

Suggestions for Hearing Accessibility in Congregational Programming

Facts:

- ◆ 1 out of every 4 adults in Canada has a hearing loss, and 70% of them are under the age of 60.
- ◆ 25% are young adults or older youth.
- ◆ 1 out of every 7 children have measurable hearing loss.

- ◆ Unless all of our activities are designed to accommodate the needs of the hearing impaired, up to 25% of persons who might otherwise be active in our congregations will simply go away in frustration. 1 in 4.

- ◆ Hearing loss is a socially isolating barrier. The Hearing Impaired won't say anything if their needs are not being met, they'll just quietly stop attending.

What congregations can do:

There are many relatively easy things that congregations can do to include the Hard of Hearing and Deaf. For a full listing, there will be a *document available for [download from the CEM web site](#)*. Here are a few highlights to get you started:

- **Whenever possible, always use a microphone or sound system.** If you've got 6 people sitting around a kitchen table, you don't need a microphone. For anything larger, you do.
- **Whenever you use a microphone, make sure your mouth is visible.** Holding the mike directly in front of your mouth is a barrier to lip-reading.
- **Remove barriers to lip reading.**
 - Men should not have facial hair anywhere near their mouths.
 - For women, it's helpful if lipstick is worn. Take care with lighting so that faces are visible and not in shadow.
 - For small group activities (up to 10-12 people), sit in a circle.
 - For up to 25-30 people, sit in a semi-circle with 2-3 rows
 - For a typical sanctuary, reserve the 1st 2 rows for the Hard of Hearing, and ensure that all speakers - including those from the congregation -- face this section.

- **Slow it Down.** Speak with a measured pace, include spaces between thoughts.
- **Use Captions for audio-visual.** If you will be showing a movie clip or you-tube clip and there are no captions or sub-titles, the hearing impaired will not understand it.
- **Have transcripts available for special music or non-captioned audio visual.**
- **Incorporate written words wherever possible.**
 - Have the scripture(s) printed in the bulletin or on a handout.
 - Use a Powerpoint along with the sermon, one that captures the essence of the message in text.
- **Avoid extremes of volume.** Loud noises can be both painful and damaging to hearing-aid users.
- **Minimize background noise.**
- **Understand that the hearing impaired will not be able to visit in noisy environments.**
- **Understand that music may not be meaningful to the hearing impaired.**

The hearing impaired do not expect that they will be able to participate fully in all components of an activity. However, unless they can understand and follow a significant portion of the activity, they will simply not keep coming.

If you would like to learn more about meeting the needs of the hearing impaired in your congregation, please email (do not call on the phone) any of the following:

John Nichols - jnichols@cyg.net

Joan Thompson - joantcanuck@hotmail.com

Susan Lee Hare - markhare@mountaincable.net

(note that Susan has experience with hearing loss in children)