

TASK FORCE ON DISABILITY & DEAF ACCESS

Membership

The Rev. Twila Smith, <i>Chair</i>	Western New York, II	2021
Ms. Sarah Watkins, <i>Vice-Chair</i>	Texas, VII	2021
The Rev. Dr. Eugene (Gene) Bourquin	New York, II	2021
Ms. Carrie Brown	Maryland, III	2021
The Rev. Suzanne Johnston	Rochester, II	2021
Ms. Cass Martensen	San Diego, VIII	2021
Mr. Gary Moore	Central Gulf Coast, IV	2021
The Rt. Rev. Mark Van Koevering	Lexington, IV	2021
The Most Rev. Michael Curry, <i>Ex Officio</i>	North Carolina, IV	
The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, <i>Ex Officio</i>	Ohio, V	

Changes in Membership

The Rt. Rev. Rob Skirving, East Carolina (2019); no replacement

Mandate

2018-D097 Establish an Advisory Council on Disability and Deaf Access

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention reaffirm and renew its previous commitments to Resolutions 2003-D051 and 2015-D043, which require the Church to provide persons with disabilities and Deaf people with full independent accessibility to all official and ancillary events of the Church, including worship; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention establish a Task Force to review progress made toward full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and any other relevant statutes; consult with Church staff to ensure that materials, policies, and procedures for accessibility and reasonable accommodations are developed and implemented for each General Convention and ancillary Church events; and develop a means of reconciliation with people who have been excluded from Church events due to lack of accessibility or failure to provide reasonable accommodations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force shall consist of between five and nine members, to be appointed jointly by the President of the House of Deputies and the Presiding Bishop, and a majority of the members shall be people with disabilities and deaf people, and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force include such progress in their report to the 80th General Convention on their work.

Summary of Work

Task Force Composition and Perspective

The Task Force on Disability and Deaf Access includes members who are Deaf and hard of hearing, have physical disabilities, vision loss, and mental health disabilities, and a parent of a person with neurological disabilities and autism. We recognize that our membership is not fully inclusive of all experiences and perspectives.

Early on, as we considered which perspectives we were missing, we were intentional in thinking as broadly as possible about the issues under our charge and the people they impact, while recognizing that our work and this report may fall short of this goal, particularly as it relates to barriers and discrimination faced by autistic people, Deafblind people, persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and people who experience discrimination at the intersection of disability/Deaf and other marginalized identities.

In undertaking our charge, we focused primarily on the impacts of ableism and audism on Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people and people with disabilities, in their experiences of Church, and did not extensively cover the impacts on family members and loved ones.

Terminology

This report highlights how people with disabilities and people who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing continue to experience prejudice, discrimination, and barriers to full inclusion in the life and ministries of The Episcopal Church. The Task Force recognizes that readers of this report have varying degrees of familiarity with issues surrounding disability and hearing differences, and as such, as it is important to define terminology we have used on our Task Force and in this report. We also believe that understanding this terminology is important for the work of the Church. We acknowledge that we have primarily approached this language and these issues from the perspective of people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people in the United States, and that appropriate or accepted terms may differ from country to country, as well as by language.

“Person First” and “Identity First” Language

Both people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people have experienced a long history of exclusion and segregation and have been “labeled” and “othered” by the medical profession, the church, and society at large. Seeking to redefine themselves, for themselves, both Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people and people with disabilities have developed preferred terms and language to label themselves and build positive identities. Language and terminology that is considered acceptable to people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people is constantly evolving and opinions on what words to use and who can use them are, like the Deaf/deaf

and disability communities themselves, extremely diverse. Many people with disabilities, having had their personhood diminished by medical labels and offensive slurs that they did not choose for themselves, believe it is important to be seen as a person, first, and then as someone with a disability. Person-first language acknowledges that people with disabilities are people, first. People who use person-first language may have disabilities and those disabilities may be an important part of who they are, but they are not defined by them. Person-first language is especially common among people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In most cases, person-first language is acceptable for people who do not have disabilities to use when referring to people who do.

