able to watch prayers being signed by a leader, or alert to cues that the time of personal prayer is over and the service is continuing. If Deaf people face one another during prayer it could increase the potential for distraction, or make the worshippers more inhibited as their feelings might be visible to others.

It is interesting in this regard to note the seating arrangement in the other Diocese church which has relocated from its traditional upstairs chapel. The new chapel downstairs does not have fixed pews, but the individual chairs are still placed in rows facing the altar. Even though it is possible the semicircle arrangement has not been tried there. It has not been suggested by the congregation. It would appear that they do not feel that it is necessary or desirable for a church service to have the chairs arranged in the way that they would for a meeting or everyday conversation.

I would argue that not only was the semicircular seating arrangement unsuited to the purpose of the liturgy but also that it was not necessarily authentic to Deaf culture in this instance. Just as hearing church congregations adopt particular behaviours and styles for worship not seen in other areas of life, surely we must allow that Deaf culture might manifest itself in different ways in different settings. It is insufficient to take what we know of Deaf culture, predominantly from social situations,

and to attempt to reproduce it in an uncritical manner in the less explored formal setting of worship which has quite different ends. Demands for culturally appropriate liturgy should take account of both authentic Deaf ways of being and the requirements of good liturgy.

8.3.2 I Gaze on You in the Sanctuary to See Your Glory

In moving the Church service downstairs the Chaplain hoped to break adherence to traditional forms of worship and patterns of behaviour that he deemed had been imposed by the missioners and were thus not congruent with Deaf culture. However, in choosing a new location for the service the Chaplain appeared to ignore the importance of the visual aspects of both setting and liturgical action. Given the huge emphasis placed upon the visual in the Deaf Elders' accounts of coming to faith and their ongoing spiritual lives this would seem to be a serious oversight.

When the church service was held downstairs the only visual focus was the makeshift altar with its single candle and the action taking place upon it. There was no procession marking the transition from everyday conversation to the time set aside for worship. There were no pictures, cross or statues to draw the thoughts of the congregation to prayer. The accounts of the Deaf Elders indicate that images, candles and other symbols play a great part in culturally appropriate Deaf worship and the field notes contain many examples of the interest and engagement of the congregation when these were used. McDonough (2008) draws attention to the importance attributed by the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* to the surroundings in which worship takes place as symbols of heavenly realities.[21] I would argue that the chapel with its carvings, coloured altar frontals and vestments marking the change of liturgical season, candles and traditional practices such as the entrance procession are important visual markers which connect the Deaf worshippers to a sense of the sacred.

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[21] "Sacred buildings and requisites for divine worship should, moreover, be truly worthy and beautiful and be signs and symbols of heavenly realities." (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 2005, n.288)

By contrast, the room where the service was held downstairs was full of reminders of the secular. Most of the Deaf church members are of an age to recall disputes about whether it was proper for the Deaf centre, founded as much to house the church as to be a social club, to have a bar. Firth's (1966) example of discussions about what was appropriate on Sundays has already been quoted. If eating cake on Sunday was thought to be too 'frivolous' it is not surprising that proposals to open the bar after the church service were hotly debated. It is likely that the Deaf Elders felt some disquiet at the idea of worshipping where they could see the bar and the bingo equipment when there was a consecrated sacred space available to them.

The chapel provides the visible substance that helps the Deaf worshippers to connect to the unseen God. What is more, the chapel makes a statement about their identity as a community: it is the material embodiment of their shared history. Physically, it has been created and cared for by the hands of generations of Deaf people. Symbolically, it is the realisation of the aspirations of the Deaf Cobbler and the generations which followed for a place of their own, a home for the Deaf Church.

The chapel contains many items either made by people known to the Deaf Elders or commemorating those who have gone before. On entering the chapel one of the first things to catch the eye is a large carved copy of the Da Vinci 'Last Supper'. The members proudly recount how this was made by a Deaf person, Martin Dutton. He had been apprentice to the famous furniture maker Robert Thompson, "the Mouseman of Kilburn", who marked his work with the figure of a mouse. In a similar fashion this carving is marked in the corner with a small lizard. Not only was it carved by a Deaf person, it also serves to remind the church members of a significant event in their own history, a pilgrimage to Yorkshire in the footsteps of St Chad, during which they visited Thompson's workshop. The carving was commissioned in memory of a former officer of the Deaf Institute, who was also a teacher at the Deaf school.

Around the chapel there are gifts offered by the members, either bought on their travels or presented to commemorate deceased relatives. Some

of these donations are recorded on small plaques. Above the altar hang three ornate sanctuary lamps. The one in the middle commemorates the Missioner who, according to the origin narrative, brought them home to this place. Some deceased church members were named on small brass plates fixed to the benches where they used to sit. However, as the numbers of these increased they were moved onto a wooden board to the right of the sanctuary. Looking at all these reminders of past members of the community it is easy to understand the attachment of the Deaf congregation to this place and their reluctance to abandon it however inconvenient it might appear to an outsider. As Miztal (2003) notes, remembering "occurs in the world of things and involves our senses"(p.16). The symbolic associations locked into specific locations and landscapes are essential elements which connect people to their history.

Everything about the chapel reminds the Deaf Church members that they are taking their place in that great chain of Deaf people who down through the years have worked to spread the Gospel in this place. It speaks of their identity as a community and their responsibility for the continuation of the Deaf Church by sharing their insights into how to live as a Deaf Christian with younger generations. Amidst all the changes the Deaf Elders have witnessed during their long lives the chapel is the tangible link between them and the origin narrative through which they are

> related to their environment, to their ancestors, to their descendents, to the beyond which is the ground of all existence, to what is permanent beyond all flux. (Mol, 1976, p.42-43)

8.3.3 The Future of the Deaf Church

The Chaplain expressed the opinion that young people were not interested in joining the Deaf Church because they perceived it as being run by old people in old-fashioned ways. It was vital for the Deaf Church to be open to change: either they embraced new ways or accepted the inevitable decline as one by one the members died and were not replaced.

The Deaf Elders, however, reject this analysis of both the cause and the solution. They believe that the Deaf Church in its present form does indeed have something to offer young people. The real problem in recruiting new members is more fundamental and intractable. If young people are not being incorporated into the Deaf community then how can they join the Deaf Church?

From the perspective of the Deaf Elders the obstacle is the educational policy of placing Deaf children in mainstream schools. It has been shown how in the past the Deaf schools provided the first experience of a Deaf community for those children with hearing parents. In school children could draw upon the collective resources of the group through learning from peers and sharing strategies for surviving as a Deaf person among a hearing majority – the lessons of '1001 Victories' (Ladd, 2003), encountering and learning from older children through the mentoring system, and having contact with the adult world of the Deaf club. The policy of mainstreaming confers no such benefits. A mainstream school may have only one Deaf child or at best a small group, isolated from their Deaf peers. This has a major impact on children's understanding of their Deaf identity, and their ability to conceptualise themselves as part of the Deaf world. Moreover, the Deaf Elders feel that mainstreaming impacts negatively upon the spiritual welfare of young Deaf people. Harry makes a direct link between the decline in numbers attending church and the rise in the number of children in mainstream schools:

> *We see a lot of chapels for the Deaf that are not used. It is because schools are not teaching Deaf children about church. Now they are going into mainstream schools. So they do not know who God is. They do not know about Jesus. It is all very well for chaplains to say we should encourage them, teach them, but we can only do so much...some of our Deaf churches, as I said before, mainstreaming has been the end of them.*

Schools in general may be becoming more secular and no longer offering the thorough grounding in Biblical teaching that Harry states he received

at the Deaf school. Others among the Deaf Elders feel that they understood little about Christianity from formal teaching under the oral system. They relied on other resources; dictionaries, sharing any information they acquired, and transmission of knowledge from older generations of Deaf people. Under the mainstream system isolated children do not have access to such collective resources. And having not been exposed to other sign language users or known older children who have gone on to join the Deaf club they do not naturally make their way to the Deaf community when leaving school.

This sense among the Deaf Elders that youngsters are being lost to the Deaf Church through policies promoting mainstream education is also shared by Deaf clergy. McDonough (2008), a Deaf former priest, writes:

> Many profoundly Deaf pupils... leave school with the conviction that anything related to sign language and the Deaf community are to be avoided. Many of them have never heard of, or are familiar with Deaf Centre/Church and Deaf community because no one told them about it...This is one of the reasons for the diminishing number of Deaf people coming to Church. (pp.2-3)

The Chaplains who feel that young people are not interested in the traditional Deaf Church cite examples of places where young Deaf people are setting up alternative Deaf church groups away from the Deaf clubs or outside the Church of England. The Chaplains may be correct in thinking that the traditional Deaf Church does not appeal to the young. But these new developments also validate the point of view of the Deaf Elders that the prerequisite for a thriving Deaf Church is a vibrant Deaf community. These new groups seem to be a phenomenon of those university cities, particular places such as Wolverhampton and Derby, where large groups of young Deaf people are concentrated. This coming together of a critical mass of sign language users is for many their first experience of being a part of a Deaf community, and as such can lead to a reappraisal of various aspects of their Deaf identity, including the spiritual.

8.3.4 Relationship with the Chaplain

The description of the church service held downstairs ends with the Chaplain asking the church members for their views about it. While they made no comment, it was evident that the lack of response signalled negative feelings. There were other examples in the field notes of hesitation or not maintaining eye contact when people were reluctant to say something negative, become involved in an argument, or where the topic under discussion was upsetting for them. There could be a number of reasons for the lack of response in this particular case.

Although Deaf culture is often characterised as very direct (Mindess, 1999) a primary value is also to maintain group unity. Perhaps in saying nothing the church members were trying to avoid conflict and argument within the group between those who could still climb the stairs and the less mobile members for whose benefit the change was proposed. It is also likely, given the strength of attachment to the chapel described above, that any discussion that risked ending in a permanent change of venue was simply too distressing to contemplate. The church members may also have found it difficult to articulate the significance of the chapel as their spiritual home.

Harry's comment that the location did not matter since God was always present seemed designed to find a compromise between the desire of the Chaplain to relocate and the unexpressed wishes of the Deaf congregation to remain in the chapel. At other times Harry adopted this role of mediator between the Deaf Elders and outsiders. The remark, made on behalf of the group, was a way of acknowledging that the church members were unhappy without challenging the authority of the Chaplain: they could agree to treat the question of location as unimportant. So it would appear that the conflict the church members were trying to avoid was between themselves and the Chaplain. Perhaps if the Chaplain had himself been Deaf rather than being perceived as an outsider the church members might have felt able to be more direct. In this situation their relationship with the Chaplain seemed to resemble that they described as existing between themselves and the Missioner, behaving in a submissive

manner and treating him with deference since they felt dependent on his goodwill for the services they needed.

The Chaplain may not have picked up on the lack of response as a negative signal at that first service. He said that the only people who complained to him in private afterwards about not using the chapel were themselves hearing. However, it gradually became clear to him that the Deaf Elders were murmuring among themselves against the project to hold the church services downstairs. But rather than reflecting on the importance of the chapel in the spiritual life of the Deaf Church members the Chaplain took this as further evidence that the Deaf Elders were resistant to any form of change:

> *Several times I have suggested that we try something different. With the missioners there was not a communion service every time as we have now, it was a celebration of prayer and worship. I would love to try different forms of worship but moving from upstairs to downstairs caused enough fractures and reactions. Change takes time and it has to be practised.*

8.4 The Sacred and the Profane: Relationships within the Deaf centre

In addition to managing differences with the hearing Chaplain, the Deaf Church leaders are also required to negotiate relationships within the secular world of the Deaf centre. A number of incidents in the field notes indicate that tensions exist between the Deaf church members and the Board of Management which runs the centre. The Deaf Elders perceive that their priorities are not shared by the centre managers, a situation they find perplexing given that the centre was built to house the church. This could be viewed as one aspect of increasing secularisation in society. Decline in Deaf Church attendance means that the church members are no longer the largest and most powerful group in the centre. The position that the Church Council once occupied in terms of prestige and its pre-eminence in the practical organisation of club activities is now the domain

of the Sports and Social Club. The Church Council only concerns itself with organising the programme of worship and a few social trips for church members. However, a closer investigation indicates that tensions within the club are not confined to the Church but occur between all the Deaf groups using the centre and the Board of Management. It appears to be a clash between Deaf and hearing cultures rather than sacred versus secular interests. The question of who controls the Deaf centre and for whose benefit seems to be very much at the heart of the matter.

8.4.1 Revisiting Firth's Organisational Structure

In order to understand the problems within the Deaf centre at the present time it is instructive to return to Firth's (1966) description of the organisational structure of the typical Deaf Institute at the time of the missioners. Firth depicts a tiered structured whereby a person or group outside the Deaf world (a church, a local authority, a charity or philanthropic individuals) appointed a Board of Management to oversee the provision and funding of welfare services for Deaf people within an institute or centre. The Board of Management in its turn employed a missioner to do the day to day welfare work and run the church services. Firth claims that a major problem with the system was that the Board members had hardly any direct involvement with Deaf people and knew little about their lives.

