

Sign Language Materials Help Deaf Community Come unto Christ

By Hikari Loftus

Church Magazines

Although the Church has been providing American Sign Language (ASL) translation for more than 30 years, it is increasing its efforts to provide Church documents, pamphlets, manuals, and videos in ASL to aid the Deaf¹ in their gospel learning.

“ASL is considered a foreign language by the Church, so we follow the same process we do to translate into any other language,” said Kimberly Day, manager of sign language translation. “It’s been wonderful to have the production of ASL materials be part of translation services.”

Although many Deaf people read and understand written English, ASL does not follow the same sentence structure that English does. Rather, it follows the pattern of most romantic languages. For this reason, printed material and closed captioning services do not always provide the Deaf with clear understanding.

“Some Deaf people read English just fine. Some prefer to have materials in their native language, just like speakers of any other language,” said Joseph Featherstone of the Church Translation Division, who is Deaf. “Having these products in ASL allows Deaf people more access to the gospel and more access to feeling the Spirit.

“The Book of Mormon translation into ASL has made a huge impact on the Deaf community in terms of being able to learn and have access to the gospel,” Brother Featherstone continued. “When I read the Book of Mormon in English, I read it and understand it, but when

I see it expressed in ASL, it does something different. It is completely personal to me, and it touches me.”

ASL is just one of many sign languages used throughout the world. Most languages—and even countries—have their own sign language.

Such diversity makes translation a significant task. And

while the Translation Division aims to translate material into the various sign languages worldwide, the division is first focusing on establishing patterns with ASL that will make the transition to other languages efficient and smooth.

In a few cases, products offer different sign language options, such as the movie *Legacy*, which offers ASL, Japanese Sign, and British Sign.

“We are still growing and learning,” Sister Day said. “It’s a balancing

act to meet the needs of all people in a worldwide church and do it with limited resources. Sometimes you have to choose what will reach the most people.”

To begin, translators transform English sentences into a series of keywords and symbols. The symbols indicate what types of emotions and movements that the signer should make to convey the meaning of the words. This translated piece is called a *gloss*.

The gloss is then put on a teleprompter, and a native Deaf signer is filmed signing what is indicated on the screen. The end result is a visual product that Deaf people can watch.

The growing list of materials available in ASL includes items like the Book of Mormon, selected hymns, the

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—Joseph Featherstone,
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To view a *Church News and Events* video report on ASL, visit news.lds.org and search “ASL.”

The Church, which has been providing American Sign Language translation for 30 years, is increasing its efforts to provide material in ASL.

Gospel Principles manual, general conference, and many other faith-building films, pamphlets, and documents. The ASL page on LDS.org (<http://lds.org/asl>) also provides translated materials and broadcasts.

These products, while useful to Deaf members of the Church and their families, are also important to missionaries who teach Deaf investigators.

“If we can understand the message, that makes it easier to feel the Spirit,” Sister Day said. “By providing these products, we are enabling the Deaf to focus on the message and feel the Spirit. It helps them come to Christ. That is the point—to bring souls unto Christ.” ■

NOTE

1. The word *Deaf* is capitalized when it refers to the distinct linguistic and cultural group of people whose primary language is ASL.