Still other people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people have developed political, social, and cultural identities and a sense of “disability pride” or “Deaf pride” that is inextricably bound up with who they are as individuals. For these people, being Deaf or disabled is an integral part of their identities, and they may choose to use identity-first language rather than person-first language. The use of identity-first language is especially common among Deaf, blind, and autistic people, but is used by people with all types of disabilities.

In this report, we have largely used person-first language, recognizing that this is an established and accepted practice when writing about disability, especially in the United States. We acknowledge that it can be complex to understand when it is appropriate to use identity-first or person-first language and, for this reason, we encourage that all people seeking to navigate these issues:

- Uplift and use language that recognizes the personhood and diverse humanity of people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people
- Avoid the use of slurs and offensive language, as well as metaphors that equate disability and hearing differences with sin, failing, or negativity, and;
- Honor individual and community preferences for identity-first or person-first language.

Use of the terms “ableism” and “audism”

Throughout this report, we use the terms “ableism” and “audism” to refer to prejudice and systemic discrimination against people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people, respectively. The terms ableism and audism were coined in the late 1970s by disability/Deaf activists and scholars and have become more widely used in recent years. The effects of audism and ableism are most deeply experienced by Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people and people with disabilities, but as with racism, sexism and other forms of systemic discrimination, they also have pervasive negative impacts on other individuals, and indeed on the Church and society as a whole.

Use of the term “disability”

As part of our charge relates to an evaluation of The Episcopal Church’s compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), we have chosen to define “disability” in similar terms to the definition

provided by the ADA. For our purposes, a disability is an “impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.” The ADA also recognizes that people who have a history of a disabling impairment or are perceived by others to have an impairment, are also people with disabilities. This definition resonated with our goal to interpret our charge in the broadest terms possible.

The ADA does not provide a list of qualifying disabilities, and neither do we want to be in a position to determine who has a disability and who does not. That said, we acknowledge that disabilities can include physical, intellectual, developmental, mental health, chronic illness and other conditions. We also acknowledge that not everyone with a disability has or is able to access a clear medical diagnosis and that diagnosis should not be the only criteria by which disability, or the need for accommodations, is determined.

Use of the term “Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing”

The distinction between the terms “Deaf” and “deaf and hard of hearing” is important to our work and recommendations as a Task Force and to the work of the Church. Deaf (with a capital “D”) refers to people whose complete or partial inability to hear is not just a physical difference, but also a sign of identification with a distinct Deaf community and culture. People who are Deaf are often native users of American Sign Language (ASL) or other signed languages, and primarily or exclusively use sign to communicate. For Deaf people, the use of ASL or another signed language is not just a method of communication, but a critical part of Deaf identity, community, and culture.

When written with a lowercase “d,” “deaf and hard of hearing” refers to people whose complete or partial inability to hear is an audiological condition. People who are deaf and hard of hearing primarily use or prefer English or other spoken languages for communication and may have limited or no proficiency in signed languages. Also, deaf and hard of hearing people generally do not identify with Deaf culture or participate in Deaf community.

It is also important to note that spoken and signed languages are completely different from one another in terms of grammar, structure, and vocabulary. Just because someone is fluent in a spoken language does not mean that they are fluent in a signed language and vice versa. There are also diverse and distinct signed languages. American Sign Language is used primarily by Deaf people in the United States and Canada, and there are many other signed languages used by Deaf people across The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion.

The term “deaf and hard of hearing” also includes people who are Deafblind, which encompasses a significant number of individuals with both hearing differences and vision loss. People who are Deafblind often use tactile (hand-in-hand) sign language or low vision signing to receive communication.

For more information on this topic, go to the National Association of the Deaf website, nad.org.

Why a Distinction Between Disability and Deaf?

In the United States and other countries where The Episcopal Church is present, there is a growing body of law that recognizes, defines, and protects the human and civil rights of people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people. Rather than creating distinct legal protections for Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people and people with disabilities, the authors of many such civil and human rights laws have chosen to define “disability” as a broad category which includes Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people, granting rights and protections to all who experience the discrimination and structural inequalities of ableism or audism.

