



The General Conference  
Sabbath School &  
Personal Ministries



TO

# SPECIAL NEEDS MINISTRIES

## HEARING IMPAIRMENT



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH

**Special Needs Ministries: Hearing Impairment** is created by the General Conference Sabbath School & Personal Ministries Department.

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Design: AdventSource

**Available from:**

AdventSource

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Lincoln, NE 68506

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[www.adventsource.org](http://www.adventsource.org)

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Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 978-1-57756-159-0

# **SPECIAL NEEDS MINISTRIES**

## Creating Inclusive Opportunities in Ministry

Ministry is a privilege given by God for the modern-day Christian based on biblical principles, the life of Christ, and the love God shows to, for, and with all people. Ministering to, for, and with people with special needs is the extension of the love that Christ demonstrated while on earth. It allows Christians to replicate the Heavenly Father's supreme sacrifice of service by giving His only begotten Son to an undeserving world.

This publication provides information that will assist congregations in developing Special Needs Ministries, specifically a ministry that focuses on children and adults who are deaf or hearing impaired. Specific suggestions and strategies will be given so that the church can make the gospel accessible to all people, including those with a hearing impairment.

Certain conditions may hamper efforts to embrace all men, women, and children into inclusive worship. People with special needs may not wish to self-identify as having a special need, or their family members may share the same reluctance to openly identify a special need. This resistance may be the result of personal issues, preference, and/or the cultural stigma related to disabilities. In addition, parishoners may not feel adequately prepared to participate in inclusion ministries, or may not be comfortable with children and adults with unique needs. Concern over the adequacy of church resources to meet identified needs may also be an issue. However, if the church can work around and eventually overcome these potential obstacles, it can create powerful ministries that address the needs of the one billion people in the world with a disability.

## *The Mission*

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel in the context of the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14:6-12.

Special Needs Ministries, which coordinates its outreach under the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department, exists to teach and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to people with special needs. As the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department communicates the good news of Jesus Christ to men, women, and youth throughout the world, the Special Needs Ministries focuses on those with disabilities. Training and promotion materials are provided through *AdventSource* and the Adventist Book Center to support the mission of including people with special needs in all areas of church life.

A major goal of the ministry is to encourage church leaders worldwide to intentionally meet the needs of individuals with special needs and include them in all aspects of church life. Leaders are advised to develop programs for witnessing to people with special needs and to make facilities—and the gospel—accessible to all.

The mission of Special Needs Ministries is to encourage the inclusion of all members in the church. Unfortunately, this goal has not been fully met for many individuals with disabilities. To educate the church about the ways that people with special needs can contribute to the mission of the church, a worldwide Special Needs Ministries Awareness Sabbath can be a useful event. This program can take place at camp meetings, leadership training events, or any gathering in which these four goals can be emphasized: accessibility, education, encouragement, and accommodation.

In planning events and activities for the Special Needs Awareness Sabbath, set a goal for the day. One day is not enough to cover all the issues related to special needs, but positive contributions of individuals with special needs can be highlighted for the church or community.

As much as possible, be sure to invite individuals with special needs to plan and participate in the Special Needs Ministries Awareness Sabbath activities. If individuals with disabilities are to become fully included in the church, the congregation must see those with disabilities involved in all areas of church life. Special Needs Ministries Awareness Sabbath gives the opportunity for people with disabilities to use their gifts for God and at the same time increase the congregation's awareness of individuals with special needs, their talents, and their needs.

Romans 12:3 states, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." As Ellen G. White explained, "The only way to grow in grace is to be disinterestedly doing the very work which Christ has enjoined upon us—to engage, to the extent of our ability, in helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them."<sup>1</sup> This statement should guide both those serving in Special Needs Ministries and those being served. The Special Needs Ministries team encourages adults and children with disabilities to participate fully in the church and to grow in Christ; and, in turn, people with disabilities are able to help and be a blessing to others.

The mission of Special Needs Ministries is to bring all members into the work of Christ. To promote full inclusion of members with disabilities, it is important to focus on each person's abilities, talents, and relationship with God. What can the church family do to encourage and support a member with a disability?

For an adult or child with a disability to be truly included in the church family, she or he needs access to the gospel message through the Bible, sermons, the worship service, Sabbath School programs and materials, Bible study guides, music, Pathfinders, education, and fellowship. Community-based activities such as Vacation Bible School, evangelistic meetings, and vegetarian cooking schools are a few other ways to provide meaningful support to those with special needs. Individuals with disabilities may not be aware of alternative resources that are available; therefore, a goal of Special Needs Ministries is to help people with disabilities access those resources and the support they require to feel fully included in the church.