Turning now to the organisational structure of the modern Deaf centre, the present day Board of Management is still clearly recognisable as the body described by Firth. In reality it has changed little. It is still dominated by people with little experience of Deaf culture. First, there are hearing people with no experience of the Deaf world but who have proven capability in running other charities, fund raising, and committee work. There are hearing professionals whose work may bring them into contact with Deaf people; teachers of Deaf children, social workers, doctors, nurses and audiologists. There is, however, no longer any representation of religious bodies. A significant number of hard of hearing people are Board members. They are involved in various clubs

for hard of hearing people that use the centre premises. They understand themselves as deaf in a medical sense and do not recognise that there is any difference between their own position and that of the culturally Deaf sign language users. Only in recent years, following a vigorous public campaign by the Sports and Social Club, did the Board agree to allocate a small number of seats to Deaf people.

In Firth's time the Board of Management employed the missioner to do the required welfare work on their behalf. This aspect of the organisational structure has completely changed. The work with Deaf people formerly carried out by the missioner is now the responsibility of specialised professionals external to the Deaf centre. The Board of Management employs a small number of staff to link the Deaf members to these outside services as required; for example, telephoning to book appointments at the job centre or with a social worker, and running a service for booking interpreters. The staff are also responsible for administration relating to the premises.

Firth (1966) and Lysons (1965) use the term Voluntary Society to mean the overall organisational structure for the running of the Deaf centre and those who worked on its behalf. While its precise constitution may have varied from area to area it is clear that the Societies were philanthropic organisations, designed to help Deaf people who were viewed as being in need of assistance and charity. The modern Deaf Society has endeavoured to shed such connotations of material dependence and welfare, nor does it espouse the associated moral virtues of care and compassion. It is legally constituted as a charity, but its objectives are framed in terms of rights. Its documents speak of equality, access, quality of life and the rejection of discrimination. The term charity, in this context, is treated as meaning a not-for-profit business. It is simply a form of management that offers certain financial privileges. However, the Board members and staff treat 'the Charity' as they refer to the organisation, with the greatest deference: its good is seen as the ultimate goal, an end in itself. The priority is the financial health of the charity and its good reputation, the unspoken assumption being that what is good for

the charity benefits the Deaf people it purports to serve. But when its effect upon the Deaf centre members is examined, it appears to be in fact a structure which perpetuates colonialism.

8.4.2 Taking Care of Business

The centre is run according to a business-oriented model which does not always sit easily with the priorities and cultural values of its members. Management priorities seem to be predominantly financial. The emphasis is on services and projects with measurable outcome, initiatives which mirror wider social concerns and are thus able to attract grants. The Deaf centre, as the major asset of the charity, must also be put to work to generate income. The premises can be hired to outside organisations and individuals, and the Deaf groups using the centre must pay a nominal 'rent' to the Board of Management every time they meet. The centre members are often unhappy about these complete strangers using what they see as their home, and fail to understand why they should pay to use their own Deaf club premises when they already pay a membership subscription.

The need to generate income is also used to justify the presence on the Board of Management of people with no experience of the Deaf world and who do not use sign language. The Deaf members reasonably ask "But what do they know about Deaf people?" The response is that it is more important to have people who understand the intricacies of charity and company law or who know how to attract funding. This requirement also restricts access to Board membership for Deaf people: few are seen as appropriately qualified according to these criteria and thus they can only occupy the token places reserved for Deaf representatives. The Board meetings are conducted according to the formal traditions conventional at hearing meetings and following an agenda fixed to meet the requirements of charity law and the presumed mutual agreement about priorities. In fact, no such agreement exists. In practice the Board frequently dismisses Deaf concerns and ways of working as not in line with modern business

methods, while the Deaf club members perceive the Board's actions as bureaucratic obfuscation designed to keep them ignorant and powerless.

To the Board of Management the framework of charity law is a system for the efficient running of the centre. It prescribes certain checks and balances which safeguard the members from impropriety on the part of the charity's officers and staff. Yet to the Deaf members it can often appear to be a mechanism of subjugation. Many of the rules pertaining to the charity seem to the club members to be petty and demeaning. The various committees and clubs are reduced in status by being designated sub-groups of the charity and by law are required to present their accounts, constitutions and membership lists to the charity for inspection. All the individuals listed as members of the clubs are automatically claimed to be part of the membership of the charity and subject to its rules. Failure to behave in a manner deemed appropriate for a respectable charity can result in members being banned permanently from the Deaf club premises which, given the closeness of the ties between community members and the lack of other social opportunities, can only be construed as cruel and unusual punishment. Similarly, permission for initiatives or activities wanted by the members can be denied because they do not match the image that the Board wants the charity to present. This notion of bringing the charity into disrepute, of contravening the mores of polite society, is surely in itself a question of cultural expectations. It is certainly a source of frequent disagreement.

For the hard of hearing groups using the club the structures for running an organisation in the hearing world pose no problems. For the culturally Deaf the system is frustrating and at times incomprehensible. For example, the Social Club committee received a request for a list of the names and addresses of club members. The committee duly informed the Board of Management that they were unable to provide such information as they did not have it. From a Deaf perspective such information was entirely irrelevant. The committee would never post written information to its members, that was not the Deaf way. Therefore home addresses were not requested. That the information did not exist was clearly

incomprehensible to the Board. From a hearing perspective this would be the first thing one would ask a new club member. To them the Social Committee was refusing to share the information which implied mistrust and secrecy. In situations where many Board members are unfamiliar with the workings of Deaf culture, such incomprehension and frustration can quickly flare into anger and the suspicion of hidden motives.

In the literature much has been made of the role of the missioner as gatekeeper (Lewis, 2002; Ladd, 2003; Stone, 2005;), as the person with the linguistic knowledge to broker, and therefore also with the potential to control, interaction between Deaf and hearing people. But it could be argued that in some respects the missioner was also the social glue that held the fragile structure of the Deaf Institute together. The Board of Management and the Deaf members had different cultures and different priorities: the missioner could act as cultural mediator, bringing to light misunderstandings such as the one described above before any damage was done. The missioner responsibilities, both spiritual and secular, have been parcelled out to other organisations but it would seem that there was some truth in the opinions expressed to Lysons (1965) that the holistic service offered by the missioner was greater than the sum of its parts and that its demise has left a significant gap in the structure of the Deaf centres.

The Board of Management's argument that the centre costs a great deal to run and that Deaf people need their centre to stay open is irrefutable. But the means by which this is achieved and the ways in which the centre is run on a daily basis are frequent sources of friction. The Board of Management has to keep up a constant campaign trying to convince the Deaf members that its aims are mutually beneficial: a well-managed club is financially sound, gets grants, and thus has money for the facilities and services its Deaf members want. Why then do the club members remain unpersuaded? To what extent do the services offered actually match their needs and wishes?

8.4.3 A New Pharaoh Who Knew Not Joseph

In the eyes of the Board of Management the charity that runs the Deaf centre exists to benefit Deaf people, therefore what is good for the charity is good for the Deaf members. Yet this does not seem to resonate with their experiences. The Deaf Elders feel that the ethos of the centre as it is currently run does not match their priorities, and in fact is a hindrance and even a threat to the continued existence of their Church in the building. The Church pays a charge to the Board of Management every time a service is held. This may be because they also use the hall and kitchen rather than being a hire charge for use of the chapel, or it could be considered to be a contribution towards heating and lighting costs. However, this demand for payment fuels the perception that the Church is treated in the same way as any other secular Deaf group wanting to use the centre facilities. The Church is described by the Management as a 'user group', and if the Church has no more rights or privileges than any other user group then presumably the chapel is just another space in the building to be allocated by the Board of Management as it pleases. The attitude that the chapel is simply another room to be put to work to generate income does seem to have driven some congregations in other centres out of their traditional homes.

In addition to all the other factors previously cited, a further reason the Deaf Elders were reluctant to worship downstairs was their perception that if the chapel was not in constant use it would be taken from them. This was not stated explicitly at the time the Chaplain was trying to move the services downstairs, but it later became clear that this was a major area of concern. The gradual encroachment on Church space began with the vestry, the only other room on the upper floor of the centre. Since it was only used by the church members for a few hours each week, the Board of Management argued that the rest of the time it should be available for other users. When it was proposed to set up computer classes in association with the local college the church committee agreed that the vestry could be shared. The church retained a vestment

cupboard, notice board and a locked desk drawer in the new computer room.

While there had been an amicable settlement to negotiations about sharing the vestry, tensions between the Church and the centre's Board of Management over the use of space continued. Suggestions that classes could be held in the chapel were less well received, some members reluctantly conceding that perhaps the back of the chapel could be screened off for such purposes during the week, other remaining strongly opposed.

The Board does recognise that the chapel is officially licensed by the Diocese for worship and has made tentative enquiries to the Chaplain about the position of using the chapel for other unspecified activities. So it would appear that the church members were justified in their concern that others would seize the chapel if it remained unused for a time. The Deaf Elders also recall that in the past sacred space has been appropriated for other uses. Nothing remains today of the separate Roman Catholic chapel. The place where it was located on the plans for the extension to the centre (*Hearing,* 1966) is now occupied by a suite of staff offices. The Deaf Elders attribute the loss of the Catholic chapel to a decision by the Board of Management at a time when the centre manager "wanted more offices and the chapel was one of the first things to be cut" (Harry). However, it has proved impossible in the present research to compare this perception of the demise of the chapel with any official Catholic account of the services being withdrawn: the Roman Catholic Diocesan Archivist denies any record of such a chapel having existed.

Rumours about further room changes in the centre caused a fresh outbreak of anxious discussion, as documented in the field notes:

When I arrived for the church service there appeared to be some changes going on in the centre. Downstairs there was evidence of building work. The Deaf church members had been apprehensive about rumours that the Sports and Social Club office was being relocated from the small space behind the reception desk to the church vestry. This seemed to be

perceived as a further attempt to take over church space. Irene had been unable to attend church for a while but word had reached her about the last church service being held downstairs. She instructed Robert that services must always be upstairs, so that the chapel was clearly in use.

Susan, a younger woman who has returned to church in the last few years, is still active on the Social club committee. Since she is more involved in the day to day politics of the centre than the Deaf Elders, her arrival was eagerly awaited for news of the latest developments. Susan unlocked the room next to the kitchen, originally the Ladies' lounge. When I first started coming to the centre it was the Board room and later the snooker room. More recently it has been the location for serving up the lunch to the Over 60s on Thursdays. Susan escorted the church members around, showing them how it is being refurbished as offices for the Social Club committee and explaining who would be using the desks. The church members seemed reassured that there was no longer any threat to their territory upstairs.

8.4.4 The Purpose of the Deaf Centre

It was argued that the reforms of social welfare which led to the demise of the missioner system would give Deaf people access to specialist professional independent services when they needed them. Such services would be theirs by right; an improvement upon being tied into a sense of dependence and obligation with the missioner. Also, since the missioner role was so wide-ranging, the missioner may have had only limited expertise in the many areas of life with which he was supposed to assist. However, the reality of the Deaf Elders' lives seem to suggest that the Deaf centre is no longer offering the types of services they require, nor is it doing what is necessary to enable them to access the relevant outside services. In both spiritual and secular affairs they seem to be less well provided than formerly.

The new system of specialist services was supposed to replace all the functions of the missioner. In spiritual terms, the only practical shape

this takes in the Deaf centre is maintaining the chapel as a place for the Church to meet and permitting the Church of England chaplains to lead religious services on the premises. To the Church members, this is insufficient. They feel that the Board and its appointed centre manager have no interest in the Church. None of the Board members now attend harvest or Christmas services in the chapel as they did in former days. The feeling has grown among the Deaf Elders that it would be better to revert to the old system where the person paid to oversee the day to day running of the Deaf centre was also responsible for the Deaf Church. Firth's (1966) contention that there is, or should be, an essential connection between spiritual provision and the everyday manifestations of practical care would seem to resonate with the Deaf Elders.

To their way of thinking, spiritual welfare has been outsourced in the same manner as all the other services they previously received within the Deaf centre itself. The Board of Management does not provide the things they need therefore, they conclude, the Board does not have their well-being at heart. Turning to secular matters, the situation does not appear any better. The organisations to which responsibilities for secular welfare services have been devolved have reduced or ended their provision within the centre itself. The Social Workers for the Deaf, for example, used to be based in the centre but are now remote figures in offices on the outskirts of the city. Similarly, any assistance with work issues now requires visiting or contacting the Deaf centre to book an interpreter and then going to the Job Centre to see a specialist Disability Advisor. Such complex procedures may be acceptable for a lengthy appointment planned well in advance, but what of immediate day to day needs such as assistance with understanding the English of an official letter or filling in a form?

A report written by the Deputy Superintendent of the centre in 1974 shows that the Welfare Officer was expected to be present on club nights; that is four evenings a week, including Sundays, from 7-10pm. The report highlights the importance of staff being available at these times for the Deaf members:

> The bulk of personal requests for help are made during the evening opening times when many deaf who are at work have brought their problems to us and members of staff have often been kept till after 10 p.m. in dealing with these cases.