However, as the Task Force, we recognize that legal definitions of disability do not reflect the identities of people in the Deaf community. For Deaf people (with a capital D), the inability to hear is not a disability, but a difference, and the use of American Sign Language (ASL) or other signed languages is an important part of Deaf culture.

As such, we highlight the difference between Deaf and disability, making a distinction between the two in our Task Force name, while acknowledging that Deaf people and people with disabilities experience similar barriers to full inclusion in the life of The Episcopal Church.

Full Inclusion: A Gain for the Church

A commitment to dismantling ableism and audism and promoting full inclusion in the life and leadership of The Episcopal Church requires that we orient ourselves away from the notion that disability and hearing differences are exclusively, or even primarily, a human deficit to be overcome. The Task Force recognizes the blessings and gains that people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people bring to the Church, not despite, but because of their disabilities and hearing differences, and calls on The Episcopal Church to take proactive steps to do the same.

For example, American Sign Language not only expresses, but literally embodies the scripture narratives and liturgies, making them visible and tangible in ways that written and spoken language cannot. These gifts should not only be made apparent by means of accessibility, but also honored with deep listening and watching by the Church. Equipping Deaf people for lay and ordained ministry in American Sign Language and other signed languages strengthens not just Deaf congregations, but the whole Church.

Deaf people and people with all types of disabilities have lived experiences that offer unique perspectives on scriptural interpretation and how we as Christians understand and relate to the life of Jesus Christ – all of which add immeasurably to the richness of our faith and traditions. The gifts that Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people and people with disabilities have for The Episcopal Church will remain unrealized as long as we continue to place barriers to ministry and dismiss possibilities out of concerns for expense or difficulty, or fail to reimagine existing systems and ministries to fit the gifts, talents, and perspectives that Deaf/deaf and disabled people bring.

Analysis of Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was first enacted in 1990 and the current text reflects amendments, most recently in 2008. The ADA appears in the United States Code, with the original law codified in 42 U.S.C. § 12101. The findings of Congress, found in Section 12101 and presented in part below, serve as an overview of the intent for Equal Opportunity for Individuals with Disabilities. (See ada.gov for details.)

Brief analysis of the Church's compliance, regarding participation, ministry, leadership, formation, and employment, are offered below. It is important to note that while entities of the Church are largely exempt from ADA requirements, as a Task Force we consider our baptismal covenant and the message of the Gospel. We also recognize that the language of the ADA is largely about access and, in our view, this is a limiting perspective. As noted previously, there is much for the Episcopal Church to gain from the full inclusion and gifts of persons with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people.

The first portion of each item below, in italic text, references language from the ADA. We recognize that some language in the ADA is now considered dated.

“Physical or mental disabilities in no way diminish a person’s right to fully participate in all aspects of society, yet many people with physical or mental disabilities have been precluded from doing so because of discrimination; others who have a record of a disability or are regarded as having a disability also have been subjected to discrimination ...”

We affirm that Deaf persons and people with disabilities are full members of Beloved Community and should have full access to participation in the life of The Episcopal Church and its ministries. We also recognize that many still face challenges and barriers to be seen as capable of serving with the fullness of their God-given gifts and abilities. We are aware that many of our church buildings, educational institutions, camps, and conference centers continue to present barriers to physical, cultural, and programmatic access. We know that attitudinal barriers and systems of The Episcopal Church perpetuate ableism and audism, which continue to keep people away from experiences of worship, formation, leadership, and church community. We grieve that people continue to face discrimination because they have disabilities and/or are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing. We know that we cannot fully be Beloved Community when any among us face barriers to inclusion.

“Historically, society has tended to isolate and segregate individuals with disabilities, and, despite some improvements, such forms of discrimination against individuals with disabilities continue to be a serious and pervasive social problem ...”

