



ICDF Networks

September 2017

Network for Deaf Signing



Photo: Linda Wells demonstrating "Love" in sign language

The Deaf Signing Network gives members an opportunity to share their experience of using sign combined with dance and movement in both worship and evangelism.

We have seen God heal emotionally, spiritually and physically through dance and especially when it is used in conjunction with Sign Language. We cannot allow anyone to be isolated from the Gospel or Body of Christ.

It can help hearing people connect heart and head as well as see the deaf ministered to and included in worship. In this way it acts as a blessing to all.

"I often see a bridge forged between the deaf and hearing communities via sign dance. I once had a deaf man weep as he told me he "heard music" for the first time when I used sign and dance together. -

Linda Wells, Network Coordinator

Sign language has also proven to be a solution to many dancers when faced with the dilemma of how to interpret words or ideas in a song when doing a choreography. As a result we can find one or two sign language gestures incorporated into a dance, while on the other side of the spectrum the whole dance can consist of sign language. Often we, as dancers, would take the sign language gesture as inspiration and adapt it by simplifying the movement to flow with the rest of the choreography. In the process we would make it bigger and not limit it to the face and chest area so that it can be expressed by the whole body.

Join the conversation

- Do you have a dance/movement worship language? ... this doesn't need to include sign.

- Do you or does your church use deaf sign in worship?

If so, we would love to hear your story. Please join the conversation at icdfworld@gmail.com and we will add your comments to the Network Blog. See ... <https://icdfnetworks.wordpress.com/category/deaf-signing/>

If you share Linda's passion for reaching out to the deaf or to explore the possibilities that sign language may hold, please contact her at linda.wells@om.org

I am delighted to introduce to you Tendi Henry from Jamaica. Tendi has not only been drawn towards sign language and it's helpfulness in dance as worship but also as a means to draw closer to the deaf community for sharing the love of Jesus.

I personally have had deaf people dissolve in tears in church proclaiming that seeing their language of sign combined with dance movement has actually caused them to "hear" music with their eyes. Hearing people have also exclaimed to me that sign and dance combined helps their mind's truth to drop into their heart as truth allowing them to feel very deeply as never before.

For these powerful reasons I am thrilled to welcome Tendi and her story, with all my heart.

Linda Wells

My Worship Language

Beginning with Sign Language

I got saved at the age of twelve (12) and looking back I realized that indeed God's hand of protection was around me. Between sixth form and my college years, my relationship with God grew more intimate. As a dancer (although at that time, I didn't realize or even dared to believe that God had given me that gift), whenever in worship I needed to move, especially my hands, in order to fully express what was in my heart to God. I remember asking God for a worship language – a language that I could use my body, specifically my hands, to pour out in intimate devotion to Him - my Lord and King.

One day while in my second year at the University of the West Indies, Kingston (UWI), I attended a University and College Christian Fellowship (UCCF) meeting where I first saw a young lady ministering through sign language. Immediately my spirit connected and though I can't remember the song, I can vividly recall the Holy Spirit speaking to me...Spirit to spirit! It was amazing!

I later found out that there was a ministry called "Signs and Wonders" that I immediately joined. God has blessed me with height and long limbs so my arms, hands and fingers seemed to be made for sign language. Hence my journey began learning a language (in Jamaica, we use the British Sign Language), which I mostly used as choreographed movements in worship. For the next two (2) years, I learnt to sing songs using sign language. However, I found that I was intimidated when speaking to a hearing impaired person. I then realized that singing in sign language doesn't automatically qualify you to speak and or interpret.

After graduating from UWI, I migrated to the Bay Area, San Francisco California. For the next eight (8) years that followed, sign language (I had to learn the American Sign Language) for me was similar to what the "gift of tongues" was to another person. Whenever the Holy Spirit calls me into that intimate place where I abandon all reservation, my body moves and my hands starts speaking...literally! It was God's gift to me, His choreographed language taught to my spirit by His Holy Spirit.

Sign Language as Choreograph Movements

I have always thought of myself as a worshipper first and foremost, a dancer, then as a choreographer. So, when called upon to choreograph dances, it was always a challenge at first until I started incorporating sign language as movements. Looking back, I realized that I went back to basics ... to my worship language. As Christians, we need to understand that because our relationship with God is unique, we each have a worship language – that thing we do when we lay bare before our Lord and Saviour. When we strip away the fluff and try to articulate the very essence of us – our spirit to God's Spirit.