This situation was not exclusive to the Centre in question but was an established part of the Missioner role:

Normal Evening Attendance (compiled from data in Lysons, 1965, Table 44)

No of evenings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Superintendent	1	8	11	17	9	5	-	51
Qualified Assistant	1	1	12	8	5	-	1	28
Trainee			9	4	2			15

Now the centre staff, though more numerous than in the time of the Missioner, are based in offices behind a locked door. They only work standard office hours, will only open the main door of the building at certain times within those hours and will only see Deaf people by appointment. The Annual Report carries statistics for the number of bookings made with the member of staff designated the Advice and Guidance Officer, but it seems unlikely to be at the same level as the assistance offered by the Missioner available on four nights every week. Also there is no way of assessing how many people would have appreciated advice but felt the problem too small or too urgent to be worth making an appointment. Observation revealed a number of occasions when the Deaf Elders used strategies to bypass this system. They brought official letters and forms to church and asked the Chaplain to translate them. When the regular church interpreters were booked for Diocese services or other events the church members would often take the opportunity to request a few minutes of the interpreter's time for help with personal matters. It appears that the inconvenience of the official channels outweighed the burden of having to ask for a favour.

Another important factor was that the interpreters in this situation were well-known to the church members. Booking an interpreter through the Deaf centre would mean sharing the nature of the appointment with the centre staff and the Deaf Elders frequently comment "I don't want them to know my business". The Deaf Elders are naturally reticent about sharing private information with relative strangers. In the past some may have felt that the Missioner knew too much about their lives, but the professionalisation of many services has also diminished the element of personal relationship.

Deaf culture is essentially visual, relying on face to face contact. Relationship is paramount. One must observe the courtesies of maintaining a relationship as well as attending to the task in hand. Acceptance and status in the Deaf world depends upon who you know and how you are connected to the community (Mindess, 1999). These are the criteria against which the trustworthiness of newcomers and outsiders can be assessed. The Deaf centre staff are not in relationship with the members: they dwell behind locked doors and most are not proficient sign language users. The centre offers little practical assistance to its members and its staff still operate as gatekeepers to outside services in much the same way that the Missioner did. To the Deaf Elders, working with and for Deaf people should mean being at the heart of the community, being seen and known. To them, the overriding impression that the current structure creates is that hearing people, both within the centre and beyond its walls, are no longer interested in the Deaf community and its needs.

9 WE HAVE A BUILDING FROM GOD

"If the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" 2 Corinthians 5 :1

The preceding chapter explored tensions within the Deaf centre which impacted upon the Deaf Elders and their Church. Similar conflicts in other Deaf clubs appear to have contributed to the migration of some traditional Deaf Church congregations from the Deaf club setting. Attention will now be turned outwards to consider the situation of the Deaf Church as part of the wider Church of England. This chapter examines how the institutional structures and policies of the Church of England are affecting the traditional Deaf Church congregation.

It has been shown that before the advent of the chaplains the extent to which the Deaf Church was integrated into the Church of England on a practical level was limited. As described in previous chapters, though the majority of Deaf centre churches used broadly Anglican forms of worship there was a variety of organisational affiliation. Some Deaf centres and their churches were officially Anglican missions, others received funding from the Church of England to carry out their work, but all considered that they served the needs of Deaf people of all denominations (Lysons, 1965). Ordained Anglican clergy led occasional services, but the Deaf churches were to a great extent autonomous and appear to have taken little part in the worship and organisational structures of the deanery or diocese in which they were situated.

In order to explore the influence of the Church of England structures upon the Deaf congregation under study consideration will first be given to how ministry among Deaf people is organised today.

9.1 The Deaf Church and Sector Ministry

Chaplaincy among Deaf People operates outside the parish boundaries which are the primary pastoral and administrative divisions in the Church

of England. It serves a particular sector of the population rather than serving all of the people in a specified area. In the Church of England such extra-parochial work is usually termed sector ministry.

A parish in the Church of England must provide for the long-term spiritual sustenance of its members week by week. In addition to offering regular opportunities for teaching and worship it must also meet specific needs for particular situations through the life course from birth to death, for example baptism of infants, marriages and funerals. However, its ministry is restricted to a clearly demarcated group of recipients; those resident within a relatively small geographical area.

Sector ministries vary in the extent of their geographical coverage. Some chaplains are responsible for a single institution such as a school, hospital, prison or university. Others provide additional services for a particular sector of the population within a diocese, for example youth chaplaincy, where it would be anticipated that the majority of their needs would be met within parishes. Chaplains for foreign language groups also tend to work at a diocesan level. However, these populations are frequently concentrated in particular locations, especially in the case of recent migrants who will often gravitate to large urban centres where there is the prospect of employment, and where other migrants from their own region are already established.

By contrast, Deaf chaplaincy attempts to meet all the spiritual needs of Deaf people throughout the whole of the diocese. Few Deaf people choose to attend their local parish church. The diocesan Deaf Church acts not only as parish for its Deaf congregations in terms of their day to day needs but also is responsible for provision which would otherwise be the remit of sector ministries but which Deaf people are unable to access because of the language barrier. An additional difficulty is that the precise extent of this Deaf population is unknown.

Examining the case of the Diocese under study we find:

- Population: there are no official figures for how many Deaf people live in the Diocese who may potentially require chaplaincy services at some point in their lives. The total population of the Diocese is approaching 2 million. Applying a very crude approximation that in Great Britain there are around 60,000 people with BSL as a first or preferred language out of a total population in the order of 60 million, then this would correspond to some 2,000 Deaf people in the Diocese. The Deaf Chaplaincy mailing list has around 150 names of people who consider themselves in some way connected with the Deaf Church or wish to be kept informed of its activities. This includes a few hearing people. It does not include the numerous Deaf people who approach the chaplaincy because they require the services of the Church at specific points in their lives.
- Church congregations: 6 Deaf churches, each with its own programme of services.
- Geographical area: over 1,500 square miles.
- Occasional offices: the chaplaincy provides services or access to such services in the hearing church through a chaplain or interpreters for baptism, confirmation, church weddings and funerals of Deaf people or at which Deaf people wish to be present.
- Pastoral visits and home communion: there are a large number of elderly former churchgoers, isolated and scattered through the Diocese who need to be visited.
- Sector ministries which Deaf people can not access because of the language barrier: the Diocese has chaplains in seven NHS hospital trust major hospitals, four universities, and six prisons and young offenders institutions. The Chaplain among Deaf people is responsible for the care of any Deaf person in all of these institutions.

If this range of activities and the time demands of reaching such a scattered population are taken into account rather than the numbers who

attend church regularly then the difficulty of setting realistic staffing levels and budgets is clear.

During the course of the research the chaplains frequently exhorted the Deaf Church members to attend Diocesan events where possible. They felt that the Deaf Church was often overlooked in matters of planning and funding, and that maintaining a high profile by being visible at major events was one way to combat this. A further problem identified by the chaplains was that the Deaf Church had no access to the decision making processes which took place through deanery and diocese synods. There was no mechanism for the Deaf Church to be represented by sending its own delegates, and Deaf people were not part of the system of voting for representatives which took place in parishes. One Chaplain obtained agreement for the Deaf Church to send an observer to the deanery synod. It was hoped that this would be a first step towards gaining proper representation. The same problem besets the Deaf Church nationally. At the present time the Deaf Church sends a team of five observers to General Synod, but is still campaigning for the right to take part in the debates and to vote.

With a single church congregation to care for the missioners were able to hold services every Sunday. Under the new system of chaplains, six churches were sharing one or at most two ministers. Services were cut to once every two weeks and eventually to once a month in each location. At particular times of year when all the groups wanted a service, such as Easter and Christmas, this could only be accommodated with one joint service for all. Organising such services proved problematic as there were strong vested interests about whose chapel was used and which groups had members taking a prominent part in the service.

Despite the drastic reduction in the number of services held by each church group, maintaining even this level of provision proved difficult with only a part-time chaplain. The emphasis appeared to be on survival rather than planning for growth or attempting new activities. The solution chosen to address the problem and its implications for the Deaf Church under study will now be described and analysed.

9.2 Planting a New Seed

After years of trying to balance the demands of being part-time Chaplain to the Deaf community while at the same time running a parish, the Chaplain resigned and accepted a full-time appointment in another Diocese. The nature of the post, combining normal parish responsibilities and the demands of a busy sector ministry chaplaincy, added to the difficulty of recruiting someone new. None of the clergy working in the Diocese had the necessary knowledge of sign language and Deaf culture to take on the work. People from outside the Diocese with such specialist skills wanted to put them to use full-time, working exclusively with Deaf people. After a delay of a few months a new Chaplain accepted the appointment but only on the condition that significant changes would be made to the organisation of the Deaf Church in order to make the work load more manageable.

Instead of trying to travel to all six congregations the Chaplain would hold one monthly service in a central location in the Diocese. The place chosen was a hearing parish church with no previous connection to any of the existing Deaf churches. Additional services would be held here for the major feasts and also all meetings about the organisation of the Deaf Church. It was to be a permanent base for the Deaf chaplaincy in the Diocese. The Chaplain hoped that this official presence in a parish church would increase the visibility of the Deaf Church and integrate it more fully into the administrative structures of the Diocese.

The new joint monthly service was advertised as an additional provision on the fourth Sunday of the month. The six Deaf churches would carry on with their own services as usual on the other Sundays. However, the content of the services would have to change since without an ordained chaplain present there would be no-one authorised to preside at holy communion. This would only be available at the new location. But the church groups were free to continue meeting for worship and would be responsible for organising their own services of Evening Prayer.

The first of the monthly services was also the official service of welcome for the new Chaplain. Harry and Irene, Len and Vera and Robert and Maureen all travelled to be there. Their destination was an historic church in an affluent market town about twenty five miles from the Deaf centre. Its fine architecture with lofty arches and stained glass windows, marble tombs and embroidered hangings in rich colours was a feast for the eyes. In contrast with this ancient grandeur the west end of the church had been refurbished with a modern kitchen, cosy meeting rooms and a social area with tables and chairs.

All six Deaf churches were well represented. The service had been carefully planned to allow as many people as possible to have an active part and each of the church groups had at least one of their members taking a prominent role. There were also a number of new people present who had not taken part in Diocesan Deaf Church events before. These included a few Deaf students from the neighbouring university town and a mixed group of Deaf and hearing people who met regularly in a hearing church for fellowship and to work on performing signed hymns together. Two of the group had been attending one of the Deaf churches, and so the group had been invited to sign the hymns for the service. There was also a hearing couple who were to be the liaison between the Deaf and hearing congregations in the building; Gwen, a sign language student, and her husband, Dave, who provided the music for the hymns and worked the computer equipment which projected the words of the service on to a large screen. At all points the service was presented in sign language, spoken English voiced by an interpreter and written English on the screen. The song chosen by the Chaplain for the inaugural service, "All are welcome in this place", seemed to be a manifesto for this new style of presentation offering access for both Deaf and hearing worshippers.

At the beginning of the service Robert as chairman of the Church Council led the customary procession to the altar carrying the Deaf Church banner. During the notices at the end of the service Robert reminded the congregation that the banner was used every time the Deaf churches

came together from the different parts of the Diocese. It was a symbol of their unity. In the past after services the banner had been returned to its box and kept safe ready for the next event. Now it was to remain permanently next to the high altar, a visible marker that this place was now the home of the Deaf Church in the Diocese.

The following Thursday, back at the Deaf club, the church members were eager to discuss the new venue and the Chaplain's plans for the future. Maureen expressed appreciation for the fine building with its beautiful furnishings and for the comfort and convenience of the modern facilities. Vera had enjoyed the signed singing group and the lively new hymns they performed. Len teased her that she had seemed to enjoy Dave's guitar playing: perhaps she was not really Deaf after all? The Chaplain had somehow managed to obtain funding for a catered buffet after the service and this had been the opportunity for the Deaf Elders to spend time catching up with old friends from other areas, many of whom they knew from school days and others they had worked with over the years on the Church Council.

The Chaplain had emphasised that the new arrangement was about working together to keep the Deaf Church strong and help it grow for the future. Robert was enthusiastic. As chairman he had struggled to maintain the Diocese Church Council. Each of the churches was supposed to send representatives and the constitution required a certain number of officers. With declining church membership and reduced input from the Chaplains the Deaf Church leaders were fully occupied with organising the programme of events for the church in their own area. They struggled to find additional members with transport who were able to attend the Diocese Council planning meetings. The Deaf-led fellowship group was no longer active. The new pattern of services proposed by the Chaplain emphasised co-operation on a Diocesan level. Past rivalries had in some respects been eased by the neutral ground of the new setting. The Deaf Elders who in the past has said "I don't see why we should bother going all the way to their Deaf club, they never come here when it is our turn to host the service" could not complain

about the central location of the new venue. When the church members from the different areas were gathered they seemed to draw strength from experiencing themselves once more as a vibrant, numerous Church community with plans for the future. People had come together with renewed energy and there were new people share the work.

