



## A Deaf Church with a Hearing Ministry

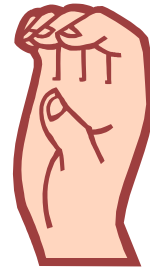
by Jonathan Brooks

Perspective is important when ministering to a specific group of people. Some people view ministry to those who are deaf as ministry to the handicapped. Others, like Pastor Arthur Craig and the congregation of Woodhaven Baptist Deaf Church (WBDC), view ministry to those who are deaf as a language ministry.

Instead of using Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Filipino or a host of other languages found in Houston, WBDC uses American Sign Language to reach the deaf community of Houston.

Craig noted that many deaf people experience being the only deaf person in the family. Thus, WBDC ministers to families who have both hearing and deaf members. There are deaf parents of hearing children; hearing parents who have deaf children. WBDC tries to include the whole family. “Currently, we are about 60% deaf and 40% hearing, but we do everything from a deaf perspective,” said Craig, who preaches in signs. “We are the opposite of a hearing church that has a deaf ministry. We are a deaf church with a hearing ministry.”

We approach deaf work as language missions because it has a culture and language all of its own. By moving away from our mother church [sponsor church, Houston’s First Baptist], deaf people have the opportunity to run their own church; they can be leaders, teachers, deacons, and preachers. Our associate pastor is deaf. We have trained, ordained and sent out many from this church through the years to become pastors, missionaries, teachers, and deacons. This church gives them opportunities that they would not otherwise have,” explained Craig.



According to Craig, deaf people have the same problems as hearing people, but their needs are complicated many times over by their deafness. “When ministering to the deaf, one gets a lot more involved in their personal lives. As a pastor to the deaf, you go to the hospital with them, go to court with them, go through family crises with them – every aspect of their lives you get involved in because of the barriers of communication with sign language. You are there to translate for them or minister to them through the language of signs. Also, anything we do in deaf ministry – such as leading them to Christ, disciplining them – typically takes four to five times longer than it does in hearing ministry.”

Ministry to the deaf requires a greater amount of time and most of the time a greater amount of resources to reach a smaller group of people. The fact that group sizes tend to be smaller, typically between 100 – 125 people, combined with the fact that the earning power of deaf people is much less than that of hearing makes for financial challenges to deaf ministries. Outside sources and resources and hearing people in the ministry who can offer financial support are a must.

WBDC seeks to reach the deaf community of Houston through such tools as its home Bible studies and its annual Christmas drama, which draws deaf people from all over the city that are unchurched. Craig estimates that there are between 8 and 12 thousand deaf persons in Houston with perhaps a maximum of 300 to 400 deaf person in churches of any denomination on Sunday. Of that number, he estimates only 1% of the culturally-deaf population know Christ making it essential to regard the deaf community as a mission field. More churches and ministries to reach the deaf for Christ are needed.

WBDC has also formed a separate non-profit ministry called Deaf Prison Ministries Network. They recently opened an aftercare facility for deaf ex-offenders in Willis, Texas called Healing Hands Ranch, which is for deaf men coming out of prison. The deaf ex-offenders sent to the ranch are disciplined, learn life skills, and are helped to re-enter the mainstream of life. WBDC works to reach the international deaf community by hosting summer camps for deaf children in the Ukraine.

Craig stated that WBDC is eager for any person who meets or knows of a deaf person to pass on to them the deaf person's name and contact information so they can reach out to them. "We have home Bible studies all over the city," said Craig. "People come from all over the city so we are not a community church but a city church. If you know of a family that has a deaf child or of a deaf adult, let us know so we can help."

For more information about WBDC, visit their website at [www.woodhavendeaf.org](http://www.woodhavendeaf.org) or call the church office at 713-467-2255 (TTY) or 713-467-3325 (Voice).