Physically, persons with disabilities are all too often isolated or segregated to the margins – literally – of church spaces. Many of our buildings, often historic, are still not physically accessible; in some, persons may come inside, yet not be able to reach spaces for communion, classes, and fellowship. Persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities still experience exclusion from church

gatherings, worship, and formation. Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people are marginalized through lack of linguistic and cultural access to the Word of God, the liturgies of the church, and in fellowship, formation, and pastoral care.

“Discrimination against individuals with disabilities persists in such critical areas as employment, housing, public accommodations, education, transportation, communication, recreation, institutionalization, health services, voting, and access to public services ...”

In the Church, it is vital that we consider how we engage persons with disabilities and the Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing through employment, lay and clergy leadership, education, and communications. Do we understand where we are underrepresented? Where we remain inaccessible? Do we know the transportation barriers that keep members away from church meetings, and recognize those who have been unable to fully access and participate in our schools, camps, and conference centers? Despite our intentions of full inclusion, are we aware that micro-aggressions and discrimination persist? Are we committed to change?

“Unlike individuals who have experienced discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, religion, or age, individuals who have experienced discrimination on the basis of disability have often had no legal recourse to redress such discrimination ...”

When anyone faces discrimination, it hurts all of us. We recognize that discrimination persists in the church and especially grieve the history of injustices toward persons on the basis of race and color. We also recognize that many in the church face discrimination on the basis of multiple factors, which can compound experiences of injustice. Addressing discrimination requires us to acknowledge individuals impacted by ableism, audism, and all forms of oppression, and commit to removing systemic barriers in the Church and society. Even where we may be exempt from legal requirements to do so, the commitment to our baptismal covenant must obligate us to pursue these efforts as a matter of justice.

“Individuals with disabilities continually encounter various forms of discrimination, including outright intentional exclusion, the discriminatory effects of architectural, transportation, and communication barriers, overprotective rules and policies, failure to make modifications to existing facilities and practices, exclusionary qualification standards and criteria, segregation, and relegation to lesser services, programs, activities, benefits, jobs, or other opportunities ...”

It is our sincere hope that exclusion perpetuated by The Episcopal Church is not intentional. Regardless of the intent, however, the impact is the same. At all levels, we must ask ourselves and those affected what barriers remain. What rules and policies, facilities and practices, need modification? Where do exclusionary qualification standards and criteria remain? Where and how do we segregate persons with disabilities and those who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing? How can we improve access and inclusion in worship, programs, and activities? In all areas and aspects of the church – when we examine ourselves honestly – do we recognize persons with disabilities and those

who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing as fully capable and fully included, participating and leading? Are we willing to commit resources to this end? If not, why not?

“Census data, national polls, and other studies have documented that people with disabilities, as a group, occupy an inferior status in our society, and are severely disadvantaged socially, vocationally, economically, and educationally ...”

Our baptismal covenant calls us to “strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.” The work of advocacy alongside persons with disabilities and those who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing continues to be important and we affirm the faithful work of the Office of Government Relations, the Episcopal Public Policy Network, dioceses, and individual congregations and ministries in this arena.

“The Nation’s proper goals regarding individuals with disabilities are to assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for such individuals ...”

“Equality of opportunity” and “full participation” remain unrealized, “proper goals” within the church; the need for our support in all of these areas, in society, remains.

“The continuing existence of unfair and unnecessary discrimination and prejudice denies people with disabilities the opportunity to compete on an equal basis and to pursue (opportunities) ...”

In the Church, this comes back to fully being Beloved Community. When one person is denied the opportunity to reach the altar, to serve in leadership, to worship and learn and experience the fullness of community, we are not yet Beloved Community.

Prayer Resources and Litany of Repentance

Part of our charge was to consider resources for reconciliation for persons who have been excluded from church events. The following prayers are offered, which encompass experiences both inside and outside the church. The Litany of Repentance is offered as a step toward reconciliation.