The Deaf Elders were able to identify some positive features in the new situation, but these had to be set against a number of aspects which to them represented significant losses and suggested decline rather than growth. What the new policy really meant was that the Chaplain would now only lead a service once a month whereas formerly the chaplains held a Deaf Church service somewhere in the Diocese every Sunday, and on some weeks services in two different locations. In hearing churches the priests worked every week: why should the Deaf Church only have access to its chaplain one week in four? Joseph questioned the appointment of a hearing person as chaplain. He said that the Diocese should have chosen someone Deaf. The Deaf Church did not want to make do with hearing chaplains and interpreters any more.

There was also concern about how their own church services could be continued in the absence of a chaplain. Harry and Irene had both retired from their official roles in the Church. Most felt they were now of an age where they wished to be ministered to rather than learning to take on new roles. Joan commented "My husband and I have worked for the church for forty years, being Church Warden, being on the Church Council, working in the kitchen. Now it is time for someone else to take their turn." Robert, the youngest of the church members, was willing to try leading the services but reminded them how difficult he found working from the written English service books.

Irene was worried about the situation of the older members and those without transport. The journey was too long for the more frail members and there were not enough people with cars to offer lifts to everyone. She was particularly concerned about Ada. A ninety year old widow, Ada lived some way out of town and had previously relied upon her friend Jack for a lift to church. Since Jack died a few months before,

hearing family members had brought Ada to church when they were able. But it was very unlikely they would be willing to make the trip to the new church which would involve them giving up a whole afternoon. When would Ada be able to receive holy communion if services were to be held only at the new location? The Chaplain had expressed a willingness to visit such people in their own homes from time to time, but this was not the same as being able to share in the celebration with the rest of the community. After all, Ada had been attending the church longer than anyone, joining when she left school aged sixteen.

Harry remained silent and thoughtful for a while and then concluded: "Well, it seems that this new place is going to become the headquarters of the Deaf Church. I don't think that is right. The Deaf Church started here in this town. This was where the seed was planted. Things should be run from here because this is where it all began."

The following week I contacted Irene to see whether she and Harry needed transport to church since they used to have a lift with the Chaplain. Irene explained that Harry was not well and that they thought they would stay at home for a while until the worst of the winter weather was over. Also, although they had both retired from the official ministry roles they had previously held, the church members still continued to look to them organise the services. Irene said that she was going to step back and give Robert the opportunity to establish himself as the new leader of the church. Now that the Chaplain was not intending to come and lead any of the services Robert, as chairman of the Church Council, made an impassioned appeal for all the Deaf community and the existing church members, both Deaf and hearing, to work together to help him to keep the church services running.

When I arrived for the next church service there were some new faces among the people gathered in the hall. Two members of the Over 60s club had come to show their support in response to Robert's request. There were also a few hard of hearing people with limited sign language skills who had been invited by Joseph in an attempt to boost congregation numbers. Arrangements for the service were already

underway upstairs. However, it appeared to be Joseph who was in charge rather than Robert. He was brandishing a sheaf of papers on which he had written lists of Bible references and copious notes. He asked me to do the Bible reading, a psalm. I was surprised as in the Deaf church services there was usually only a Gospel reading.

In the vestry before the service Joseph complained that he had received no information, no instructions for the service. The main content of the service, that which did not change from week to week, was set out in the service book. It seemed he had expected someone to provide him with the Bible reading, Collect for the day and choose the hymns. These tasks had previously been the responsibility of the Chaplain.

At the beginning of the service Joseph welcomed everyone and explained that in the absence of the Chaplain he would lead the worship and give a sermon. He picked up copies of both the Communion and Evening Prayer books and looked at them, puzzled. Robert held up the correct book for Evening Prayer to show him. Joseph opened the cover, flicked through the pages and declared "I do not know this service. We will begin on page three". He signed the prayer concluding the penitential rite which had otherwise been omitted, as had the opening sentences and prayers. Everyone in the congregation seemed very confused.

Joseph then announced the Bible reading and looked at me to signal I should get up and read. Usually the opening hymn would have come first. I thought back to previous occasions when the hymn had been overlooked, knowing how annoyed or anxious the person responsible for signing it would be, so I asked "Is the hymn first?" Joseph said no, we would do the service his way, the hymn would come later. After the reading Joseph began his sermon. However, he was signing from a written script which he had placed on the altar. This meant that his face was largely hidden, and since he was following a text what was produced was signed English with a great deal of fingerspelling but no-one could see his lip patterns. He then called upon Cyril, a hard of hearing man who was not a regular churchgoer, to do a New Testament reading after which Joseph gave a second sermon.

The service was concluded with the Lord's Prayer, the blessing in a form designed for use by clergy only, and a final hymn. This meant that all the main texts of Evening Prayer had been missed out, as had the sections which normally were of particular interest to the Deaf congregation, the sharing of news in the form of intentions for the prayers of intercession, and the peace. Afterwards Robert said that the service had been "different". Joseph pointed out that anyone was welcome to come up and sign the sermon if they felt confident to do so, though he did not suggest he might relinquish the role of service leader. Over in the corner Len surreptitiously commented that he could have done better himself and perhaps should give it a go. This seemed to sum up the level of resentment in the room as Len is very unassuming and normally keeps a low profile.

As spring approached Irene and Harry returned to church. Irene hugged everyone extra hard; I think she must have felt very isolated during the bad weather when they stayed at home. Harry said his health was still not too good, he had only come to keep Irene company on the journey. Ada, tightly buttoned up in her red duffle coat, was escorted in by her daughter. Len was complaining that Joseph asked him to do something every time and on this occasion wanted him to lead the congregation responses. He did not want the responsibility of having to lead something every time he came to church; it was tiring and he had not been well.

When the service began Joseph seemed more organised and followed the book for much of the time. A hearing member of the congregation signed the opening hymn. Mandy, a hard of hearing lady who had just started attending church, did a second reading. In addition to using speech she does sign a little when she mixes with the Deaf members at the Social club. However, for the Bible reading she signed full grammatical English with signs for words such as 'to' and 'the', presumably some artificial sign system learned at school.

Joseph's sermon was again difficult to follow with his head bent to read the words he had written. It was also lengthy. After this Joseph checked

his watch and said that time was moving on and we would now have the notices. This meant that the intercessions were missed, though Maureen tried to intervene and share news of Lucy who was in hospital. However, in the service book the prayers of intercession are not written out, there is only an instruction 'The Prayers'. I wondered whether perhaps Joseph had not recognised what was intended by the English instruction.

At the club on Thursday I mentioned the church service to Irene, hoping to learn her views on how the Church was managing without the assistance of the Chaplain. At first she hesitated and said it was difficult to explain how she felt. Others were more direct, and said the services had been terrible and the sermons went on for far too long. After some thought Irene commented: "Everything was done by hearing people. Joseph asked his hearing friend [Mandy] to do the reading. Eileen, a hearing person, signed the hymn. It is not that I mind hearing people sharing the work in church, but what about us Deaf? It is not easy for me to travel here for church on Sunday. If during the service I am feeling worried and upset about what is going on how can I pray properly? My faith is still strong but I don't feel I want to come to church any more if it is like this."

9.3 Ministry at the Heart of the Deaf Community

The traditional Deaf Church congregation, founded through the vision and efforts of Deaf people, was later nurtured and sustained by the ministry of the missioners and chaplains. The new Diocesan structure for the Deaf Church initiated by the Chaplain requires the Deaf Elders to maintain the life and worship of their church without such support. The Deaf centre churches are now expected to draw upon their own resources. The Deaf Chaplaincy will continue to provide ministry, but not where its Deaf members currently are or where they would choose to worship.

The field notes indicate that this is an entirely unrealistic expectation, both in terms of the training and experience the Deaf Church members

have had for leadership, and when compared with what would be expected of a hearing parish in the absence of resident clergy. The only people with any formal training for ministry in the Diocese were four Lay Readers, only two of whom were still actively involved in ministry at this time and even then in a reduced capacity. In the fifteen years since the Deaf Lay Readers were licensed one of them went on to further training, but no new people were involved in any training courses for official ministries other than being approved to administer the chalice during the Deaf Church communion services.

The Deaf Elders characterise the era of missioners as giving them little opportunity to make decisions about church matters or to take a leading role in services. The Church Council was chaired and the agenda fixed by the Missioner. In the services Deaf people may have been able to sign a hymn but the content of the services was planned by the Missioner. This situation seems to have continued during the era of chaplains. The Chaplain chose a reading from the official lectionary, usually a Gospel passage, selected hymns to match its theme and added the Propers for the season. But when the Deaf churches were required to organise their own services it became clear that members generally had no idea how and why the Chaplain had done this, where to obtain the relevant information, which parts of a service could only be done by an ordained person and which parts were optional and which mandatory. This information had never been shared or taught.

This situation is certainly not unique in the Deaf Church. In many hearing churches it would also be the case that only a minority were involved in organisation and visible participation in services. The rest would not be expected to have a detailed knowledge of the structure and rubrics governing the liturgy in which they were participating. The difference is that a hearing congregation would not be expected to look after itself without the support of clergy or other trained, licensed individuals. Other clergy would be brought in to supply for temporary absences. In the Deaf Church there is rarely another chaplain nearby who can fulfil this function. During an interregnum every hearing church

would have Wardens or others with an official position who would be responsible for decision making. No such structure exists in the Deaf churches in the Diocese at the present time.

The situation faced by the Deaf Church does appear to indicate that there is a structural problem here. The expectation that the Deaf church groups will be self-sustaining seems unrealistic compared with the support and structures available to hearing parishes without clergy. There would also seem to have been a serious inequality in the opportunities for Deaf people to access the training which would allow them to participate in the leadership structures of the Church of England. Those who have been involved in such training report the difficulties of courses where trainers and other participants frequently have no knowledge of Deaf people and their needs. In recent years the first steps have been taken to begin to address this situation by offering ministry training taught by Deaf clergy in BSL, but much more is needed if Deaf people are to take their place as leaders in the Church.

The new arrangements for services have further weakened the long-term viability of the traditional Deaf centre church. The necessity of maintaining the traditional bases of the individual church groups and equipping Deaf leaders is a pressing problem. The huge significance of the Deaf centre chapel as a spiritual home for the Deaf Church has been shown. These traditional Deaf churches should not be allowed to decline and be lost since they are the physical expression of spiritual belonging for their individual communities. The importance of face to face contact and personal relationships in Deaf culture cannot be overemphasised. It is difficult to imagine how the Chaplain can create such relationships of trust with the church members, or be available to those community members who do not come to church, without being present in the Deaf centre. Surely the place of the chaplains is at the heart of the communities they serve. Once more, the statement made to Lysons (1965) comes to mind, that it would be futile to preach to Deaf people on Sunday if one had not walked alongside them and served them during the

week. Yet now the Chaplain is not even present in their midst on Sundays.

The manner in which the Deaf Elders have accepted the loss of their regular services may appear surprising given the huge significance the chapel holds for their church and community. However, in situations of oppression one can learn the futility of resistance and internalise a form of learned helplessness. Ladd (2003) suggests that such fatalism is a fundamental part of Deaf life. One of Ladd's informants describes a similar situation in which the Deaf community failed to mount a protest when its only BSL television programme was withdrawn:

> "It all goes back to school; people have said to me, 'We are not surprised. Anything we get, we know hearing will take it away from us again one day'. That belief is very deep rooted." (p.324)

The Deaf Elders appear to be displaying a stoical resignation in the face of the inevitable. The Chaplain who complained that the Deaf Elders were unwilling to contemplate change - "Change takes time and has to be practised" - was surely doing them a disservice. They have accepted a huge change in supporting the monthly services at the new venue and in attempting to take on new roles in the latter part of their lives. One can only imagine the outcry if a hearing congregation was told that it would no longer be served by clergy in its own parish church. The Deaf Elders have accepted the change but this does not mean that they have embraced it. They have accepted it in the same way that the elderly widows at the beginning of this research journey claimed to be 'not-bothered' about their circumstances: one accepts what can not be changed but this in no way lessens the sense of sadness at what has been lost.

9.4 A Neo-Colonial Church?

The withdrawal of the Chaplain from the services at the traditional Deaf centre church could be seen as heralding a new era of Deaf autonomy in church affairs, with the Deaf members leading their own worship in

culturally appropriate ways. However, the reality depicted in the field notes shows a very different situation.

The most senior of the Deaf Elders who had themselves received formal training to fill the leadership roles feel that they are now too old: the baton must be passed to the next generation. Irene felt that stepping aside herself and allowing Robert to gain confidence through actually experiencing leadership was an essential aspect of this intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Harry repeatedly described the process as "giving it to the Deaf"; that constant sharing of all the accumulated wisdom of a long Deaf life, taking every opportunity in both church and social situations to teach the next generation. In the context of Church this obligation has strong biblical resonances: "I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you" (1 Corinthians 11: 23). Christianity was originally a verbal message passed on through oral tradition (Crystal, 1965, p.134).

For Harry and Irene, what they have learned from both their own spiritual journeys as Deaf people and from formal Church training they have passed on to the group. They hoped that over the years the others would have absorbed the rubrics from seeing their actions, learned the liturgical signs from watching them sign the texts, and acquired spiritual understandings through sermons which related the Christian message to the realities of Deaf life. To their way of thinking these are the formative experiences which equip the next generation of Deaf people as leaders of the Church.