## *The Ministry*

Special Needs Ministries promotes the importance of specialized ministries to foster the spiritual wellbeing of persons with special needs.

The ministry:

- educates leaders, directing them to appropriate resources for ministering to persons who have a special need;
- fosters the inclusion of qualified persons with special needs in church committees, forums, volunteer service opportunities, and other ministries.
- ensures the development of resources for reaching and accommodating individuals with special needs; and
- encourages the training and employment of individuals with special needs throughout the church.

Therefore, Special Needs Ministries blends the services of those with a disability with those who do not have a disability. They unite in a bond of ministry, each returning to God the talents and gifts He has bestowed.

As a community of believers who share the gospel with all, Christ is our example. Of Jesus' 35 recorded miracles, 27 touched people with special needs. He healed the boy who was "unable to speak" (Mark 9:17, NRSV), a man who was paralyzed (Luke 5:18-26), and a deaf man (Mark 7:32-35). Jesus gives clear evidence that the worldwide church is to be involved in Special Needs Ministries.

In *Steps to Christ*, Ellen White wrote, "This was [Jesus'] work. He went about doing good and healing all. . . . There were whole villages where there was not a moan of sickness in any house, for He had passed through them and healed all their sick. His work gave evidence of His divine anointing."<sup>2</sup>

One particularly powerful statement comes from White's *Testimonies for the Church*: "I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. *This is God's test of our character.* If we have the true religion of the Bible we shall feel that a debt of love, kindness, and interest is due to Christ in behalf of His brethren; and we can do no less than to show our gratitude for His immeasurable love to us while we were sinners unworthy of His grace, by having a deep interest and unselfish love for those who are our brethren and who are less fortunate than ourselves."<sup>3</sup>

Describing His earthly mission, Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord . . . has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

Often Jesus would ask the person He had healed not to tell anyone. Confidentiality is extremely important in this ministry; no information about a person with a special need should be shared with anyone else without written permission.

It is important that each congregation develop an awareness of the range of disability needs their ministry must address. As successful strategies for inclusion are identified, it may be helpful to share those strategies as members move into other roles or divisions in the church. However, it is important that any information about individuals and their needs be considered highly confidential, and that personal information should not be shared without specific permission from the individuals and/or their families.

## *Deafness and Hearing Impairment*

Deaf people are one of the largest unreached groups in the world. Estimates of the number of global Deaf range widely. Often, both hard of hearing and the culturally Deaf are grouped together; estimates of this combined population range between 50 and 300 million. Of this number it is estimated that only 2 to 4 percent are Christian.

Although obviously related, the needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing people are in some ways very different. Those who identify themselves as “deaf” typically have been diagnosed with a condition that prevents them from receiving sound in all or most of its forms, and as a result, cannot hear well enough to understand speech. Further, a deaf person often considers himself or herself as part of the Deaf community. This community often includes people who are fluent in sign language and share unique common experiences, traditions, and customs related to being deaf. This cultural group typically does not believe that being deaf is a disability to be overcome, but view it as an attribute or quality.

When working with the Deaf, it is important to recognize the importance of their Deaf culture. It is, in essence, part of their uniqueness as an individual, not something that needs to be “fixed.” As with other special needs groups, the Deaf need to be seen for who they are and not what they cannot do. Deaf individuals may also develop the ability to lip-read to enhance their ability to communicate, but often consider sign language their primary language.

The terms “hard of hearing” or “hearing impaired” typically refer to people who have a significant loss of hearing but retain some residual hearing. Hearing loss can be slight, mild, moderate, severe, or profound, and it can affect one or both ears. Individuals identifying with this group may or may not use sign language to communicate. They may use other methods of assistive technology, augmentative communication devices, or a combination of writing, talking, and sign language to communicate. Often, people identifying themselves as hard of hearing identify with their mainstream culture and perceive their hearing challenges as something to overcome. Individuals with hearing loss may use personal devices such as hearing aids or cochlear implants, and they may also benefit when an FM system or soundfield is used. In this case, a teacher or pastor may wear a microphone that enables the individual with a hearing loss to have the sound amplified specifically for him or her through a hearing device. Those who experience loss of hearing due to aging are not considered culturally Deaf. The World Health Organization estimates that one-third of those over the age of 65 have a hearing loss, and almost half of adults over the age of 75 have a hearing loss.

