

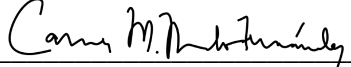
Ephphatha! Deaf Church Responds to Synod on Synodality

by

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Submitted to the Faculty of
The Catholic Theological Union at Chicago
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for
the degree of
Doctor of Ministry

April 2024



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Dedicated to my parents, Yeongja Song and Seungok Park

박승옥, 송영자 부모님께 드립니다

Acknowledgements

When I was a Master of Divinity student at St. John's University, Queens, New York City in 2004, Dr. Carmen Nanko-Fernández was my MDiv thesis external reader who helped to advise me. After I earned my Master of Divinity, Dr. Nanko-Fernández encouraged me to take doctoral courses at Catholic Theological Union. After I was ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood for the Archdiocese of Seoul, South Korea, I asked Cardinal Andrew Yeom, Archbishop of Seoul, South Korea if I could study for a Doctor of Ministry; however, he said, "I heard that Deaf people were so happy to have you and to hear the Word of God in sign language from you. So, you should take care of your Deaf sheep." I obeyed him.

Many years later, because there was no priest who ministered to Deaf people in the Archdiocese of Washington, I was asked to minister to Deaf people at Gallaudet University, the only liberal arts college for the Deaf in the world, and at St. Francis of Assisi Deaf Church in the diocese. Cardinal Andrew of Seoul loaned me to the Archdiocese of Washington for three years. I came to Washington, DC in January 2021 and began to minister to Deaf people. A reporter interviewed me and reported in the *National Catholic Reporter*. A few days later, someone suddenly emailed me. According to the email, when she read the *National Catholic Reporter*, she was surprised that I came to Washington, DC and welcomed me back to the USA. She was Dr. Nanko-Fernández.

Dr. Nanko-Fernández encouraged me to study for the Doctor of Ministry at Catholic Theological Union. I declined her suggestion because I was too old to study, and I forgot much of my English because I had not used it in Korea for almost twenty years. I also had to minister to Deaf people in Washington, DC. She said that age was just a number, I would get my English back, and I did not have to go to class in person in Chicago, but I could be in

class through Zoom with sign language interpreters. My archbishop and auxiliary bishops of Seoul accepted my request and encouraged me to study for the DMin. I took seven courses at Catholic Theological Union and one graduate level course at Gallaudet University. When I was writing my DMin thesis-project, I frequently felt that I wanted to give up my DMin studies because the thesis-project was hard and very tiring. I asked Dr. Nanko-Fernández if it was acceptable for me to quit the DMin program. She said that it was important for Deaf Catholics to write about the Deaf Catholic Church, so she encouraged me not to give up. Finally, I succeeded in completing my DMin thesis-project.

I would like to acknowledge and give my deepest appreciation to my thesis-project director, Dr. Carmen Nanko-Fernández who made this work possible. Without her encouragement and support, I would not have earned a DMin degree. Her guidance and advice carried me through all the stages of writing my thesis-project. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Scott Alexander, Dr. Jaruko Doi, MM. Fr. Benya Tokan and Rev. Leigh Preston for letting the proposal board meeting be an unforgettable moment and for your brilliant comments and suggestions through the board process. Thank you!

I believe that God called me to study for the DMin through wonderful professors, friends, and supporters. I would like to thank God, for letting me overcome all the difficulties. I have experienced the Lord's guidance day by day. He is the one who let me finish my degree. I will keep on trusting Him for my future.

I would like to give special thanks to Liz Palladino and Christine Iannoe-Schuller for interpreting in sign language when I took courses at Catholic Theological Union for 3 years. Grateful to Msgr. Patrick McCahill of New York City who supported me totally and helped by interpreting for me and editing my papers. Thanks Fr. John Kennealy of Washington, DC for always supporting me while I stayed at his rectory as a resident priest for 3 years.

