

**Is YOUR church doing enough to accommodate persons who are deaf or hearing impaired?**



**Did you know that according to the World Health Organization approximately 15% of the world's adult population is experiencing some degree of hearing loss?**



## **How can the Church accommodate its deaf or hearing impaired members?**

### **Background information**

Globally hearing loss is the most common congenital anomaly found in newborns and in South Africa deafness is considered to affect the most people within the group of persons with disabilities.

The World Health Organization estimates that 15% of any population experience hearing loss, which means there are at least 7, 5 million South Africans who experience hearing loss. Of these, more than 5 million use a spoken language to communicate.

This means that there are more than **5 million individuals that are not effectively reached by the Church**, as leaders are not informed about minor changes that can make a big difference to the experience of congregants that experience hearing loss. Hearing loss is often referred to as a silent or invisible disability, with the impact only being realized by society when someone is engaged in communicating with the person with hearing loss.

## Who are we talking about?

- **Hearing Impaired** refers to persons with **varying degrees of hearing loss** not using South African Sign Language (SASL) as a **primary** medium of communication, who use **various means of communication and assistive hearing technologies**. These include speech, speech/lip reading, hearing aid systems, cochlear implants, Bone Anchored Hearing Aid (BAHA) and applicable assistive listening devices etc. or a combination thereof. This group primarily aligns with terms like “impairment”, “disability” and the hearing world.

- **deaf** with a lower case “d” refers to persons with **total hearing loss** not using SASL as a **primary** medium of communication, who use **various means of communication and assistive hearing technologies**. These include speech, speech/lip reading, cochlear implants, BAHA and applicable assistive listening devices etc. or a combination thereof. This group primarily aligns with “impairment”, “disability” and the hearing world.

- **Deaf with a capital letter “D”** refers to a Deaf cultural group who uses SASL to communicate and who do not align with terms like “impairment” or “disability”.

- **Hard of Hearing persons are those with** different degrees of hearing loss, who are part of the Deaf culture. These individuals do not align with the terms “impairment” or “disability”.

**For the purposes of this document, the focus is on persons who are deaf or hearing impaired.**

Hearing loss varies greatly from individual and can be slight, mild, moderate, moderate to severe, severe, or profound to deaf.

A person who has slight to mild hearing loss may not be greatly affected in the activities of daily life, but in Church he or she may need to be accommodated to fully participate.

**Please note that wearing hearing instruments like hearing aid(s), cochlear implant(s) or BAHAs does not restore hearing** and therefore the use of these do not automatically position the individual to follow all proceedings in any environment.

**The hearing instruments support the wearer in one on one communication situations where there is minimal background noise, sufficient light and positive attitudes from both parties.**

No matter how high tech the hearing instruments are, there are many factors that can hinder communication.

When considering individuals who have moderate to severe, severe to profound hearing loss and those who are completely deaf, assistive technology can bridge the communication gap, but the assistance of professionals like Note Takers and Lip Speakers may be required.

Some communication challenges experienced by persons who are deaf or hearing impaired, include:

- Difficulty in following long, complex sentences
- Lip reading, as mentioned below, may be difficult in poor lighting etc., and not all individuals have acquired this skill. If someone can lip read, there should be no more than 6 metres between the speaker and the person reading his speech.
- A lack of facial expressions being used by the speaker hampers understanding of what is being said
- The person speaking turning away while speaking or obscures his mouth
- If the topic of discussion changes without warning
- Insufficient light on the speaker's face and
- Environmental or background noise e.g. other people talking or telephones ringing

Persons who are deaf/hearing impaired are protected by the stipulations as described in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which is enforced by the South African Government, as well as legislation like the Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities and the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

According to the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities persons who are hearing impaired and/or acquire deafness later in life, might however never utilise SASL as their language of choice and may require access to lip readers, note-takers, loop systems, captioning and sub-texting for access to information and communication.

**Stipulations include equal access to communication, information, services and products.** Like other authorities and bodies, the church is obligated to take all measures to ensure that persons who are deaf or hearing impaired can enjoy proceedings like its other members.

**Here are some examples of how the Church can accommodate its members who are deaf/hearing impaired:**

Examples of assistive technology:

- An FM system: the Speaker uses a transmitter, while members of the congregation with hearing loss use the receiver to follow proceedings
- Induction loop systems (the most effective technology for use in the church)
- Live captioning

## 1. FM Systems

FM Systems are wireless devices that enhance the use of hearing aid(s), cochlear implants, BAHAs. They can also assist people who are hearing impaired but do not wear hearing aids. FM systems usually comprise of a transmitter and receiver and differ from manufacturer to manufacturer. The transmitter captures sound via a microphone or direct connection to a sound source and transmits to the receiver. This means that sound is picked up as close as possible to the person who is speaking and then transmitted to the person with hearing loss, providing greater clarity of speech/sound and a reduction in background noise.



