

## **SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER VS. CLOSED CAPTIONING**

Closed captioning is a useful way to provide television access for the deaf community. However, it is also a valuable tool for extending messages to other important groups, including the elderly, hard-of-hearing viewers, those learning to read, and those learning English as a second language.

Closed captioning may sound great for a large television ministry, but what does it offer a smaller congregation? Should they simply use a sign language interpreter?

Having an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter in your church is a wonderful way to share your message with the deaf community. However, ASL shares little similarities with English. It is also a language that takes many years to learn. Therefore, this method is exceedingly limited, as many hard-of-hearing viewers and those who lose their hearing later in life do not always devote the time required to learn sign language. Statistics show that only 10% of the 24,000,000 deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the United States understand sign language. The other 90% rely on captioning.

Furthermore, there is no universal sign language and there are various systems for deaf communication. For example, ASL differs greatly from British Sign Language, despite the fact that both countries speak English. Some members of the deaf community use Signed Exact English (SEE), a form of sign language that represents literal English, while others rely on cued speech, where hand movements are used to aid speechreaders in differentiating between sounds.

Lastly, watching an ASL interpreter can be strenuous. If one becomes distracted or looks away for a second, accurate comprehension and understanding may be lost. The viewer is forced to focus solely on the interpreter and not the speaker! Because captions remain on the screen for up to three lines at a time, viewers can catch up if they become distracted, and more importantly, can focus their attention on the speaker for further clarification.

Whether a deaf person prefers ASL, SEE, speechreading or cued speech, captions can increase his or her understanding of your sermon. Moreover, captions appeal to an extensive audience and can assist you in communicating your message to the world.