Prayer for use by persons with disabilities and/or who are Deaf or hard of hearing:

God our Creator, by whom we are each wondrously made: you made me in your image, equip me with gifts, and pour your love into me; when people see me as different, other, unable, unworthy, broken, scarred, wounded, and anything less than whole, grant me courage and forbearance while you work in them; when I am weary of questions, stares, barriers, intrusions, indignities, oppression, and injustice, ease my burdens; when I am in pain, in body or soul, give me your comfort, healing, and peace; where you and the world need what I can uniquely offer, send me to serve in your Name; and help me remember, in and through all things, that you call me Beloved; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Prayer for use by people who love and care for someone with disabilities and/or who is Deaf or hard of hearing; note that this uses the pronouns “they/them,” which may be substituted with pronouns preferred by the person included in the prayer:

God our Creator, by whom we are each wondrously made: you made (Name) in your image, equip them with gifts, and pour your love into them; when people see them as different, other, unable, unworthy, broken, scarred, wounded, and anything less than whole, grant me the courage to ask how I can be their best ally; when I see them in these ways, forgive me and break open my understanding; when either of us are weary of questions, stares, barriers, intrusions, indignities, oppression, and injustice, give me the courage to stay beside them, learn from their perspective, and ask what they would have me do; when they are in pain, in body or soul, teach me to be present and ask how to comfort and support them; help me honor the gifts you bring forth in them; and grant that, in and through all things, I acknowledge them as Beloved, as you yourself have named them; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Prayer for use by a congregation or church body:

O God, who calls us into Beloved Community and sends us into the world as witnesses to your love: help us understand who is missing from this gathering (congregation, church), whose gifts we have limited, and forgive us for the barriers we place between your church and your people. Open our ministries, open our minds and our hearts, to include people whose gifts we have failed to honor, people we have believed unable to serve and to lead, and all we have failed to fully recognize as whole and holy. Help us remove the stumbling blocks between us and the community you call us to be; teach us to create new spaces, build new tables, and transform your church; and remind us, always, that people we may identify with disabilities, you have already named as Beloved; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Litany of Repentance

Dear people of God, our church and our collective history bears the wounds of limitations, barriers, and oppression that we place between ourselves and those who differ from us. We do not fully respect human dignity.

We have failed to honor the ways you have wondrously made your children, failed to realize the gifts you have given, and not loved with the same love you pour out. The sins of the past and of our present day keep us from being the Beloved Community you intend.

We have created obstacles to reach spaces we hold dear, including the altars where we break bread and acknowledge the wounds of Jesus. We have not removed them even when made aware of their presence.

We have not respected the dignity of one another, as we vow in our baptism. We name inabilities and limitations instead of recognizing our siblings in Christ who are whole and holy. We have created barriers to learn, to serve, and to lead.

With our actions and inaction, in small ways and great, in things we do not even recognize, we have contributed to the disabling of other people.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we reject the oppression of other human beings on the basis of disabilities, differences, and the rich variety of ways God enables us to live and move and have our being.

We also recognize the temporary nature of our human condition and that many of us take for granted particular abilities we may now possess, including characteristics that are physical, intellectual, and related to our mental health.

As members of Christ's beloved community, we must work alongside all God's children, building up the gifts in each other and serving together for the sake of God's mission in the world.

In the assurance of forgiveness, let us be fully present before God and humbly confess our sins: our participation in disabling and "othering," our contributions to oppression, and our perpetuation of barriers and exclusion.

Silence is then kept for a time

God the Father, you created your people and called us Beloved, yet barriers and limits of our own making have separated us. *Have mercy on us.*

God the Son, you healed your people and restored them to community, yet the damage we cause continues to wound your body. *Have mercy on us.*

God the Holy Spirit, you stir among us, yet we fail to be aware of the gifts you bring near to us and the people you are enlivening in our communities. *Have mercy on us.*

We have celebrated our own abilities, while failing to acknowledge the full humanity of persons we deem less able than ourselves; we have limited the gifts that persons with disabilities and who are Deaf or hard of hearing bring to the Church. *Have mercy on us.*

We have failed to understand discrimination through the perspective of persons with disabilities and those who are Deaf and hard of hearing. We have not condemned behaviors and practices that limit and hurt God's children. *Have mercy on us.*

