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FAITH4ALL

Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:

In this issue, we will explore the best ways to include people who are hard of hearing or mute in your community.

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Including People Who Are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Mute in Your Community

The inclusion of people who are deaf or mute in religious institutions is frequently overlooked. This neglect diminishes the potential for spiritual development of both those possessing such challenges as well as the “temporarily-able-bodied” participants. The U.S.’s Center for Disease Control and Prevention states that “[i]n 2019, 13.0% of adults aged 18 and over had some difficulty hearing even when using a hearing aid and 1.6% either had a lot of difficulty hearing or could not hear at all, even when using a hearing aid.”¹

Aphasia is an acquired communication disorder that impairs a person’s ability to process language, but does not affect intelligence. Additionally, the diagnosis of aphasia does **NOT** imply a person has a mental illness. [The National Aphasia Association](#) has determined that “the most common cause of aphasia is stroke (about 25 - 40% of stroke survivors acquire aphasia)”² and sustaining a traumatic brain injury frequently also causes aphasia.

While dealing with the barriers that any individual faces are varied and personalized, the easiest and most general way to approach communication challenges is generally quite simple:

- *always have available tools on hand, and*
- *always have the willingness to communicate in any way necessary (e.g. auditorily, using written text, visuals cues, or body language).*

Tools for the hard-to-hear individuals include:

- Always have a good system for audio amplification in a sanctuary or common area;
- Have on hand a personal amplification system which might be used by those congregants who are hard of hearing. Such systems with headphones are commonly available and affordable for most institutions to have in their toolkit for congregational use;

- Install a [Loop System](#) in commonly used areas which can be used by most all modern hearing aids;
 - Establish a grouping of seats that have especially good sightlines to the areas commonly used by ministers or rabbis where congregation members, particularly those who read lips, can reliably find space to sit;
 - Most religious services include a reflection or sermon which have been previously prepared - so, in addition to broadcasting these reflections aurally - these reflections should be made available *at the time of delivery* in printed form for those who learn best from reading printed material.
6. Give them time to speak. Resist the urge to finish sentences or offer words;
 7. Communicate with drawings, gestures, writing and facial expressions in addition to speech;
 8. Confirm that you are communicating successfully with “yes” and “no” questions;
 9. Praise all attempts to speak and downplay any errors. Avoid insisting that each word be produced perfectly.
 10. Engage in normal activities whenever possible. Do not shield people with aphasia from other people in your community or ignore them in a group conversation. Rather, try to involve them in community-wide decision-making as much as possible. Keep them informed of events but avoid burdening them with day-to-day details;
 11. Encourage independence and avoid being overprotective.

Now to attend to those congregants with aphasia, National Aphasia Association has produced a list of [Do's & Don'ts](#) regarding communication.

This thoughtful list states:

1. Make sure you have the person's attention before you start;
2. Minimize or eliminate background noise (TV, radio, other people);
3. Keep your own voice at a normal level, unless the person has indicated otherwise;
4. Keep communication simple yet mature; make succinct your own sentences and slow your rate of speech. *Emphasize key words.*
5. Be conscious not to “talk down” to the person with aphasia;

When communicating with an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing, or has difficulty speaking, I believe the most important thing is to remember to embody compassion and maintain a presence of patience. All people have rights to participate as fully as they are able to in the life of the community. Be eager to offer assistance so they can fully engage in the life of the faith community; these are our brothers and sisters in the body of our worshipping community! Treat them as valued members.

Today the First Congregational Church of Boulder was fortunate enough to have [Dr. Reiland Rabaka](#), of the [Center for African & African American Studies](#), deliver a most inspiring message titled

“Agape: A Biblical Blueprint for Building the Beloved Community”. This powerful interfaith message about building the beloved community is at the very heart of the [mission](#) of Faith4All!

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We hope you are enjoying our Spring weather and praying for more rain!



*Any questions or comments regarding this e-journal or this organization can be directed to kevin@Faith4All.org.

Endnotes:

¹MADANS JH, WEEKS JD, ELGADDAL N. HEARING DIFFICULTIES AMONG ADULTS: UNITED STATES, 2019. [NCHS DATA BRIEF, NO. 414](#). HYATTSVILLE, MD: NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS. 2021

²[HTTPS://APHASIA.ORG/WHAT-IS-APHASIA/](https://aphasia.org/what-is-aphasia/)