Following the effective withdrawal of the hearing chaplains one might have expected a resurgence of Deaf ways of worship. What was in fact observed suggests that linguistic colonialism is once more influencing the development of the Deaf church, as the legacy of the Milan Congress and the historical dominance of spoken language reasserts itself. Irene had identified and begun to teach the next leader in the Deaf chain, a monolingual BSL user who already had a position of authority in the group. Joseph's decision that he needed to intervene and assume leadership himself seems to have been based on his superior knowledge of

written English and the fact that he had some experience of how things were done in hearing churches. He knew how to locate Biblical references and was able to prepare a sermon in written English. All the Deaf Elders expected the services to continue in the customary way. However, in order to maintain this tradition of worship it is necessary to work from the English texts which comprise the liturgy. This was the reason for Joseph allocating all the prominent roles in the service to those who had the greatest fluency in English; either hard of hearing or hearing people. Irene's observation that the Deaf members were being overlooked (the hard of hearing people are not culturally Deaf and are therefore viewed by Irene simply as 'hearing') was certainly borne out in the months that followed. Those hearing people who attended the church regularly also expressed concerns that they were being asked to contribute more.

The situation described by Irene appears to indicate an emerging neo-colonial pattern in the Church. Those with the greatest knowledge of the language and traditions of the chaplains are attempting to claim, or being pushed to fill the leadership roles, thwarting the emergence of genuine grass-roots Deaf leadership and new Deaf modes of worship. The contention, previously quoted, of the Chaplain who felt that only the Church of England was broad enough to accommodate Deaf Church because it required little in the way of formal professions of doctrine may well contain some truth. But while the Church of England may be theologically broad it has strong requirements of conformity in terms of its liturgy. It is permitted to translate the liturgy into BSL but nonetheless the starting point is a written order of service. As long as the emphasis is on worship from a written English text the monolingual BSL users can never be truly at home or fully assume leadership for their own Church.

The situation appears to be that the Deaf Church is being drawn more and more into the life of the mainstream Church of England. The justification for this incorporates both practical arguments about manpower and theological arguments about the integrity and unity of the Church as the

Body of Christ.[22] The Deaf congregations who previously saw themselves as belonging to something unique and independent, a Deaf Church that was part of the Deaf World, are increasingly becoming aware of their membership of a wider, predominantly hearing, organisation. This may give them access to more material resources, to decision making structures and the power invested in them. It may awaken the Church of England anew to its responsibility to make all areas of Church life, ministry and governance open to Deaf people. However, the potential negative consequences must not be ignored. I would contend that there is a fundamental incongruity between the genuine desire of many chaplains to see Deaf people in control of all aspects of their Church while at the same time embedding them more firmly in mainstream Anglican structures which require them to continue worshipping according to English liturgical texts and hearing norms.

9.5 All are Welcome in this Place

A fresh start in a new venue offers opportunities for change both in ways of worship and in who takes on leadership roles within the group. It does appear that in some ways Deaf cultural considerations have been taken into account in planning the new services. The new service attempted to honour all the church groups and their leaders by according them a prominent role in the worship. Myerhoff (1978) discusses the importance of visibility within groups who are marginalised and largely invisible to the surrounding majority. For individuals who are frequently isolated and overlooked, opportunities to be seen and receive attention within their own communities can be important markers of status and an affirmation of belonging (pp.143-148). This appears to be the case for the Deaf Church Elders. As they become less able to play the active role they once did in the organisation of the Deaf Church, for some these opportunities for visibility and recognition appear important, both for

[22] This image is to be found in various passages from St Paul, particularly Romans 12: 4-6. It has been proposed by some that if Deaf people worship separately they cut themselves off from the rest of the Body; a situation detrimental to them and to the Church as a whole. For a fuller discussion and rebuttal of this from the Deaf perspective see McDonough (2008).

themselves and to mark the status of the church group to which they belong. There may also be an additional reason why such active participation is important; it offers the opportunity to contribute one's talents to serve the community, an important value in Deaf culture.

Traditionally the roles which offered such opportunities were signing hymns, leading the Lord's Prayer, carrying the banner or cross and taking the collection. Some of the Deaf Elders feel they have been pushed aside now that the signed singing group, the majority of whom are hearing, are leading most of the hymns.

In the months that followed the inaugural service the Chaplain made considerable efforts to develop the liturgy in ways that prioritised Deaf participation. Experiments were made with new types of material such as drama, spontaneous prayers of intercession rather than written forms, and 'hymns' created in BSL without music. Deaf leaders were encouraged to undertake parts of the service formerly led by the Chaplain. This once again raised the problem of BSL users signing from written English texts.

The solution proposed was to use short, relatively simple responsorial versions of standard prayers where such options are offered in the service book, and for the Chaplain to further modify the language into plain English. For example, *Common Worship* has responsorial forms of the Creed and these were chosen rather than the lengthy Nicene or Apostles' Creed. However, only choosing these forms risks denying Deaf congregations the opportunity to deepen their faith through access to more theologically sophisticated material. Lewis (2002) draws attention to this as a problem which has beset the Deaf Church since the time of the missioners:

> With the publication of *Common Worship* in 2000, the reaction among many of the chaplains working with Deaf people has been "how can we shorten and simplify the service to make it accessible to Deaf people." Deaf people in the 21st century are still to experience only a simplified and limited form of the worship of hearing people, just as they did seventy years ago with the publication of the "red book". (p.160)

The Chaplain's stated long term aim is for the Diocese Deaf Church to be led by Deaf people, both in decision making and worship, and for the liturgy to be adapted in ways that the Deaf church members feel to be appropriate to their language and culture. This can be most fully achieved through separate services for Deaf congregations, where only the requirements of sign language and Deaf culture need to be taken into account. A number of authors discuss the great difficulty of achieving a truly integrated service that accommodates the needs of both Deaf and hearing people worshipping together (Advisory Board of Ministry, 1997; McDonough, 2008;). Yet chaplains frequently seem to be pushing for a more integrated approach; either establishing new ventures in hearing parish churches or attempting to move Deaf congregations out of the Deaf centres into shared premises.

The Deaf Church has retained its distinctive identity in the new setting by continuing to worship separately, rather than being integrated with the hearing parish services. This means that the content can be chosen with a Deaf congregation in mind and connections made explicitly with Deaf experience. Deaf norms of worship such as remaining seated throughout can be followed. However, the mode of delivery of the new service differs from that in the individual churches. Sign language is used throughout but there is also English voice-over and written text projected onto a large screen above the sanctuary.

In the traditional Deaf churches it was assumed that any hearing people present were there because they could sign or wanted to learn. Therefore no spoken English was used unless the hearing person was a guest invited for a particular reason, for example when hearing relatives attended a memorial service or a visiting clergyman came to assist with the service. The new venue has brought in additional people, including the two representatives of the hearing church responsible for liaising with the Deaf members and also some hearing people involved in the worship group signing the hymns. However, all these people are present because they are genuinely interested in the Deaf Church and want to share in its life. They are not expecting or demanding that the services be made

accessible to them. So it remains unclear why this approach has been adopted. Is there a change of emphasis from Deaf Church to signing church, integrated church or fully accessible Church of England? If this were the case and the new approach reflects a deliberate intention that the service should be fully accessible to all whatever their mode of communication then this would be a departure from the previous aim of providing a service solely for the Deaf community. As such it would represent a significant change in the very nature of what was being offered. However, this has not been openly acknowledged by the chaplaincy team, nor has it been challenged by the Deaf members.

If the new vision is for an accessible church where all are welcome this also raises questions in terms decision making. There is a clear conflict with the stated objective of bringing the Deaf Church to a place where Deaf people can be in charge of all aspects of their Church. If the model adopted is one of all working together as equals, whether Deaf or hearing, how can Deaf leadership be maintained, or even justified? Under previous structures there were mechanisms which ensured that the Deaf community point of view predominated. Only Deaf people could be voting members of the Diocesan Deaf Church Council and the individual Deaf churches also chose their own representatives on the Chaplain's committee for the Diocese. Now both of these structures have been dismantled and amalgamated into one new group in which anyone connected with the Deaf church can participate. It would seem that there are some hard decisions ahead about the nature of the church that has come together, and in particular about the status of its hearing members.

The positive aspects that the Deaf Elders identify in the new monthly service can be linked back to the values expressed in the Deaf Church origin narrative. There the concept of a home for the Deaf Church signifies where Deaf people are gathered; a place that belongs to them and to which they can belong. In such a place the community can establish itself and can continue to be a Deafhood resource for future generations. It is this continuation, this transmission down the generations of Deafhood wisdom that is the priority of the Deaf Elders,

the aim of all their efforts. In many ways the creation of the new Diocesan base has the potential to fulfil these aspirations afresh. Once more the Deaf Church community is being gathered, bringing together the six scattered groups in a new way. Separately, the church groups appeared to be declining and the Deaf Elders were anxious about the future. The death of each individual cast a shadow on the survival of the group as members were not being replaced. Together, in this new home, there is the possibility of a renewed sense of solidarity, purpose and hope.

10 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to explore the relationship between religious belief and practice and the development of Deafhood. It has considered how members of the Deaf Church utilise the resources of faith to build identities which are affirming for them as Deaf people and as Christians. It has been shown that the Deaf Church Elders incorporated insights from their faith in their reflections upon the meaning of their life experiences; both negative experiences of oppression and discrimination, and positive experiences of community, fellowship and self-worth. It was from these reflections that they were able to construct individual spiritual journey narratives which celebrated the providence of God, His purpose for their lives and their intrinsic value as Deaf people divinely created and loved. Such narratives helped them to resist the discourses of deafness rather than Deafhood, discourses of impairment and inferiority which they experienced all around them, at school, at work, among those who knew nothing of Deaf lives, among those who professed to serve the Deaf community, and also in the Church.

The Deaf Elders also interpreted the history of their Deaf community through the lens of faith. The collectivist orientation of Deaf culture meant that the Deaf Elders conceptualised faith as a community experience. The Deaf Church members were on a shared pilgrimage; belief and belonging were inseparable. The Deaf Church origin narrative portrayed the Church as both gift and mandate from God: it was divinely inspired and given to Deaf people along with the responsibility for its continuation. God had a specific vocation for the Deaf Church and it was to spread the Gospel to other Deaf people, passing on to the next generation what had been learned and encouraging others to belong. In contributing to the work of the Deaf Church its members were serving both God and the Deaf community.

For many, this opportunity to work together for the good of the community was a primary motivation for belonging to the Church. In the past, some had felt a sense of obligation to attend services because it was

expected by the missioner or chaplain. Although this was no longer the case, the Church members felt a strong obligation to one another. The mechanisms described by Becker (1980) to encourage social coherence and conformity were clearly at work in the Deaf Church, with members checking that others would be attending and making sure that any absences were explained.

As well as reflecting on Deaf identity and experience in terms of faith, the Deaf Church Elders also incorporated Deaf cultural ways into their religious practice, shaping their understanding of the Christian message according to their experiences as Deaf people. In addition to the strong community focus described above, this also included adapting some aspects of ritual to match Deaf community collectivist values. The importance of sharing news about other community members influenced the form of the prayers of intercession. The celebration of group unity in the memories related during the Deaf Church memorial service has been discussed. The Deaf Elders also emphasised the importance of apprehending and experiencing spiritual realities through the medium of the visible and material.

The importance of the visual and physical in worship, the use of images, symbols, ritual gestures and actions, has long been downplayed in Protestant traditions. In recent years such aspects have received less attention within Catholic liturgies too, with increased importance being given to the spoken word and forms of congregational participation which prioritise exterior activity over interior engagement. For Deaf people with their visual culture such use of images, symbols and actions is vital. This was clearly shown in the accounts of how the Deaf Elders came to believe. Interest in spiritual matters was prompted by things which were seen: pictures of biblical scenes, a cross, the proliferation of churches of various denominations. The significance of the visible and material in the spiritual lives of the Deaf Elders was also reflected in their passionate attachment to the Deaf centre chapel with its images and symbols of the things of God and objects which called to mind the faith journey of their own community. However, a renewed appreciation of the visual and

aesthetic aspects of worship could also enrich the wider Church. The teaching of the Church states that we are all not only spiritual beings but also creatures of flesh. Using our bodies and all our senses in worship aids understanding and reverence. Excessive emphasis on word and text risks making Christian worship relevant only to an educated elite sharing a common cultural and linguistic background.

This research concurs with Lewis (2002) that further consideration is needed to explore what culturally appropriate worship of Deaf people could be. The continued development of BSL liturgies by Deaf theologians, liturgists and clergy should be encouraged and enabled by the Church of England. The evidence collected in this thesis indicates that working from written English texts can be difficult for Deaf leaders and the signed English forms produced can be impenetrable for many members of the congregation. However, I would contend that to date little attention has been paid to the form and style of BSL to be used in worship. When liturgies are created in BSL, the natural language of Deaf people, they do not necessarily have to be in everyday conversational style. Rather, use should be made of all the possibilities and subtleties inherent in BSL which are available to mark different registers and styles, in order to produce a distinctive liturgical form of language. Much of our research into Deaf culture has focussed on social situations. The attempt to take what we know is appropriate in casual social settings and to reproduce it in an uncritical manner in Church situations would be both a simplistic reduction of Deaf culture and a grave liturgical error.