Hearing loss and deafness can either be acquired (the loss occurred after birth and was due to illness or injury) or congenital (the loss was present at birth). A person who is deaf or has a hearing loss is often of typical or above average intellect. In some cases, however, older

children or adults are diagnosed with a hearing impairment after a traumatic event, such as an acute illness affecting the neurological system and brain, a severe stroke, or a significant traumatic brain injury.

It is typically not possible to tell from looking at a person the extent of his or her intellectual impairment, and attempting to make such an assessment based upon physical characteristics or degree of hearing must be avoided. Although a person who is deaf or hard of hearing may have challenges at times communicating with hearing populations, those issues must not lead to an assumption that the individual has intellectual issues as well.

Like some other types of disabilities, this special need can impact all ages and may occur at any point in life. In some cases the individual does not comprehend his or her limitations, such as an aging person who slowly loses ability to hear. In other cases, especially when the hearing loss occurs concurrently with another impairments, the individual may be aware of the fact that he or she functions differently from how they did in the past. This can be the case following a stroke or other neurological diagnoses later in life. In this case individuals may refer to themselves as “late-deafened” or “adult-deafened.” When the onset is later in life, the individual may experience frustration, anger, or embarrassment.

In a church setting, the determination of a special need is typically based upon self-reporting or the report of family members or caregivers. Most importantly, church members must avoid pre-determining the scope or range of disability in a person with physically obvious needs. It is often helpful to approach such individuals by asking, “How may we help?” instead of inquiring about details regarding the special need and its cause. In some cases an individual may not be ready to acknowledge a loss of hearing. In other cases, the individual may be comfortable with his or her deafness, but prefer not to be treated as one who has a disability or special

need. In either case, asking how to help is productive, considerate, and acceptable—and it avoids labeling the individual. In addition, offering assistance can foster a positive relationship based on Christian care and concern.

In his book *Working Together: Deaf and Hearing*, Thompson U. Kay shares eight insights that can help a hearing person communicate more effectively with a Deaf person:

1. Learn the manual alphabet, signs, and finger spelling.
2. Learn the Deaf person's name or sign.
3. Tap the Deaf person's shoulder lightly to get his or her attention.
4. Introduce yourself and use the sign for your name.
5. Face the Deaf person with whom you are speaking.
6. Maintain eye contact.
7. Include the Deaf in conversations.
8. If the Deaf person uses an interpreter, address the Deaf person, not the interpreter.

## *Four Goals of Special Needs Ministries and Deaf/Hearing Impaired Populations*

The first booklet in this series, *Special Needs Ministries: Creating Inclusive Opportunities in Ministry*, produced by the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department, identified four goals of Special Needs Ministries. Now, in this booklet, specific strategies related to these goals will be explored, with worshipers who are deaf or hearing impaired as the focus.

**1. Accessibility.** Special Needs Ministries assists church leaders in learning how to make all structures, buildings, and programs available to all. The point of

this goal is to provide an environment in which everyone feels welcome and has access to all areas of church life, regardless of her or his physical or mental condition.

First, architectural and physical barriers must always be considered, although a person's hearing challenges rarely pose any physical challenges. For worshipers with hearing issues who also use a wheelchair, structural elements to consider include accessible parking lots, ramps for wheelchair access, and halls and bathrooms that allow for wheelchairs. If the individual has severe intellectual impairments paired with significant sensory impairments, a quiet room would offer valuable support. A person with hearing issues may not be able to communicate clearly to ask the location of bathrooms or specific Sabbath School room locations, so clear signage directing them to various rooms/locations in the church will be helpful. Signs that clearly identify the location of all areas, including where activities such as fellowship lunch are conducted, may provide needed information for all worshipers. One additional physical issue to consider is safety, related specifically to the type of fire alarm installed in the church. It is critical that deaf worshipers can sense or see a fire alarm to ensure their safety during services.

It is important to realize that deaf worshipers may or may not wish to join the main congregation for the church service. Many elements of the church service are not meaningful for individuals who cannot hear. If deaf worshipers do wish to join the main congregation, a space should be planned for their interpreter at the front of the sanctuary. In other cases the Deaf population may feel best served worshipping in a separate room, where their church service is tailored to their needs and interests. In such situations, an appropriate room should be provided that is conducive to an alternative church service. Their desire to worship separately must not be interpreted as unfriendliness or wanting to segregate themselves, but is related to their

desire for a spiritually meaningful worship experience. Further, having a separate, meaningful service should not indicate that they do not wish to be part of the larger church group. Participating in other church activities such as fellowship lunches, socials, Vacation Bible School, and Pathfinders should be encouraged and supported.