We have overlooked barriers and inequality in our church and our communities, and not acknowledged the limits that places on all of us. *Have mercy on us.*

We have practiced injustice with economic justification and not worked to relieve burdens that oppress others when we ourselves seem unaffected. *Have mercy on us.*

We have denied access to our churches and other sacred spaces, and even to Christ's table, with barriers we have created. We have failed to provide accommodations that enable full inclusion. We have preferred historic buildings and aesthetics over access. *Have mercy on us.*

We have limited access to events, meetings, conferences, camps, and seminaries, and chosen convenience over inclusion, without acknowledging the people we harm and the gifts this denies us. *Have mercy on us.*

We have erected unreasonable barriers that limit the vocations of people called to serve God through the Church, including access to formal discernment and formation for holy orders. *Have mercy on us.*

We have built ourselves up and held tightly on our own power by insisting on "fixing" circumstances for other people, in ways we ourselves choose, and have not asked about their needs or perspectives. *Have mercy on us.*

We speak of categories and conditions, we use labels and diagnoses, and fail to acknowledge personhood. *Have mercy on us.*

We have been impatient with people who learn and process experiences in ways different from our own. *Have mercy on us.*

We have separated ourselves from others, refusing to be present in ways that would help us understand and learn from their experiences. *Have mercy on us.*

We have disregarded people who need our help and not seen them as worthy of our love and care. *Have mercy on us.*

We have been fearful of people who are different from us. We have turned away. *Have mercy on us.*

We have ignored the sufferings of our siblings in Christ. *Have mercy on us.*

We have been satisfied with what is and who this excludes, while failing to recognize what could be. *Have mercy on us.*

Despite our intentions, we have not had the will and the courage to act in love for the sake of all God's people. *Have mercy on us.*

Lord have mercy. *Christ have mercy.* Lord have mercy.

May Almighty God have mercy on us, grant us the strength and conviction to love as you would have us love, and to acknowledge the many and varied gifts you give each of your children. Where there has been separation, may God reconcile us. Make us inclusive in God's church, bold in our actions in the world, and ever more compassionate in our love toward one another, that we may help realize the Beloved Community we are called to live into each day. Amen.

Recommendations

Formation and Ordination

We acknowledge that barriers remain which limit the vocations of people called to serve God through the Church, including access to formal discernment and formation for holy orders. We recognize barriers in language, culture, and physical space, and financial constraints, have limited access to ordination processes and formation. We encourage accessible alternatives in formation at all levels, with specific attention to formation for ordination. We commit to recommending alternatives in future work of this Task Force and collaborative efforts of the Episcopal Conference of the Deaf and a Disability Advisory Group.

Language Access

We urge the Church to be attentive to communication access needs at all levels, including diocesan conventions, churchwide formation, and congregational worship and programs.

Specific communication access requests for persons who are Deaf or hard of hearing should always be provided as a reasonable accommodation for full participation in meetings and activities of The Episcopal Church, whether the request is for American Sign Language interpretation or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services. Deaf persons who request ASL interpretation should be provided with ASL; persons who are deaf and hard of hearing, who primarily use English, should be provided with captioning, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), or other services to meet communication needs.

- CART is used to transcribe spoken English into written English, while sign language interpretation is used to render American Sign Language (ASL) into spoken English and spoken English into ASL. It is also important to note that ASL is not the only signed language in use within the Episcopal Church.
- The reason why both ASL interpretation and CART services may be necessary is because some Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people primarily communicate using English, while others use ASL. ASL and English are distinct languages and not all Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people are able to use both for communication.
- Deaf persons who are native users of ASL should be provided with ASL; persons who are deaf and hard of hearing, who primarily use English, should be provided with captioning, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), or other services to meet communication needs. While captioning and CART technology may be useful for many in the Church, including persons who do not identify as Deaf/deaf, it does not “replace” ASL as a language.