Attention has been drawn to the tension that exists for the Deaf Church, using a language for which there is no written form, and attempting to operate within the Church of England whose traditional liturgy is based upon fixed written texts. In the church under study the expectation that ordinary members of the congregation should lead services from fixed English texts appears to be creating a type of neo-colonial structure which excludes those who do not know the language and traditions of the missioners and chaplains. However, rejecting the traditional services in favour of fresh expressions of worship could alienate those members for

whom the familiar set texts hold meaning and associations. There is also the question of how such new forms of liturgy or BSL translations of traditional services can be saved and transmitted rather than being created anew every time without resorting to back translations into written English. The BSL Bible translation project may eventually offer the possibility of signed scripture readings for those churches with access to the appropriate technology. But more work is needed to find ways of creating and sharing liturgies that are more congruent with an 'oral' culture.

Broesterhuizen (2005) claims:

> The time of spiritual colonialism is over during which dependence was supposed and fostered. Deaf ministry by Deaf people themselves, ordained and not ordained, "peer ministry", is the only way to let Deaf people produce their own religious culture in places where Deaf people meet one another. (p.317)

I would argue that declaring colonialism to be over does not make it so. The evidence from this study suggests that colonialism is still alive and well both in the Deaf club and in the Church. The problem is that it is no longer overt. Paternalism has been clothed in the rhetoric of rights, equality and autonomy but is still flourishing among those who claim to be allies of the Deaf community. The Deaf Church case study has shown that the directions chosen by both Deaf centre managers and Church authorities are often not in line with the wishes of the Deaf people they aim to serve, nor do they match fundamental Deaf cultural values.

The research has brought to light significant material not previously explored in the literature of Deaf Studies. The detailed study of the history of one Deaf church, its life and worship from a Deafhood perspective contributes to both Deaf history and to British congregational studies. This is of particular value at a time when the number of these traditional Deaf centre churches is falling. The question of attitudes about denomination has been opened up and some of the complexities hidden within the seeming uniformity of the Anglican Deaf Church have been exposed. It would appear that the ties between members of the Deaf

community often transcend any barriers of denomination. The Deaf Elders saw the Deaf Church as firmly rooted in the Deaf world: they belonged to an autonomous Deaf Church and the Deaf Church belonged to the Deaf community. The Deaf school appears to have played no small part in nurturing such attitudes and in separating Deaf children from the denominations to which their families belonged.

The Deaf Church memorial service has been examined as a particular cultural manifestation of death ritual, in opposition to Padden's (1996) contention that no such distinctive Deaf funerary rites exist. Padden uses this supposed absence of burial rites in formulating her understanding of the nature of Deaf culture itself, claiming that such aspects as food or ritual are not relevant in determining the boundaries between Deaf and hearing culture in Western post-industrial societies. However, it would appear that such differences do indeed exist and that there are distinctive features of Deaf culture to be found even in these traditional categories. They will not be found if we assume that they are absent and fail to investigate thoroughly, or ignore the ways that such features can become hidden beneath imposed colonial patterns.

In concentrating upon the Deaf church aspect of funeral and memorial services I chose not to pursue my original intention to research bereavement and Deaf ways of grief. Clearly there is further work to be done to refute the received wisdom suggesting that Deaf people do not grieve deeply or are 'matter-of-fact' about death. It would also be valuable to consider how collectivist values such as responsibility for mutual support among community members operate at times of bereavement.

A particular theme to emerge throughout the thesis was the importance of the intergenerational transmission of Deafhood knowledge. The topic of mentoring in the Deaf school, identified by Ladd (2003) as a potentially rich vein for future research, has been explored in the life stories of the Deaf Church Elders. It has been shown that the mentoring system was particularly important to the women in the group in shaping relationships that continued to be significant throughout their lives. Educational

policies of placing Deaf children in mainstream schools were seen by the Deaf Elders as seriously damaging to the spiritual welfare of children and to the future viability of the Deaf Church.

The emergence of Deaf Studies as an academic discipline has allowed space for the exploration of topics from a Deaf cultural and community perspective. This is undoubtedly of great importance and much valuable work has been done. However, for such research to have an impact in a wider academic context Deaf Studies needs to engage in the broader academic debates, contributing its own distinctive perspective. In this thesis I have attempted to highlight some of the areas where such connections can be made in my own work, bringing insights from other disciplines to bear on the Deaf community experiences described. These have included linking Deaf oppression to material from Black Studies, Deaf experiences of bereavement to the theory of disenfranchised grief, and suggesting possible similarities between the use of the metaphor of family in the Deaf community and ideas about the nature of kinship in other minority cultural groups.

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Appendix 1 The Deaf Church Origin Narrative

The Deaf church started in North Staffordshire sometime in the 1860s. But how did it come about, begin, develop? The story is that there was a man, a Deaf cobbler, who was himself Deaf. Long before the federation of the City of Stoke-on-Trent there were little hamlets scattered around. The Deaf man was a wonderful master craftsman, very clever, and because of his work a lot of people came from high society; rich people and middle class and poor, they all came to him to make shoes, make clogs. You know, in the pottery industry they wore clogs as there was water on the floor.

One day he was standing outside his shop. He saw a little boy, poor, scruffy clothes, no shoes or stockings, rough looking. The cobbler asked his mother to come over and speak to the little boy but the boy only smiled and made no answer to what the mother said. They thought the boy must be Deaf. They took him into the house, cleaned him up and made him some shoes. The boy was happy, smiling. He ran straight to a big building: the workhouse. The boy's mother was in there, he was born in there. When the mother saw the shoes she asked him "Where have they come from? Have you stolen them?" He said no, they were given to him by a man. He took his mother to meet the mother of the Deaf cobbler. The two women talked and the Deaf cobbler and the Deaf boy signed together. Afterwards the mother of the boy said there were other Deaf people in the area, scattered about. And that was the beginning of the seed.

You know how in the Bible God says to Moses to bring my people the Jews out of slavery, to free them, bring them to the Promised Land. And in the end they all go to the Promised Land after wandering for about forty years. Moses stood up on the high ground and asked God "Please show me the Promised Land." God showed him but he never went there. He died. Never saw the Promised Land. This was the same. God in some way, some mysterious way, told the Cobbler "You are an educated clever Deaf man. You could be the founder of something which grows for the

Deaf." You have to remember that in the 1860s at the age of 5 they went to work in the pottery factories or in the brick works, in bad conditions.

This cobbler began to teach the Deaf he found, in his mother's house, to teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Bible. "What is the Bible? It is the word of God." Teaching them. But as he began to teach a few people, his business, it did not fail but people started complaining "My shoes? My clogs? Where are they?" One rich woman was angry because her shoes were not ready. She went home and told her husband who was a master potter, one of the top potters if not the top one. He listened to his wife. "You say this man is Deaf, neglecting his business to teach children and adults who are Deaf, who never received any education? They are going to the cobbler to learn?" So the master potter went to see the master cobbler. They met, talked through writing notes or whatever, and the master potter was very interested in the Deaf cobbler. He said "I know what it is like to have a business, the ups and downs, and yours is affected because you have accepted the work of an apostle. I will pay your salary as long as you continue to teach the Deaf." He accepted.

He began his new job, went to the workhouse, found other Deaf here and there. Only a few individuals with rich parents were sent for a private education. The cobbler thought these could help him a lot as Staffordshire was a big area. He started a Deaf religious group in Burslem or Cobridge. He found more and more Deaf. More and more came to be taught. There was no provision for them in the education world so the cobbler asked a vicar if they could use the church hall. They were welcomed, not turned away. He was happy to welcome them. So they started in the north, then came down to St Peter's in Stoke and asked the vicar there. They were welcomed with open arms. Those who could sign well were set to work teaching others while the cobbler went further afield, as far as Burton. How? Maybe on foot, pony, train, if there was a train in those days. But he kept going. His aim was to find a place, a home for the Deaf. Where should they build the Centre? Staffordshire was a big area. Because the work had started in Stoke they stayed there, and then Stoke became Stoke-on-Trent, under King George V. The Deaf

cobbler wanted to find a new Centre but it was not to be; like Moses he died before he got there. So they had to bring in another man, and then other people, and at the end came Joe Ellis.

Joe Ellis was not happy with the old place in Cannon Street because the Deaf Club was just a room above the job centre. On Sunday they turned the room into a chapel. They invited the Lord Mayor of Stoke-on-Trent to the harvest service. The Deaf flocked in, so many they could not all fit in. When the Lord Mayor got up to speak he was nervous – there were so many people he thought the floor would collapse. So the Lord Mayor set a challenge. "If you can find ten people who will each give one hundred guineas I will give the same." So the Missioner began. First he asked the family of the firm who had started the work, Wedgwood, and they gave it straight away. He asked Minton, they gave it straight away, others, Richard Tiles, all the big firms, and in 6 months they had it, the 10 people giving one hundred guineas. So the building was built in Wellesley street, built by the good hearts of Christian people.

Appendix 2 The Centenary Story: 'The Glass Wall'

A century ago the six towns which for long have come to be known as the Potteries had for some few decades previously yielded to the tightening grip of the Industrial Revolution and this once beautiful valley was scarred by an unplanned chaos of factories, clay pits and mean dwellings.

It was thirty-five years since the first Factories Act of 1833, the beginning of legislation designed to amend the shameful conditions of work in the textile industries. Over thirty years were to elapse however before the provisions of this Act became obligatory in the Potteries, by which time a census recorded that in Stoke-on-Trent 5993 children under 10 years of age were employed in these unhealthy conditions, including 593 children aged 5 – all working from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Here in the Potteries it was only in 1865 that children between the ages of 9 and 13 were obliged to go to school for two hours a day and thus became "part-timers" in the local industry.

Such were the prevailing conditions at that time for children with normal speech and hearing. Small wonder then that on the statute book of the Common Law of this country was written the edict: "A deaf and dumb person is presumed to be an idiot" and that consequently our deaf and dumb children were among the most neglected members of our community.

The first efforts to educate the deaf were made in Edinburgh and London in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and thirty years later we read of the setting up of residential schools for the deaf under voluntary governing bodies at Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool. It was in 1837, the year of Queen Victoria's accession, that a Staffordshire Branch Association of the Manchester School came into being and gave us the right to send some of our deaf children away to Manchester for their education, a development inspired and supported by some of the leading men of the district whose names make interesting reading today – Josiah Wedgwood, Herbert Minton, Ralph Sneyd, Job Meigh, Sir Smith Child,

William Davenport, Colin Campbell, Francis Tremlow, Robert Heath and other members of the Wedgwood family.

CHARLES DAVIS, THE DEAF AND DUMB COBBLER

One of these deaf and dumb children was Charles Davis, who became a cobbler after leaving school. He had come into contact with may deaf and dumb adults who were poor, jobless and completely illiterate, and in the words of a Staffordshire Sentinel report of that day he asked himself: "How many in these towns are there afflicted as I am, and is there no provision made for us? After leaving school does no man care for the souls and wellbeing of the poor mute; are we to be left to ourselves after leaving school?" He began to seek out and gather together his afflicted brethren, arranging meetings with them in his own home on Sunday evenings, teaching them signs and finger spelling and leading them in prayer to a knowledge of Christ. Three years of this noble endeavour attracted the interest of certain people of standing in the district, notably Mr. J. Branson, Mr. Wm. Woodall, the Vicar of Trentham – the Rev. E. J. Edwards, and Mr Godfrey Wedgwood who undertook to provide Charles Davis with an annuity "so long as he should teach the mutes."

In 1868 permission was obtained to use a room of the National School at Stoke and there, and later at Cobridge too in another schoolroom, he taught them week by week and held services for them on Sunday. In the same year a small committee was formed and under the guidance of Mr. Branson, who was appointed Secretary, "The North Staffordshire Society to Preach to the Mutes" came into being. The good Charles Davis was appointed "Missionary to the Mutes" and meetings were held each Sunday in the Wedgwood Institute, Burslem, and at Hanley and Fenton, four nights in the week being "devoted to school work". Five years later a plea for wider support was made by William Woodall and at a large meeting Archdeacon Sir Lovelace Stamer was elected Chairman of the Society which (brevity being at a discount in those far-off days) was renamed "The North Staffordshire Society for Promoting the Spiritual and Temporal Welfare of the Adult Deaf and Dumb". The names of other

well known local families (such as Wood, Bishop, Maddock, Edge) occur in the list of committee members, the first President of the Society being Mr. Colin Minton Campbell, M.P.

That our Society was founded on a strong religious basis is clear from our records of the ensuing few years. It is apparent too that the Society had to make its home wherever it could – it moved about from one town to another – but Mr. Davis's home remained the focal point for as long as he was physically able to continue his devoted services, finding employment for his beloved deaf, often walking long distances to visit them or to collect subscriptions from sympathetic citizens whose interests had been awakened to the needs and plight of the deaf and dumb.