Attitudinal barriers that may prevent a person with a special need from feeling welcome must also be eliminated. Education, training, and modeling appropriate attitudes toward those who are disabled will help increase sensitivity throughout the congregation. Every member of the church can welcome each worshiper with genuine kindness and a spirit of inclusive worship. A warm handshake or hug, if culturally appropriate, transcends the ability to hear a verbal welcome and can be welcoming to every worshiper. The mere presence of an interpreter does not equate to having a flourishing deaf ministry. The goal is to welcome deaf worshipers to the church in every way, socially and spiritually, so that they know they are an integral part of the community.

Finally, the gospel must also be accessible. To enhance the understanding of the gospel in adult Sabbath School divisions, the church's Special Needs Ministries team can:

- Break down the lesson into smaller, manageable amounts of information, with a review of key concepts during the lesson study period.
- Provide a multi-sensory experience, incorporating written, visual, and auditory methods. Utilize a handout or screen presentation with key words and pictures to enhance the understanding of spiritual concepts. When videos are shown during Sabbath School, use closed-captioning to aid deaf/hearing impaired worshipers.
- Utilize an FM system (even during lesson study) to ensure that hard-of-hearing members can hear and be part of the discussion of the lesson. Each person

sharing an idea or thought should use the microphone so that hearing impaired worshipers can hear their comments through the FM system and thus be a part of the conversation. The congregation can be taught to wait until they have a microphone to share their ideas, and leaders can repeat comments made by people without a microphone to ensure hearing impaired members benefit from the discussion.

- Order or print copies of the Easy Reading version of the quarterly (<http://www.absg.adventist.org/Archives.htm>) in addition to the standard Sabbath School Bible study guide. This version teaches the same concepts found in the lesson but with more easily read and understood text. The Easy Reading lessons may also guide the Sabbath School teacher to use different vocabulary in written handouts or screen presentations so as to better benefit those who have a hearing impairment. This Bible study guide—in English—is more easily adapted to the use of sign language.
- Provide visual cues and prompts during the Sabbath School program to assist all worshipers as they follow along. Worshipers with limited hearing ability may miss some of the directions or spoken words. Projecting on the screen a visual of a person praying, for example, can show the worshiper to prepare for prayer.
- Encourage active participation by watching for ways to build on individual strengths instead of focusing on a person's challenges. Think of ways to include hearing impaired worshipers in the lesson study discussion. Perhaps they can sign or write their comments or questions for a designated person to read aloud.

- Introduce the Deaf and the hearing to the General Conference Deaf and Hearing website ([www.adventistdeaf.org](http://www.adventistdeaf.org)), where networking and multiple resources can be found.

To enhance the understanding of the gospel in children and youth Sabbath School divisions, the church's Special Needs Ministries team can:

- Break concepts and lessons down into smaller chunks of information, with a review of key concepts during the lesson study period. For someone with a hearing impairment, directions given one at a time are easier to understand and process than a long multi-step series of directions.
- Use peer tutors to assist during Sabbath School. A peer tutor or buddy program can positively impact the sensitivity of all participants. When the entire group is split into buddy groups for parts of the Sabbath School period, the child or youth with a special need is not singled out as needing assistance.
- Find a quieter location for small group activities. Quiet places assist people who are hearing impaired to hear as well as possible, which is a challenge in noisy environments.
- Inquire about what devices or tools may be helpful in Sabbath School. If an FM system is not already available to use, the Special Needs Ministries team may want to brainstorm how to provide such a resource. Use signs or an agenda to help a person with limited hearing to understand fully what is coming next during Sabbath School.
- Get the attention of the Deaf person before giving directions; otherwise, he or she can feel overwhelmed, confused, and embarrassed.