In January of 2024, the contract, under which I ministered to Deaf people in the Archdiocese of Washington, DC from 2021 to 2024, was completed, so I was about to return to South Korea. However, my archbishop in Seoul wanted me to complete my DMin program first before returning to South Korea. So, Dr. Nanko-Fernández asked Fr. Steve Bevans if I could temporarily reside at the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) Theologate in Hyde Park, Chicago until my graduation. I would like to give many thanks to my Archbishop and the auxiliary bishops of Seoul for encouraging me to finish my DMin studies, and Fr. Steve Bevans, Fr. Roger Schroeder, Fr. Adam MacDonald and the SVD religious brothers for kindly welcoming me to stay with them there for three months.

I would like to give many thanks to the Deaf Catholic community in the Archdiocese of Seoul for willingly participating in the survey for my research, and Dr. Agnes Brazal, Dr. Kristine Meneses and the Deaf interviewees in Manila, the Philippines for allowing me to use their interview transcripts for my thesis-project.

I would like to give countless thanks to my family, parishioners, friends, professors, classmates, companions and supporters as a whole for their continuous support and understanding when I was undertaking my research and writing my thesis-project. Your prayers for me have sustained me thus far.

Finally, I still remember that when I was a child, my parents cried and were sad because they heard that I could not do whatever hearing people do because of my deafness. I succeeded in obtaining a doctoral degree, something that is not easy for hearing people to accomplish. I want to share the good news with my parents; however, they have passed away. They are still in my heart and prayers. I would like this thesis-project to be dedicated to my parents.

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Ephphatha! Deaf Church Responds to Synod on Synodality

Min Seo Park, DMin

Abstract

Through Pope Francis and the synodal process, a practical theological method emerges that involves encountering people where they are at, honoring their stories and listening deeply in ways that encourage dialogue and inclusion. This thesis-project questions the absence of Deaf people in the process and calls the Church to “be open!” to the stories and struggles of Deaf Church; to encounter Deaf culture and experiences; to listen deeply to the perspectives and wisdom of Deaf people and communities; and to learn from and engage in mutual dialogue with Deaf people in order to be an inclusive Church. It draws on the scholarship of select Asian theologians with respect to the importance of telling of one’s own story in the doing of theology and on the scholarship of select Deaf theologians who use Deaf experience as source of theology. It explores, narrates, and analyzes experiences of Deaf Church from the perspective of Deaf Catholics in Asia with a particular focus on Deaf Catholics from the Archdiocese of Seoul in South Korea.

Introduction

Pope Francis invited the church globally to consider what it means to be church in new ways. He called for a synod on synodality. Two sessions of the assembly met in Rome, in October 2023 and the second will convene in October 2024. Prior to this first meeting, for two years, at local and regional levels, Catholics, had been gathering, in-person and online. The purpose was to listen deeply to each other in ways that reflect a priority to increase participation and to make an option for inclusion, especially of those people who have been pushed to what Pope Francis has called the “existential peripheries.”¹

In the continental region designated as Asia, the Asian Discernment and Writing Team for Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences collected opinions and suggestions from the Catholic Church throughout Asia. They wrote the Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality issued on March 16, 2023 and submitted it. According to Article 169 of Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality, “significant pastoral care should be provided to... persons with disabilities (PWDs).”²

A close read of the document reveals that there are no mentions about the Deaf or evidence of Deaf people being involved in the process that produced the Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality. The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference seems to see Deaf people as part of “persons with disabilities” and does not seem to realize that Deaf

¹ See for example Pope Francis, Homily, Mass with the Filipino Community, Vatican, 15 December 2019, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20191215_omelia-comunitacattolica-filippina.html.

² Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), “Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality,” March 16, 2023, <https://www.synodresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ACAS-Final-Document-16-Mar-2023.pdf>.

people understand themselves instead as a linguistic minority.³ Therefore it can be inferred that the document sees Deaf people as persons with disabilities who should be cared for pastorally.

Deaf people can be actively involved in the Church as equal as hearing people. It is important that Church members listen to all people including those on the “existential peripheries”⁴ for any number of reasons. Since they did not write about Deaf Church in the documents or include them in the process on Synodality, this is an absence that must be addressed if synodality is to be inclusive and participatory. According to the *Instrumentum laboris* prepared for the first session of the Synod in October 2023, “A synodal Church is a listening Church.”⁵ The stories of Deaf Catholics and Deaf Church exist and need to be shared and listened to.