Two events of significance occurred during the last decade of the century. It was then that the Mount School came into being, becoming the first school to be established by Local Education Authorities under the Act of 1893, its formation and progress being supported by a locally formed body "The Deaf School Society"; and then we see, in a Minute of 1894, "that Mr. George Beale of Liverpool is engaged as Missionary to this Society from the 14th day of April at an annual salary of £100 with travelling expenses as required".

LOW WATER MARK – A STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

In these years our Society was having a struggling time financially and following on a public meeting organised by Mr. Woodall in 1896 the Committee's work was re-invigorated by the inclusion of Mr. Godfrey Wedgwood, Mr. A. J. Story – Headmaster of the new School for the Blind and Deaf at the Mount, and Mr. E.V. Greatbach who was Chairman of the School Board. Nevertheless the early years of the present century marked the nadir of the Society's fortunes. In 1909, when there were about 300 deaf and 110 blind in North Staffordshire, this pathetic entry appears in the annual report: "There is now no capital fund and the Committee have been compelled to reduce the salary of their Missionary". And so our Mr. Beale, after five years hard work, had to suffer a cut in his £100 salary!

His record that year of over 700 visits and rather less than 200 religious services shows that his sphere extended beyond the bounds of North Staffs. and included such outlying towns as Congleton, Sandbach and Burton-on-Trent. In the conduct of Sunday services he was helped by some of the more able and intelligent of the deaf, one of whom is happily alive today – Mr. Samuel Ward of Bucknall who is eighty-two years of age and who as a young lad of sixteen, fresh from Derby Royal School for the Deaf, assisted Mr. Beale in many ways. One notes that the total income of the Society for that year amounted to £198.12s.0d. At that stage the Society rented a meeting place at the Hope Schools, Hanley, and in the course of the following year or two gradually approached a condition of solvency with the appointment of an enthusiastic Secretary in the person of Mr. H. Earlam, a member of the teaching staff at the Mount.

When Mr. Earlam became Headmaster of the Sydney Institution for the Deaf the Society appointed a Secretary our old friend the late Norman Sidney Follwell, then a young teacher at the Mount, who for the next fifty years was destined to become one of the principal figures in the ever growing development of our Society.

It was at the Annual Meeting in 1911, when under the Presidency of the Archdeacon Malcolm Graham the Society was renamed the North Staffordshire Adult Deaf & Dumb Society, that this Resolution was moved by Mr. A. J. Story: "That in order to encourage the welfare of the deaf after school life it is desirable that evening continuation classes should be established for such persons above the age of 16. Further, that in the opinion of the meeting it is desirable that suitable provision be made, by building or otherwise, for the meetings and services arranged for the deaf". At the same time, despite the efforts of voluntary collectors, the Committee recorded "a falling off in subscriptions due to the industrial crisis and the acute poverty and distress consequent upon it, coupled with the constant and growing burden of taxation".

THE VICTORIA ROAD ROOM – AND A DREAM FOR THE FUTURE

This need for adequate premises was constantly kept to the fore by Mr. Story but was pushed into the background for some time by the outbreak of war in 1914. However Mr. Norman Follwell succeeded in obtaining temporary weekend accommodation at the Hanley Y.M.C.A. until in 1917 we were offered premises at Victoria Place, Shelton, at a rental of £26 a year. Somehow the sum of £200 was found for the necessary alterations (but the question of heating had to be left in abeyance!)

Members of the Wedgwood family had long supported the work for the deaf and it was appropriate that in June 1917 the Victoria Place premises, now to be called the Church and Institute for the Deaf, should be opened by Mrs. Frank Wedgwood.

Our deaf members set to with a will to make our meeting room more attractive and comfortable and for the first time contributed weekly subscriptions to the Society, but these were difficult years and the shop was only kept afloat by the untiring efforts of Mr. A. J. Story, Mr. N. S. Follwell and Mr. G. S. Goodwin, Mr. Beale continuing his good work as Superintendent. A successful effort to raise funds was made by means of a bazaar at the Mount School, the sum of £227 being mainly used for the renovation of the room at Victoria Place.

It is interesting to record that the creation of the present national body, the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, was in a sense born in Stoke, for it was at the 1923 mee3ting that Mr. Story urged the necessity for a coordination of the work of the various local Societies and in due course became the first Secretary of the R.N.I.D.

In 1926 Mr. Beale's health compelled him to retire and thus his thirty two years of selfless devotion to the deaf came to an end. He was succeeded by Mr. G. H. Greenslade, who was ordained shortly after his arrival here and five years later left for a parish in Devon, and so it was in June 1932 that candidates for this post were interviewed by the Committee and they made the happy choice of selecting Mr. Joseph Ellis, latterly

Superintendent at the Dewsbury centre, who had recently gained his Diploma from the Deaf Welfare Examination Board. He was offered a salary of £300 on the understanding that the continuity of the position depended on the solvency of the Society. He was told that the financial responsibility would be his alone and that his salary would only be met if the income, apart from legacies, reached £400! Mr. Ellis accepted the post under these rather disquieting conditions. Thirty six years later we are able to look back and contemplate our good fortune.

The Institute in Victoria Place was not a sight to inspire our 25 year old missioner and superintendent, but it was four years before his dream of a "purpose built" social centre and office could be realised. He at once set to work to put the Society's affairs in order and introduced businesslike methods, regular office hours etc. He ever had in mind the spiritual welfare of his flock and it was shortly after his arrival that Mr. Ellis arranged in collaboration with the Rector of Shelton, the Rev. Guy Parkhouse, the conduct of our Sunday services.

WELCOME SUPPORT FROM CITY AND COUNTY

In 1933 the Ministry of Health issued a circular requesting local authorities "to give judicious support to voluntary associations whose activities are likely to preserve the deaf and dumb from destitution". Alderman Sampson Walker, who was a tower of strength to the Society in the ensuing years, was active in urging the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Public Health Committees to take a practical interest in our work and in due time acquired from the City a suitable area of land in Wellesley Street for £100, which sum was contributed by Mrs. E. W. Montford from her Silver Jubilee Fund. Meanwhile rough plans for a Church and Institute had been produced at an estimated cost of £3,300. It was at our next Harvest Thanksgiving that the Lord Mayor, Alderman J. H. Dale, was so moved by the sight of the densely packed room (he was afraid the floor would give way!) that he decided at once to make a public appeal for funds. Thanks to the effective lead given by Alderman Sampson Walker sufficient money was soon forthcoming to warrant our

making a start on the building of the present centre in July 1936, the foundation stones being laid by Mrs. Montford, President, and Mrs. Cecil Wedgwood, Chairman of the Society.

And now after a hundred years our Social Centre with its church, its meeting rooms, and its audiological wing stands as a splendid memorial to all those no longer with us who, always disowning discouragement, have laboured so faithfully for the deaf throughout those past decades – Charles Davis, Wm. Woodall, Charles Goodwin, the Wedgwoods, Norman Follwell, Sampson Walker and others.

And the principal witnesses to our work, past and present? Surely the generations of the North Staffordshire deaf whose dreadful handicap has been lessened, who at the end of their schooling have been guided into suitable occupations, who have been able to keep in regular tough with our staff and with their fellow members of the deaf community, and have thereby been helped to become useful citizens and good christians.

This is our heritage – and it is upon this century of achievement here recorded that we build for the future.

FOREWORD

by the

RIGHT REVEREND

THE LORD BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL.

Church House,
Liverpool,
October, 1931.

I thankfully authorise these forms of service for use by those who minister to the Deaf. The sequence here suggested is faithful to the principles of the Prayer Book, and is so arranged that it can be followed conveniently by those to whom it is interpreted. Thus our deaf brethren are provided with a form adapted to their special needs yet calculated to keep their worship in tune with that which includes hearing as one of its channels.

ALBERT LIVERPOOL.

Prayer Book

for the

Deaf

The Order for

MORNING

and

EVENING PRAYER

conveniently arranged and shortened for use at DIVINE SERVICES for the DEAF.

ORDER OF MORNING AND EVENING PRAYER.

One or more of the following sentences to be said by the Reader, the People standing:

God is spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. *John* iv., 24.

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. *St. Luke* xv., 18, 19.

When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. *Ezek.* xviii., 27.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us: but, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness *St. John* i., 8, 9.

Reader: Let us humbly confess our sins to Almighty God, saying with me:

THE GENERAL CONFESSION.

To be spoken and finger-spelled by the Reader and People together—all kneeling.

ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore thou them that are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy holy name. *Amen.*

Then the Reader shall say—

Grant, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace,

that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Or this—

ALMIGHTY God, our Heavenly Father, who of Thy great mercy hast promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Thee; Have mercy upon us; pardon and deliver us from all our sins; confirm and strengthen us in all goodness; and bring us to Everlasting Life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

To be said by all the People, with the Reader.

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reader: O Lord, open thou our lips.

People: *And our mouth shall shew forth thy praise.*

Reader: O God, make speed to save us.

People: *O Lord, make haste to help us.*

All standing up.

Reader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;

People: *As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.*

Reader: Praise ye the Lord.

People: *The Lord's name be praised.*

Then shall be said the following Psalm, the Reader and the People taking alternate verses:

(In the Morning)

Psalm 95.

(All standing).

O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.

Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving: and shew ourselves glad in him with Psalms.

For the Lord is a great God: and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are all the corners of the earth: and the strength of the hills is his also.

The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands prepared the dry land.

O come, let us worship, and fall down: and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

For he is the Lord our God: and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Or a Hymn.

(In the Evening)

Psalm 67.

God be merciful unto us, and bless us: and shew us the light of his countenance, and be merciful unto us:

That thy way may be known upon earth: thy saving health among all nations.

Let the people praise thee, O God: yea, let all the people praise thee.

O let the nations rejoice and be glad: for thou shalt judge the folk righteously, and govern the nations upon earth.

Let the people praise thee, O God: yea, let all the people praise thee.

Then shall the earth bring forth her increase: and God, even our own God, shall give us his blessing.

God shall bless us: and all the ends of the world shall fear him.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

OR A HYMN.

After which

The FIRST LESSON (Old Testament)

shall be read.

Then shall be said the following Psalm, the Reader and the People taking alternate verses, all standing.

(IN THE MORNING)

PSALM 100.

O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands: serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with a song.

Be ye sure that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

O go your way into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and speak good of his Name.

For the Lord is gracious, his mercy is everlasting: and his truth endureth from generation to generation.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

OR A HYMN.

(In the Evening)

Psalm 23.

The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing.

He shall feed me in a green pasture: and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

He shall convert my soul: and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me.

Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me: thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.

But thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Or a Hymn.

Then shall follow

The Second Lesson (New Testament).

Here shall be said by the Reader and People together, all standing:

THE APOSTLES' CREED.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy Catholick Church; The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the life everlasting. *Amen.*

Reader: The Lord be with you.

People: *And with thy spirit.*

Reader: LET US PRAY.

(All kneeling.)

Reader: O Lord, show thy mercy upon us.

People: *And grant us thy salvation.*

Reader: O Lord, save the King.

People: *And mercifully hear us when we call upon thee.*

Reader: Endue thy Ministers with righteousness.

People: *And make thy chosen people joyful.*

Reader: O Lord, save thy people.

People: *And bless thine inheritance.*

Reader: Give peace in our time, O Lord.

People: *Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.*

Reader: O God, make clean our hearts within us.

People: *And take not thy Holy Spirit from us.*

Then shall follow

(IN THE MORNING)

THE COLLECT FOR THE DAY.

THE SECOND COLLECT, FOR PEACE.

O GOD, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE THIRD COLLECT, FOR GRACE.

O LORD, our heavenly Father, Almighty and everlasting God, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day: Defend us in the same with thy mighty power; and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger; but that all our doings may be ordered by thy governance, to do always that is righteous in thy sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

(IN THE EVENING)

THE COLLECT FOR THE DAY.

THE SECOND COLLECT, AT EVENING PRAYER.

O GOD, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed; Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; that our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments, and that by thee we being defended from the fear of our enemies may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. *Amen.*

THE THIRD COLLECT, FOR AID IN ALL PERILS.

LIGHTEN our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Any of the following Occasional Prayers may be used at the discretion of the Reader:

PRAYER FOR ALL CONDITIONS OF MEN.

O GOD, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, we humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men; that thou wouldest be pleased to make thy ways

known unto them, thy saving health unto all nations. More especially, we pray for Thy Church throughout the world; that it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. We commend to thy fatherly goodness all those who are any ways afflicted, or distressed, in mind, body, or estate; that it may please thee to comfort and relieve them, according to their several necessities, giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions. And this we beg for Jesus Christ his sake. *Amen.*

A GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

ALMIGHTY God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men; We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

A PRAYER FOR THE DEAF.

O God, our Father, Whose dearly beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, when He went about doing good, opened the ears of the Deaf and made the Dumb to speak, teach, we pray Thee, Thy people after His example to help all those who are deaf.