## 2. Loops systems

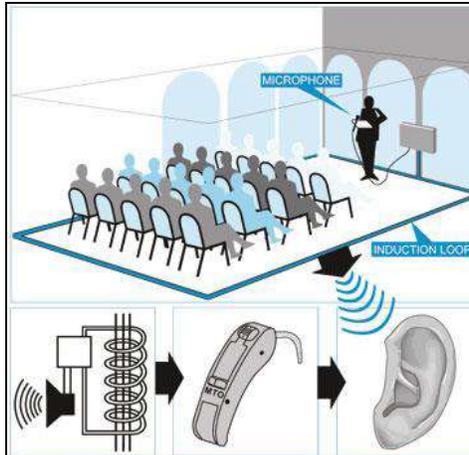
A loop system works similar to the FM system, but provides access to more users at a given time.

How does it work?

An induction loop consists of a cable that circles the listening area as well as an amplifier. The cable is attached to the loop amplifier, which gets its signal from the microphone used by the person speaking and the sound source that is connected to.

Persons with hearing loss can sit in the looped area and switch their hearing devices to "T". Sound is then induced into their hearing devices, cutting out disturbing background noise. Persons who do not wear hearing aids can also enjoy the benefit of the loop by using Loop Listeners with headphones or earphones.

More than one person can benefit from a loop installed as long as they each have a hearing instrument set to "T", or a loop listener. You are not wired to any other equipment and you are therefore free to listen from anywhere within the loop and to move around freely.



Induction Loop Systems are **the most cost efficient assistive listening technology**. They operate **on a universal frequency which** eliminates problems inherent in operating on multiple frequencies associated with FM systems.

Induction Loop Systems **are not affected by light or line site issues**. This permits use in areas that are brightly lit or in direct sunlight. Induction Loop Systems can be **configured in phased arrays and low spill over designs eliminating privacy concerns**.

It is for these reasons that more attention is now being given to induction loop systems in churches, public halls and facilities, schools, theatres, cinemas, sheltered and residential accommodations, workplace settings, service counter windows and transient environments.

The Loop Amplifier (below) to be used will depend on the size of the venue or the area to be looped. (Please see the attached brochure on Induction Loops.)

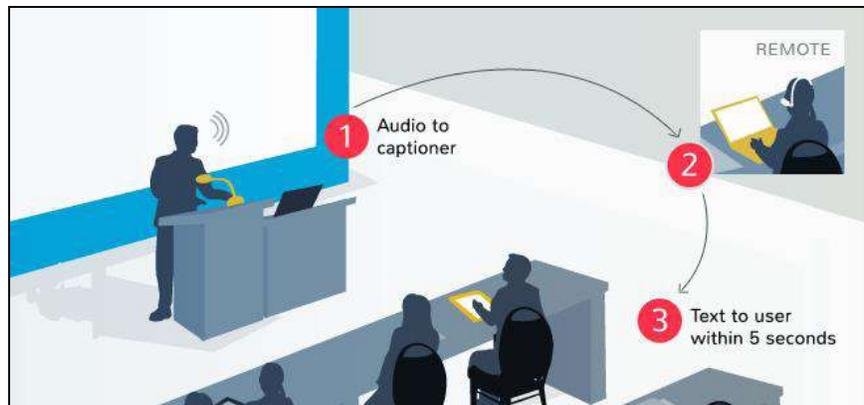


Portable induction loops are also available, which means it can be used in more than one venue. This compact portable loop system (right) is very easy to use and can operate in rooms of various sizes up to and including 150 m<sup>2</sup>.



### 3. Live captioning

Live captioning turns every web-enabled device into a piece of magic. Spoken words appear on the screen seconds after they are articulated. To achieve the highest quality standard, Language Practitioners who listen to the live audio stream and re-speak what they hear, into a system which is converted into text and then streamed to your live device.



#### Other measures you can take to include persons who are deaf or hearing impaired during services:

- Ensure ample lighting
- Make sure that everyone addressing the congregation makes use of the microphone and that they do not only start using it when their contribution is well on their way (even if they think their voice carries or that they can speak loud enough)
- Make use of a high quality sound system
- Make notes on the sermon available to these individuals before the service or shortly afterward
- Make use of a projector and laser light when reading scripture
- Display announcements on a projector
- Make proper use of carpeting to avoid the disturbance of footsteps on wooden floors

**For more guidance, get in touch with us:**

**The National Council of and for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa (NCPD)**

• Susan Bester at [susanbesterdutoit@gmail.com](mailto:susanbesterdutoit@gmail.com)

[www.ncppdsa.org.za](http://www.ncppdsa.org.za)



**The Association for Hearing Loss Accessibility and Development (AHLAD):**

Michele Tonks at [admin@ahlad.org](mailto:admin@ahlad.org)

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



**Please note that the NCPD and AHLAD are non-profit organisations who lobby for equal rights and do not supply or sell ANY assistive devices, but can direct you to suppliers.**