Photo: from St Andrews Conference archives

As I began to interpret the words to the songs, movement would flow and the message brought forth. I can only conclude that this process must be led by the Holy Spirit. After all, it is all about Jesus – His message of love and salvation. We are His hands and feet to spread the gospel of Jesus throughout the earth.

YOU HAVE TO BE DEAF TO UNDERSTAND

What is it like to “hear” a hand?
You have to be deaf to understand!

What is it like to be a small child,
In a school, in a room void of sound –
With a teacher who talks and talks and talks;
And then when she does come around to you
She expects you to know what she’s said?

What is it like to be curious,
To thirst for knowledge you could call your own,
With an inner desire that’s set on fire –
And you ask a brother, sister, or friend,
Who looks in answer and says, “Never mind”?

What is it like to be shouted at
When one thinks it will help you to hear;
Or misunderstand the words of a friend
Who is trying to make a joke clear,
And you don’t get the point because he’s failed?

What is it like to be laughed in the face
When you try to repeat what is said;
Just to make sure that you’ve understood,
And you find that the words were misread –
And you want to cry out, “Please help me, friend”?

What is it like to have to be deaf and alone
In the company of those who can hear –
And you only guess as you go along,
For no one’s there with a helping hand,
As you try to keep up with words and song?

What is it like to comprehend
Some nimble fingers that paint the scene,
And make you smile and feel serene
With the “spoken words” of the moving hand
That makes you part of the world at large?
You have to be deaf to understand.

What is it like to “hear” a hand?
Yes, you have to be deaf to understand.

You may be wondering what sign language has to do with dance or even choreography. Or if you are a purist, may think sign language already has a purpose and that is for hearing impaired people to communicate. I too felt that way initially but, if you can believe it, God can use anyone, any language and anything to draw people to Himself. God is a creative creator!

Tendi Henry

Sign Language and Congregational Movement

When Linda Wells was in Britain, she taught us many deaf sign dances at workshops. One of these dances has always stayed with me - I think because I taught it to, and then regularly led, the congregation in my Church in sign dancing it. The dance was to the song, "Purify My Heart" by Brian Doerksen. In fact, whenever the song was sung, I could see people moving to it just as they had been taught whether they were being led in the sign dance or not. These people would not claim to be ‘dancers’. What a blessing therefore to see the whole church worshipping together in music, singing and congregational movement through deaf sign.

Jan Dyer

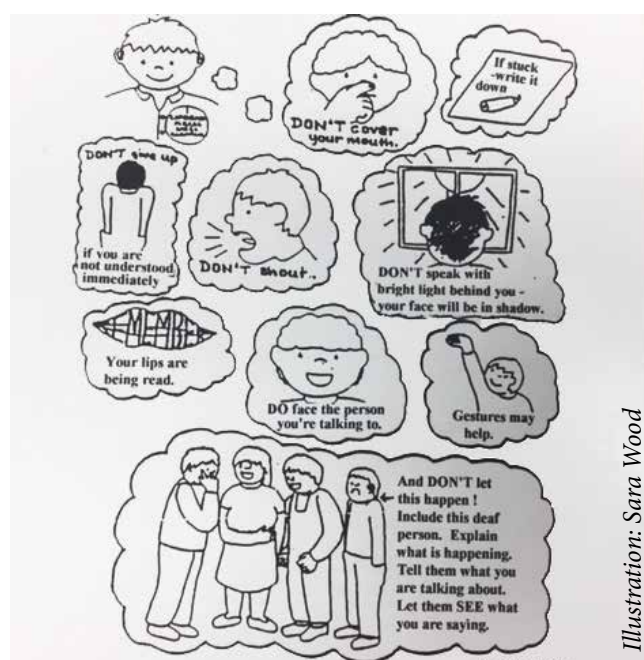


Illustration: Sara Wood

The adapted poem above was written in 1971 by Willard J. Madsen and was translated into 7 languages. Go to ... <http://www.alldeaf.com/threads/you-have-to-be-deaf-to-understand-poem.40126/> for the full poem.