Send Thy Holy Spirit to inspire and bless this Church (*Mission, Society or School*), and all Churches, Missions, Societies, Schools, and other efforts put forth for the Deaf.

Grant that our deaf people may be brought to a knowledge of Thee and Thy goodness, to their Eternal welfare and to the Glory of Thy Holy Name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*

PRAYER FOR THE QUEEN AND ALL THOSE WHO ARE SET IN AUTHORITY UNDER HER.

Almighty God, we humbly beseech Thee to bless our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth, the Parliaments in all her Dominions, and all who are set in authority under her; that they may order all things in wisdom, righteousness, and peace, to the Honour and Glory of Thy Holy Name and the good of Thy Church and people; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

PRAYER FOR THE SICK AND SUFFERING.

Almighty God, giver of life and health: look mercifully, we beseech Thee, on the sick and suffering, especially those for whom our prayers are desired, that by Thy blessing upon them and upon those who minister to them, they may be restored, if it be Thy gracious will, to health of body and mind, and give thanks to Thee in Thy Holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

HARVEST THANKSGIVING.

O Lord God Almighty, the Creator and Father of all: we yield Thee hearty thanks that Thou hast so ordained for mankind both seed-time and harvest and dost bestow upon us, Thy children, the fruits of the earth in their season. For these and all Thy mercies we laud and magnify Thy Glorious Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

CONCLUDING PRAYERS.

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise, that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests; Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *Amen.*

Then shall the Reader give out

NOTICES,

after which shall follow (if there is no Hymn) the

ADDRESS.

Before the Address, the people standing, the Reader shall say,

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

After the Address, he shall say:

And now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be ascribed all Honour, Glory, Might, Majesty, Dominion and Power, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

HYMN.

COLLECTION.

BENEDICTION.

May the Blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us always. *Amen.*

INSTITUTE FOR THE ADULT DEAF AND DUMB,
PRINCES AVENUE,
LIVERPOOL.

This little Prayer Book has been drawn up with the help and guidance of the Venerable G. J. Howson, Archdeacon of Warrington, for the Liverpool Adult Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Society. A similar book has been in use for some years and has been found very helpful, being much more easily and readily followed than when the Book of Common Prayer is used.

There has been no attempt to simplify the language to correspond to the limited vocabulary of the majority of the Deaf and Dumb. It is left to the Reader to interpret and make it understanded of them. The main objects of the book are to help towards uniformity and to encourage the Deaf worshippers to take part in the Service.

ERNEST AYLIFFE.

October, 1931.

Reprinted by The British Deaf and Dumb Association, 1967

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Appendix 4 The Order of Service for Evening Prayer

THE PREPARATION

1. The Introduction and Welcome

2. The Opening Hymn

3. The Opening Responses

Minister: Come bless the Lord,
all you servants of the Lord:

All: **Who stand by night**
in the house of the Lord.

Minister: Lift up your hands to the holy place:

All: **and bless the Lord.**

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

4. The Opening Prayer we sit or kneel

All: **O Lord,**
Let our prayers rise before you
as sweet-smelling incense,
Let the lifting up of our hands
be like evening praise before you.
Come quickly to us
when we call upon you,
receive our prayer when we come
to you:
For you alone are the God of
our salvation. Amen.

5. The Prayers of Confession

Minister: God our Father,
we come to you sorry for our sins:

We have turned away from you and
we have not done what you want us to do:
Father, forgive us:

All: **Save us and help us.**

Minister: We have done just what we want,
without thinking of you:
Father, forgive us:

All: **Save us and help us.**

Minister: We have failed you by what we do
and think and say:
Father, forgive us:

All: **Save us and help us.**

Minister: We have let ourselves be drawn away
from you by temptations in the world:
Father, forgive us:

All: **Save us and help us.**

Minister: We have lived as if we were ashamed
to belong to your Son:
Father, forgive us:

All: **Save us and help us.**

Minister: May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from our sins,
and bring us back into his service
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

6. The Prayer of the Day (Collect)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

One or two readings may be used.

7. A Reading from the Old Testament

Reader: This is the Word of the Lord:

All: **Thanks be to God.**

8. A Hymn may be sung/signed.

9. A Reading from the New Testament

Reader: This is the Word of the Lord:

All: **Thanks be to God.**

10. The Sermon

11. The Baptismal Creed

Minister: Let us declare our faith in God:

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
who made the world?

All: **We believe and trust in Him.**

Minister: Do you believe and trust in His Son,
Jesus Christ,
who saved all people?

All: **We believe and trust in Him.**

Minister: Do you believe and trust in His Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God?

All: **We believe and trust in Him.**

Minister: This is the faith of the Church.

All: **This is our faith.**
We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

12. The Peace

Minister: The peace of the Lord be always with you.

All: **And also with you.**

Minister: Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

13. A Hymn may be sung/signed.

THE PRAYERS We sit or kneel

14. The Intercessions
including prayers for the Church and the world.

At the end of the prayers:

The Lord's Prayer:

All:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who
sin against us;
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

The Evening Prayer (Collect):

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray,
and in your mercy protect us
from all dangers of this night,
for the sake of your only Son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

15. A final hymn may be sung/signed.

16. The Blessing and Dismissal. We sit or kneel

Minister: The peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God
and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you
and remain with you always. Amen.

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

All: **In the name of Christ, Amen.**

Appendix 5 The Order of Service for Holy Communion

THE ORDER FOR HOLY COMMUNION

THE GATHERING

At the entry of the ministers, a suitable sentence may be used, and a HYMN may be signed/sung.

THE GREETING

The president welcomes the people, saying:

The Lord be with you.

All **And also with you.**

From Easter Day to Pentecost, use the following:

President Alleluia, Christ is risen.

All **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

This prayer may be said:

All
Almighty God,
To whom all hearts are open,
All desires known,
And from whom no secrets are hidden;
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
By the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
That we may perfectly love you,
And worthily praise your holy name;
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Minister
Our Lord Jesus Christ said: the first commandment is this:
"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind
and with all your strength."

The second is this, "Love your neighbour as Yourself."
There is no other commandment greater than these."

All **Amen. Lord have mercy.**

The minister invites the people to confess their sins:

God so loved the world
that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ
to save us from our sins;
to be our advocate in heaven,
and to bring us to eternal life.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and
faith, firmly resolved to keep God's
commandments and to live
in love and peace with all people.

All **Almighty God, our heavenly Father,**
we have sinned against you and
against our neighbour,
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.

We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past,
and grant that we may serve you
in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Minister Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy on you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
All **Amen.**

Minister Lord, have mercy
All **Lord, have mercy**

Minister Christ, have mercy
All **Christ, have mercy**

Minister Lord, have mercy
All **Lord, have mercy**

The minister says the Collect (a special prayer for the day)

READINGS

Either one or two Bible readings may be used.
At the end, the reader may say:

This is the word of the Lord.
All **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL READING

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
according to.....
All **Glory to you, O Lord.**

At the end....

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
All **Praise to you, O Christ.**

The Sermon

The Baptismal Creed

Minister Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
who made the world?
All **I believe and trust in Him.**

Minister Do you believe and trust in His Son, Jesus Christ,
who redeemed all people?
All **I believe and trust in Him.**

Minister Do you believe and trust in His Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God?
All **I believe and trust in Him.**

The minister turns to the people:

This is the faith of the Church.
All **This is our faith.**
We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

THE PRAYERS

The response for these prayers is:

Minister Lord, in your mercy
All **Receive our prayer.**

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ, let us pray to the Father.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you promised through your Son, Jesus Christ, that when we pray in faith, you will receive our prayer.

Strengthen our Bishops and all your Church in the service of Christ, so that all who confess your name may be united in your truth, live together in your love and reveal your glory in the world.

Bless and guide Elizabeth our Queen; give wisdom to all in authority, and direct all people in the ways of justice and peace, so we may honour each other and seek the good of all.

Give grace to us, our families and friends, and to all our neighbours, that we may serve Christ in one another and love as He loves us.

Comfort and heal all who suffer in body, mind or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles and bring them the joy of your salvation.

We remember those who have died in the faith of Christ; according to your promises, grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all your saints, we offer ourselves and all creation to your unfailing love.

Merciful Father
All **Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

THE MINISTRY OF THE SACRAMENT (HOLY COMMUNION)

THE PEACE

The minister uses suitable words of introduction:

Minister The peace of the Lord be always with you.
All **And also with you.**
Minister Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

THE PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

THE BREAD AND WINE ARE PLACED ON THE ALTAR
THE COLLECTION MAY BE TAKEN

The minister takes the bread and the cup, then places them on the altar.

All **Yours, Lord, is the greatness,**
the power, the glory,
the splendour, and the majesty;
for everything in heaven
and on earth is yours.
All things come from you and
of your own do we give you.

THE GIVING OF THANKS

Minister The Lord be with you.
All **And also with you.**

Minister Lift up your hearts.
All **We lift them to the Lord.**

Minister Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All **It is right to give thanks and praise.**

It is right to praise you, Father,
Lord of all creation;
in your love you made us for yourself.

When we turned away
You did not reject us,
but came to meet us in your Son.
All **You embraced us as your children and**
welcomed us to sit and eat with you.

Minister In Christ you shared our life
that we might live in him and he in us.
All **He opened his arms of love upon**
the cross and made for all the
perfect sacrifice for sin.

Minister On the night before he died,
at supper with his friends,
he took bread, and gave you thanks;
he broke it and gave it to them,
saying, Take, eat; this is my body
which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.
All **Father, we do this in remembrance**
of him; his body is the bread of life.

Minister At the end of supper, Jesus took the cup of wine,
he gave you thanks and said:
Drink this, all of you; this is
my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you for the
forgiveness of sins;
do this in remembrance of me.

All **Father, we do this in remembrance of him; his blood is shed for all.**

Minister As we proclaim his death and
celebrate his rising in glory,
send your Holy Spirit that this bread
and this wine may be to us the body
and blood of your dear Son, Jesus Christ.

All **As we eat and drink these holy gifts,
make us one in Christ,
our risen Lord.**

Minister With your whole Church
throughout the world
we offer you this sacrifice of praise
to join with the worship of heaven:

All **Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full
of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

All **Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
And the glory are yours
Now and forever. Amen.**

**THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD
AND THE GIVING OF THE CUP**

The minister breaks the consecrated (blessed) bread:

Minister — We break this bread
To share in the body of Christ.

All — **Though we are many, we are one body,**
because we all share in one bread.

Minister — Draw near with faith.
Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died
for you, and feed on him in your hearts,
by faith with thanksgiving.

THE MINISTER AND THE PEOPLE RECEIVE COMMUNION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

All — **Almighty God,**
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of
your Son, Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you
our souls and bodies to be
a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory.
Amen.

A HYMN MAY BE SIGNED/SUNG

THE DISMISSAL

Minister — The peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord;

And the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be among you
and remain with you always.

All **Amen**

Minister Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
All **In the name of Christ. Amen**

PROCESSION OUT

Appendix 6 Register of Communion Services 1939-1966

Year	Date	Service	Communicants	Text
1939	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	62	
1940	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	67	
1941	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	82	
1942	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	
1943	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	81	
1944	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	The Upper Room
1945	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	76	
1946	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	
1947				
1948	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	
1949	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	The Upper Room
	Whitsunday	Deaf & Dumb	80	
	7 August	Deaf & Dumb	32	
1950	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	
	Whitsunday	Deaf & Dumb	60	The Upper Room
	3 September	Deaf & Dumb		
1951	1st in Lent	Deaf & Dumb	45	
	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	
	Whitsunday	Deaf & Dumb	64	
1952	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	85	

Year	Date	Service	Communicants	Text
1953	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb		
1954	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	Emmaus
1955	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	2nd Lesson
1956	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	
1957	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	85	
1958	Easter Day	Deaf & Dumb	80	
1959				
1960	24 January	Holy Communion at Deaf & Dumb Institute	42	
	3 April	Holy Communion at Deaf & Dumb Institute	8	
	Easter Day	Holy Communion at Deaf & Dumb Institute	42	
	5 June	Eucharist for Deaf & Dumb	36	
	7 August	Deaf & Dumb	32	
	18 September	Holy Communion at Institute	28	
1961	Easter Day	Communicants at N.S. Institute	41	
1962	Easter Day	Communicants at N.S. Institute	48	
1963	Easter Day		36	
1964	12 January	Holy Communion in Deaf & Dumb Institute	36	
	Easter	Communion for Deaf & Dumb	45	

Year	Date	Service	Communicants	Text
	Whitsunday	Communion for Deaf & Dumb	28	Acts XV
1965	Easter		32	
	Whitsunday		13	John XVI
1966	2 January	Holy Communion for Deaf & Dumb		Galatians 4:4-5
	Epiphany	Holy Communion for Deaf & Dumb		The King in the Stable
	Easter Day	Holy Communion for Deaf & Dumb	34	

Compiled from the Parish Registers of St Mark's Church, Shelton, held at Staffordshire County Record Office

Register of Services	1939-1944
Register of Services	1944-1949
Register of Services	1949-1961
Register of Services	1961-1968