

Interpreting in Religious Settings

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., (RID) Standard Practice Paper (SPP) provides a framework of basic, respectable standards for RID members' professional work and conduct with consumers. This paper also provides specific information about the practice setting. This document is intended to raise awareness, educate, guide and encourage sound basic methods of professional practice. The SPP should be considered by members in arriving at an appropriate course of action with respect to their practice and professional conduct.

It is hoped that the standards will promote commitment to the pursuit of excellence in the practice of interpreting and be used for public distribution and advocacy.

About Interpreting in Religious Settings

Religious interpreting occurs in settings which are spiritual in nature. These settings can include worship services, religious education, workshops, conferences, retreats, confession, scripture study, youth activities, counseling, tours and pilgrimages, weddings, funerals and other special ceremonies. Religious interpreting poses unique challenges and requires specific skills and knowledge to address those needs. Special consideration should also be given to the interpreting environment and to interpreter compensation.

Specialized Skills

Professionals interpreting in a religious context should have fluency in a signed language (e.g. American Sign Language or Signed English) and a spoken language (e.g. English or Spanish). In addition, knowledge of a source language of an original text found in scripture such as Arabic, Hebrew, Latin or others would enhance the overall interpretation. It is ideal for the interpreter to have familiarity with the sacred text; however, the interpreter may need to work with an English translation.

Some interpreters enter the field by working in a religious venue. For some persons, interpreting in a religious setting is a spiritual calling. Interpreters are strongly encouraged to enhance their skills by working with a religious mentor who is a seasoned and/or certified interpreter before working independently. For additional information about mentoring, read RID's SPP titled, *Mentoring*.

Specialized Knowledge

Interpreters will want to be aware of the consumer's cultural expectations and preferences that are specific to the environment. Interpreters in religious settings should also have access to and familiarize themselves with:

- Specialized vocabulary both signed and spoken that relate to the specific setting
- Texts specific to the setting (e.g. Koran, Torah, Bible)
- Materials used (e.g. sermon notes, homilies, multimedia presentations)
- Belief system(s), doctrine(s), creed(s) and ceremonial prayer(s)

Interpreters should be aware of how their own beliefs may potentially conflict with the beliefs of a different faith. Interpreters will want to accept assignments in a religious setting where they can faithfully and impartially interpret the message. Whether an interpreter needs to be a practicing member of a certain faith or follower of its precepts is a decision made by those requesting interpreting services. These issues should always be discussed with the interpreter and consumers prior to delivery of interpreting services.

In addition, interpreters who are members of RID must adhere to the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct regarding confidentiality. The interpreter should keep all interpreted information confidential, such as confessions, counseling and private meetings.

Working Environment

The religious interpreting environment requires advance preparation and cooperation on several fronts. Prior communication with a specific on-site contact along with access to the person(s) in charge of the presentations and presenters themselves is critical. The members affiliated with the particular setting should also be made aware of the interpreting services to be rendered, and all parties should understand the role of the interpreter.

The contact person should ensure the interpreter is provided with the necessary materials needed for the interpreter to appropriately prepare and assist in the logistics, placement and smooth integration of the interpreter's services into the religious activity. These arrangements should be made in advance of the date of the service or event.

Preparation

Each interpreter's access to all the materials, along with the order of each event/ceremony, with sufficient time to prepare appropriately, is central to the interpreting function.

Specific musical arrangements, lyrics and the meaning behind poetic language require analysis and rehearsal. This level of preparation by the interpreter is necessary in order to render a piece of music or poetic expression that is accurate, artistic, culturally modified and as visually inspiring and insightful as the audio portion. In this specialized setting, preparation by the interpreter requires commitment to ensure quality interpreting, such as matching the music flow, using the correct sign modality, providing an accurate rendition of the frozen text, displaying the appropriate emotions and actions, etc.

Long or complex events may require a team of two or more interpreters. Additionally, a musical or dramatic program may require weeks of preparation that may necessitate involvement of the interpreter(s) in the rehearsals. Preparation would also include information and detailed attention as to what is or is not acceptable, permissible to (or not to) interpret and appropriate attire.

Materials

Materials include but are not limited to music, sacred text or readings, along with the translations. These materials can be provided in a printed and/or recorded format. Subsequently, the contact person will want to ensure the interpreter(s) are provided with lists of names that may be read, the agenda, announcements, copies of sermons, speeches, poetry, scripts of any artistic performances, songs and the like in advance.

Placement of Interpreter:

While the interpreter's placement may vary, it is important for the interpreter to consider acoustics, sight line, lighting, background, location and availability of equipment, but special consideration should be given to a religion's accepted protocol in a religious service. For the benefit of the participants, the interpreter should be sensitive to the following:

- Space for a music stand to place materials
- Hierarchy
- Gender roles
- Areas deemed sacred
- Multimedia
- Videotaping
- Physical movement inherent to the service

Compensation

If a professional interpreter views religious interpreting as service/ministry to the organization or a charitable contribution, she/he may not expect payment. In situations when interpreters do not charge for their services, interpreters may want to consider educating their religious communities about potential expenses of services to develop awareness. Some interpreters accept payment but may donate it back to the religious establishment. For additional information about billing practices, read RID's SPP titled, *Business Practices: Hiring an Interpreter/Billing Considerations*.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**El Paso CC National Multicultural Interpreting Project**

Mary L. Mooney, Project Director
El Paso Community College
P.O. Box 20500
El Paso, TX 79998
(915) 831-2432 V/TTY
(915) 831-2095 FAX
E-mail: marym@epcc.edu
<http://www.epcc.edu/Community/NMIP/Welcome.html>

National Catholic Office for the Deaf

7202 Buchanan Street
Landover Hills, MD 20784-2236
(301) 577-1684 V/Fax
(301) 577-4184 TTY/Video Phone
E-mail: info@ncod.org
www.ncod.org

Jewish Deaf Congress (Formerly National Congress of Jewish Deaf)

President: Martin Florsheim
(718) 740-0470 TTY
(718) 740-4994 FAX
E-mail: DCCNEWS@aol.com
<http://www.jirs.org/jirs/jirs0005ys.html>

Episcopal Conference for the Deaf

E-mail: JLCroft@juno.com
<http://www.ecdeaf.com/>

International Catholic Deaf Association

United States Section
7202 Buchanan Street
Landover Hills, MD 20784
(301) 429-0697 TTY
(301) 429-0698 FAX
Email: homeoffice@icda-us.org
<http://www.icda-us.org>

TEXT RESOURCES

Blake, Joan *SIGNING THE SCRIPTURES: A Starting Point for Interpreting the Sunday Readings for the Deaf (Year A)*. Liturgy Training Publications, 2004.

Blake, Joan *SIGNING THE SCRIPTURES: A Starting Point for Interpreting the Sunday Readings for the Deaf (Year B)*. Liturgy Training Publications, 2005.

Blake, Joan *SIGNING THE SCRIPTURES: A Starting Point for Interpreting the Sunday Readings for the Deaf (Year C)*. Liturgy Training Publications, 2003.

Yates, Jr., Leo *INTERPRETING AT CHURCH: A Paradigm for Sign Language Interpreters*. BookSurge, LLC, 2007.