Liturgy

We encourage official revisions of the Book of Common Prayer, and all liturgies written for use in the Church, to use language that acknowledges the personhood of Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people and people with disabilities, rather than categorizing by afflictions, conditions, and other general descriptors, such as referring to “the homeless.” As language and usage is ever-evolving, we strongly recommend consulting with Deaf and disability communities when revising liturgical language.

All references that use terminology of disabilities or deaf as metaphors for sins or failings should be revised. Specifically, we draw attention to:

- The Litany of Repentance for Ash Wednesday (BCP, p. 267), “We have been *deaf* to your call to serve ...”
- The Good Friday prayer (BCP, p. 279), which focuses on conditions without acknowledging personhood, referring to “the sick, the wounded, and the crippled.” Here, the term “crippled” is especially problematic, as it has been considered pejorative since the 1970s and is offensive to many persons with disabilities. For this line of the prayer, we recommend: “For people who are sick, wounded, or who have disabilities.”

As acceptable terminology used to refer to Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people and people with disabilities may vary between countries and languages, we strongly recommend that local Deaf and disability communities be consulted whenever The Book of Common Prayer is being translated or retranslated.

Funding

We note the importance of having persons with disabilities and Deaf/deaf or hard of hearing people serving on interim bodies of General Convention and in leadership roles at all levels of the Church. We recognize that access and representation often require allocation of funding for reasonable accommodations. We are pleased that the Office of General Convention made arrangements for the cost of interpreting, providing language accessibility for this Task Force.

In the legislative work of General Convention, and in Diocesan Conventions, we note that resolutions often require adequate and specific allocations of funds to achieve the goals approved; we urge continued work with fiduciary bodies of the Church in order to achieve goals passed in such resolutions. Creating justice in the present and future Church requires appropriate allocation of funds, which should be considered by leadership bodies at all levels.

Gratitude

- We commend the work of the Episcopal Public Policy Network, and the Office of Government Relations for their efforts in work connected to the concerns of people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people.
- We acknowledge the work of General Convention and contributions in dioceses, congregations, and other entities of the Church, where progress has been made toward more full inclusion of people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people.
- We are grateful for the work of the Episcopal Conference of the Deaf, the former Episcopal Disability Network, and the many individuals who have paved the way for our work in the Episcopal Church today.

Continuance recommendation

We recommend continuation of the Task Force on Disability and Deaf Access, as current members are able to do so, until the next, in-person General Convention.

Part of the work of this task force includes providing resources for persons with disabilities and who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing who may attend General Convention, as well as consulting with organizers of General Convention on communication and other accessibility needs.

As this group has not used the funds allocated for its work, we request that access to such funds be granted through the next in-person convention.

We envision the following timeline:

February-June 2021 – Curation of resources, focus groups; discussion and action regarding further recommendations, consideration of possible future resolutions and advocacy; and communication with General Convention staff regarding accessibility for online meetings of Convention in 2021.

July-December 2021 – Preparation of resources/guide for in-person General Convention in July 2022 and arrangements for presence at Convention; continued communication regarding accessibility of online meetings prior to in-person General Convention and the anticipated in-person General Convention in 2022; and continued curation of resources to make available online.

January-July 2022 – Final preparation of materials, resources, etc., and presence at General Convention.

Disability Advisory Group

We recommend formation of an on-going Disability Advisory Group, to:

- Offer support for individuals with disabilities
- Collaborate with the Episcopal Conference of the Deaf
- Collaborate with disability organizations of other denominations
- Curate resources and make such resources available online
- Consult and offer support for congregations, dioceses, and other church institutions and leadership bodies
- Support advocacy and education

Recognition in the Church

We recommend that the Episcopal Church recognize the presence of the Episcopal Conference of the Deaf and a Disability Advisory Group, and other appropriate means, so that there is:

- A continued place for the work of people with disabilities and Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing people in church-wide structures, rather than representation requiring legislation of General Convention every triennium
- Representation for both the Episcopal Conference of the Deaf and a Disability Advisory Group online at episcopalchurch.org, enabling access and connection.