- Use a combination of visual, auditory, and multi-sensory approaches to teach concepts. The Deaf approach abstract ideas in entirely different ways. Even when lessons are interpreted, they are not automatically understood because the thought process is different. For participants who are hard of hearing, the lesson can be taped so that they can listen to it repeatedly at the desired volume to build understanding. Consider providing the taped lesson prior to presenting that lesson in Sabbath School. In addition, for learners who cannot process auditory information, make the lesson and program as visual and experiential as possible. A visual schedule (showing a picture for each part of the program, such as song service, prayer, offering, etc.) posted at the front of the class can be extremely effective. The use of felt-board and sand-table manipulative figures can also make stories visual and hands-on, aiding comprehension.
- Check for understanding throughout the lesson. Most children, including those who are deaf or hearing impaired, will benefit from acknowledging key concepts themselves, instead of passively sitting in Sabbath School during the lesson study.
- Watch for ways to build on the children's strengths instead of focusing on their challenges. Most will benefit from being asked to contribute and having an assigned task in Sabbath School. A child who is deaf or hearing impaired may be quite capable in collecting offering or leading out in doing the motions to support the lesson story for the week. With ample support and encouragement, children who are hard of hearing may be able to lead out in prayer or reading the memory verse. Encouraging all children

to participate will create fully inclusive Sabbath School opportunities.

To ensure inclusive worship during the church service, the Special Needs Ministries team of the church can:

- Use an FM amplification system to assist those who are hard of hearing to better hear the service. Members of the Special Needs Ministries team should consider how to communicate the availability of these devices to minimize any stigma or embarrassment associated with their use.
- Produce church bulletins that include a written guide to the service. Bulletins created with visual supports would benefit all worshipers with any language-related needs.
- Use a combination of visual, auditory, and multi-sensory approaches to teach concepts. The Deaf approach abstract ideas in entirely different ways. Even when sermons are interpreted, they are not automatically understood because the thought process is different. Whenever possible, provide visual cues via projected images or large-print images to denote what is happening in the service (such as an image of a person kneeling in prayer projected at the time of morning prayer or an image of a congregation holding hymnals just prior to a hymn).
- Use closed-captioning to ensure all in attendance understand video messages.
- See if your church provides written sermon notes or guides; if so, be sure to provide a version that is appropriate for those requiring a more straightforward guide to the sermon. Likewise, if your church provides a sermon or service guide to children in the church, ensure that the materials benefit all children

worshipping, so that all are engaged in learning more about Jesus and the gospel.

- Brainstorm ways to include someone who is deaf or hearing impaired in some kind of service for the church or community. A hearing impairment does not prohibit someone from serving as a greeter, participating in activities from the podium, or becoming involved in outreach to other Deaf or hearing impaired individuals.

Consider special events in church services and how to include all worshipers. Ask the Special Needs Ministries team the following questions:

- How does your communion service flow? If your deaf worshipers prefer to worship in a separate room, have you made plans for how they will have Communion available during their service?
- How does your footwashing service flow? Can you create visuals or signs to ensure that all worshipers understand the meaning of the service and know how and where to participate?

If your church finds that some members benefit from specific strategies, carry those strategies over into all outreach ministries, such as prayer meetings, evangelistic meetings, cooking schools, Vacation Bible School, and Pathfinders. For example, if the worshiper requires an interpreter in Sabbath School, has your ministries team planned for an interpreter for special meetings or classes? In this way, you can reach all who wish to join your congregation in all aspects of church life.

**2. Education.** The goal is to train people without special needs and those with special needs to work collaboratively in building God's kingdom. Resources should be continually

developed for and made available to church members. These resources will provide guidance for the inclusion of individuals with special needs throughout the church structure.

In some cultures social media has become quite prominent, but for people with an intellectual impairment, accessing and using technology may be a challenge. Printed handouts may be necessary to help all participants feel welcome. Contact prior to church events can also assist in ensuring full participation.

Consider using multiple methods of communication to spread awareness of resources and events within the church community. For many people who are deaf, technology is extremely valuable. The use of texting, for example, may be more accessible than using a relay operator to communicate church information to a deaf member. Email is another great way to connect and communicate with hearing impaired members.

The General Conference website, [www.adventistdeaf.org](http://www.adventistdeaf.org), lists links to several resources for the Deaf that may provide helpful assistance. It also lists other resources about how the hearing and the Deaf can work together in ministry.

**3. Encouragement.** The focus of this goal is to promote participation in all aspects of church life. Providing a safe, loving environment within all levels of the church for all people is the privilege of every Christian.

When all worshipers are welcomed, nurtured, and given opportunities to engage meaningfully in all activities of church life, the result is inclusive worship and fellowship that encourages participation. As you welcome everyone, including those with special needs, into your congregation, and involve them *meaningfully* and *intentionally* in all aspects of church life, they will be encouraged. It is important that the church focus on encouraging each person to be an active member of the church community as a whole, and not

segregated from the larger church body into “special” classes and activities. As ministry leaders and members continue to find opportunities for meaningful participation, all members will be encouraged and will benefit from truly inclusive worship.

