

Bishop John B. Chane's Sermon at the Episcopal Conference of the Deaf Convention that was held at Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Marriottsville, MD August 18-22, 2004

I would like to welcome you on behalf of the 93 congregations and 45,000 people who reside in the Diocese of Washington in the District of Columbia and the Maryland Counties of Prince Georges, Montgomery, Charles and Saint Mary's. Karen, my wife who is with me tonight, joins me in thanking the Reverend Barbara Allen, Rector of Saint Barnabas Church of The Deaf and the members of that active and growing congregation in the Diocese of Washington for the invitation to be with you tonight at this very important gathering of Deaf Ministries for The Episcopal Church nationally.

If the Episcopal Church is serious about living into the objectives of its missionary outreach strategy named "20/20"...doubling the size in membership of the Church by the year 2020, then it will absolutely have to take seriously the role of Episcopal Deaf Ministries and its outreach to the Deaf Communities in the cities and towns of this country.

Tonight we gather in the name of Jesus Christ to give thanks for our life in him, for our many blessings and to praise God and celebrate the Eucharist remembering the Reverend Thomas Gallaudet who began services in sign language in New York City in 1852 and the Reverend Henry Winter Syle, first deaf person to be ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church in 1876. We also gather to celebrate the action taken by the General Convention in 1988 to set aside a Feast Day in our Episcopal Calendar to honor and remember these two great pioneers of Deaf Ministry in the Episcopal Church. It was over 150 years ago that the Episcopal Church began a ministry to deaf people and it is believed that the Episcopal Church was the first of any denomination to establish a church for deaf people, back in 1852.

You all know the challenges that are before you as deaf ministry in the Episcopal Church continues to move forward in 2004. These challenges must be translated well to the hearing-majority of the Episcopal Church if we are to experience the kind of growth and missional outreach we have been proclaiming through the 20/20 formula for church growth.

If, as the Reverend Roy Brown has pointed out that, "interpreted services in "hearing Churches" rarely show growth in numbers of deaf people, nor do they usually continue for very long, then how can hearing churches "think outside the box" to assist in the missional growth and development of deaf congregations in the Episcopal Church?

What about the involvement of leadership opportunities for the deaf...on church vestries, ushers, lay readers, lectors, licensed lay preachers ... and integrated fellowship activities and opportunities that integrate the deaf with the hearing?

And what about the role of the interpreter? Too often they become the centered focus of the liturgy and not the priest.

It is critical that the Episcopal Church begin to actively recruit qualified and motivated persons who are deaf, both male and female, to train for the ordained priesthood. And yet the larger Church cannot do this without the support of the local congregation. It is the local congregation that identifies, raises up and then calls out those persons they believed have been called to serve the Church as priests. It is hard for bishops to recruit and for Commissions on Ministry to act on candidates if local congregations do not raise such individuals up.

At the same time dioceses and the National Church must be willing to raise up resources and funds to develop and plant new congregations. And this takes money; money that is hard to acquire from the "hearing" community who have quite possibly a limited knowledge of the number of deaf people in a town, city or diocese ...or the number of hard of hearing people who sign; the hearing parents who have deaf children; hearing people who have deaf parents and so on. And during these times of challenging economic times and flat line growth for many congregations and dioceses in the United States, money that is needed for such endeavors is very hard to come by. And I speak with some authority on this issue. And what about working with deaf youth? The Episcopal Church at last summer's Convention in Minneapolis approved almost 1 million dollars for youth ministry. How much of that will be directed to the special needs of the deaf community in developing specialized youth ministries for the deaf?

Living in the District of Columbia, I have had the opportunity on several occasions to visit the campus of Gallaudet University and it would be inappropriate for me not to mention the great work of this great university that continues to serve the academic needs of the deaf from across the United States and throughout the world.

The statue of the Reverend Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Alice Cogswell was sculpted by Daniel Chester French who also sculpted the statue of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial, the Minute Man in Concord, Massachusetts and the bust of President James Garfield which resides in Chapel Hall.

How many of you knew that it was President Abraham Lincoln who signed the Charter authorizing the conferring of college degrees first by Columbia Institution, which eventually became Gallaudet University. Gallaudet was the second university after Harvard to build an indoor swimming pool.

The front 17 acres of the campus is registered in the National Register of Historic Places and was designed by the famous landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead who designed Central Park in New York City and also the 53 acres that comprise the Close of Washington National Cathedral.

I'm not sure how many of you are football fans...but, having played in High School and College, I am. And I just learned the other day that the football

Huddle was invited by the Gallaudet football team because opposing teams were able to read their sign messages and were able to intercept plays. Hence this great school in the heart of the District of Columbia developed the secretive huddle.

I don't want to take up any more of your time, but I would like to place a challenge before each of you that comes directly from the lessons selected for this Feast Day set aside to commemorate the life, work and ministry of the Reverends Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Winter Syle. Remember these words and take them with you wherever you serve and from whatever diocese you are from.

Psalm 19:1-6 "The heavens declare the Glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork.

One day tells its tale to another, and one night imparts knowledge to another.

Although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard, their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world. In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun; it comes forth like the bridegroom out of his chamber; it rejoices like a champion to run its course.

It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens and runs about to the end of it again; nothing is hidden from the burning heat."

And as all of us in the Church attempt to tackle the Herculean task of growing this Episcopal Church of ours, may the reading taken from the Book of Acts remind each of us about our own responsibilities to grow all ministries of the Church but most especially Deaf Ministry; Acts 6:1-4, 7 *"Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said; it is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we for our part will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.*

The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."

Remember...we are not going to grow unless we are intentional about it, and truly commit our life and work to the Word of God and are willing to work hard at spreading it and at the same time taking care of those who have no one else to care for them by creating our communities and churches to be truly the very Bodies of the living breathing, Jesus Christ. AMEN

