

Inviting a Preacher Who Uses British Sign Language (BSL)

Updated Guidelines for Churches

Before the Service or Event

- Clarify the role: Confirm exactly what you're asking your guest to do. Are they preaching only? Leading the whole service? Will there be Communion, children or young people involved, or refreshments afterwards?
- Nominate a contact person: Appoint one clear point of contact between your church and the preacher/interpreter. Keep written communication simple, clear, and easy to follow – your preacher's first language may be BSL, not English.
- Choose how to communicate: Email and text usually work well. Video calls (e.g. Zoom, Teams) can also help if a BSL interpreter is available.
- Interpreters: - Your preacher will bring at least one interpreter for their own use. - It is the church's responsibility to provide interpreters for Deaf people in the congregation. - Do not expect the preacher's interpreter to cover this.
- Provide resources in advance: Interpreters work best when they can prepare. Send service scripts, readings, Bible passages, hymn/song words, prayers, and any visual media at least five days in advance.
- Ask, don't assume: Check with the preacher what they will need on the day.
- Welcome preparations: Share a photo of the preacher with your welcome team so they can greet them warmly on arrival.
- Training: Consider arranging Deaf awareness training for leaders and volunteers. Affordable online options are available (e.g. Open Hands Signing Church, BSL courses, Action on Hearing Loss).

During the Service or Event

- Arrival: Have someone ready to meet the preacher and interpreter. Confirm final details such as: - Order of service and who is doing what - Where people will stand or sit - Emergency exits and evacuation procedures - Location of toilets
- Technical setup: - Ensure lighting is good for interpreters. - Check sound/AV equipment. - Provide a lectern for both preacher and interpreter. - If possible, place a monitor/laptop in front of the interpreter with song lyrics and readings.
- Interpreters: Remember, the interpreter accompanying the preacher is there for them, not for the congregation.
- Recording/streaming: Always get consent before recording or livestreaming. This includes asking the preacher and interpreter.

After the Service or Event

- Offering thanks: Provide an honorarium or preaching gift. Remember that interpreters are normally paid around £45 per hour, and many preachers will cover this cost personally. In other words, they may be paying out of pocket to minister to your church.