**4. Accommodation.** The goal is to help God’s family be inclusive in principle and practice. Special Needs Ministries promotes the inclusion of qualified persons with special needs in church committees, forums, volunteer service opportunities, and other ministries. These activities should be planned with accommodations in mind.

As the church makes and puts into action a plan to include every person in meaningful participation, the needs of every worshiper will be considered and accommodated. See Goal #1 above for additional ideas on how to help deaf people and people with hearing impairments fully participate in the activities of your church.

The following accommodations will also benefit worshipers who are deaf or hearing impaired:

- Smile and maintain eye contact when interacting; if the person can read lips, facing them is helpful. If the person has a sign language interpreter, look at and speak to the deaf person, not the interpreter.
- Speak clearly and not too fast, but do not shout or speak loudly in an exaggerated fashion.
- If a word you use is not understood, try another word or gesture to communicate.
- If oral speech, sign language, lip-reading, gestures, and finger-spelling, are not effective, communicate through writing.
- During group activities, make sure the chairs are arranged so that the person with a hearing impairment can see the other group members’ faces.

- The Special Needs Ministries team may want to teach greeters, deacons, and deaconesses some basic sign language, such as “help,” “bathroom,” “water fountain,” etc.

Attaining these four goals gives the church a wonderful opportunity for evangelism, discipleship, and inclusion. Special Needs Ministries should educate the church about hearing impairments, develop resources for people with these impairments, enhance their worship experiences, and emphasize their intentional and meaningful inclusion into the larger church body. Finally, although employment is not included as one of the primary goals of this ministry, leaders in this ministry can develop and maintain a database that includes job skills of members with special needs. Assisting with the tangible need of employment is an invaluable service.

### *People With Multiple Special Needs*

In some cases, individuals who are deaf or have a hearing impairment have additional areas of need. They may have been diagnosed with a condition that impacts multiple areas of development, such as a congenital issue that impacts both the development of hearing and intellectual development. Or, the cause of the hearing impairment may create other issues. For example, an elderly member who has had a significant stroke may have not only an age-related hearing impairment, but mobility issues as well.

Because of the potential for an overlap of issues, it is important for Special Needs Ministries groups to consider and address multiple areas of need. Additional guidance on the following topics is provided in other leaflets in this series:

- intellectual disability
- hidden disability
- mobility and physical disability

- emotional and psychiatric disability
- communication disorder
- blindness/visual impairment

As in many areas of church life, sensitivity to the culture(s) of others is critical. Offensive language, even when used unintentionally, can significantly hinder the goals of this ministry. When training individuals to work in Special Needs Ministries, be sure to avoid words that are not appropriate. Although some of these words may be found in the Bible and other spiritual writings, their usage has evolved and they now carry negative connotations. The following table shows examples of words to use and words to avoid.

<b>Use this . . .</b>	<b>Instead of this . . .</b>
Hearing impaired or deaf	Deaf mute, deaf and dumb, deafie
Person with a disability or person with a special need	Handicapped
Has a disability or special need	Afflicted, unfortunate, less fortunate
Person who cannot speak	Stupid, imbecile, mute
Person who had a stroke	Stroke victim

## *How to Prepare for Training Others*

In the introductory leaflet of this series, *Special Needs Ministries: Creating Inclusive Opportunities in Ministry*<sup>4</sup>, you will find information on training church members to provide a ministry inclusive of all people, including those who are deaf or hearing impaired. The essential training elements of prayer, action, study, and planning are described. Scriptural references are also provided to guide ministry leadership groups in sound, Bible-based planning and interventions.

## **Conclusion**

Living with deafness or a hearing impairment can be challenging. It can be isolating, as one can be surrounded by people and yet not feel truly involved in what is happening. Multiple factors, including individual temperament, the degree of cultural acceptance of the impairment, and the degree of family and church support impact an individual's interest in and involvement with the church. The opportunity to share the gospel with a largely unreached population has presented itself; certainly, then, the church must respond. We have been called to conquer barriers, to make inclusive communities, and to welcome all people into the family of God.

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### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> *Steps to Christ*, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 511, emphasis supplied.

<sup>4</sup> [www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/specialneedsleaflet](http://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/specialneedsleaflet)