This thesis-project explores, narrates, and analyzes experiences of Deaf Church from the perspective of Deaf Catholics in Asia with a particular focus on Deaf Catholics from the Archdiocese of Seoul.

Thesis-Project Statement

Through the Synod on Synodality Pope Francis invites people from the margins and the existential peripheries to participate, share their stories, and discern together an inclusive church.

³ Min Seo Park, “Deaf Culture and Deaf Church: Considerations for Pastoral Ministry,” *New Theology Review* (November 2009): 29-30. Going forward, this article will be referenced as “Considerations for Pastoral Ministry.”

⁴ Expression used by Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio quoted in Cardinal Pietro Parolin, “Message of His Holiness Pope Francis Signed by the Cardinal Secretary of State to the Participants in the Meeting for Friendship among Peoples,” August 2014, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140823_messaggio-meeting-amicizia-popoli.html.

⁵ XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris*, June 20, 2023, https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/universal-stage/il/ENG_INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS.pdf.

Deaf people are a marginalized and linguistic minority. Many hearing people do not know about Deaf People and Deaf culture. Deaf theology is new for hearing people, especially hearing theologians. Deaf people tell their stories, as sources of theology. Deaf theologians dialogue with Deaf lived experience to empower Deaf Church. This thesis-project calls the Church to “be open!” to the stories and struggles of Deaf Church; to encounter Deaf culture and experiences; to listen deeply to the perspectives and wisdom of Deaf people and communities; and to learn from and engage in mutual dialogue with Deaf people in order to be an inclusive Church.

A Note About Language Usage

D/deaf: The word “Deaf” and the word “deaf” are usually used in English speaking countries. The word “Deaf” with a capital “D” is used by some, and by me in this thesis-project, to indicate the Deaf community understood culturally and linguistically. The word “deaf” with a lower case “d” has been used to refer to an audiological condition though some use it as a broader identity term. Usage varies for a number of reasons;⁶ however the usage preferences of individual authors when quoted in this thesis-project will be honored. Personally, I identify as Deaf.

농 (Nong): The Korean alphabet is different from the English alphabet so Koreans do not use both capital letters and lowercase letters. 농 (Nong) is D/deaf in Korean. In past, 농아 (Nong A) was mostly used. 농아 means that deaf and dumb in Korean. Today Deaf Koreans prefer the word 농 rather than 농아 because they felt that they were insulted when they heard the word 아. Therefore, the word 아 was removed. In general, hearing people prefer the word 청각장애인

⁶ For research that addresses usage and its complexities see Kimberly K. Pudans-Smith, Katrina R. Cue, Ju-Lee A. Wolsey, and M. Diane Clark, “To Deaf or not to deaf: That is the Question,” *Psychology*, Vol.10 No.15: December 2019, DOI: [10.4236/psych.2019.1015135](https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2019.1015135).

(the Hearing Impaired) rather the word **농인** (the Deaf). Hearing people view Deaf people in terms of having lost their hearing sense, so they need to be fixed if possible. Deaf people, however, feel that they are proud of being Deaf. I will use **농** (Nong).

Listening: Listening is not limited to a hearing sense. Listening can work through different ways. For example, Deaf people lost their hearing sense, but they can listen to something through sign language. Deaf people can listen to the Word of God through sign language. Listening means seeing for many Deaf people. Listening plays an important role in this thesis-project because it is part of the practical method encouraged by Pope Francis in the doing of theology and the living of synodality. I use listening in the broad sense of engaging and paying deep attention to the stories of others that is not dependent on the sense of hearing. I am aware that listening may suggest ableism to some readers.

Genesis of the Thesis-Project

I was supposed to study in a Korean seminary; however, I was not accepted as a seminarian because I was Deaf. One of the Deaf American priests encouraged me to study for the Roman Catholic priesthood and I came to the United States when I was 26 years old. I was required to write a Master's thesis and began to look for references and sources relating to my topic, Deaf Culture and Deaf Church: A Pastoral Ecclesiology for Deaf Ministry. I learned that there were sources and references that were written by Deaf and hearing Americans, but I also discovered that there were very few documents about the Deaf Asian and Deaf Korean Catholic Church.

When I was studying theology as a seminarian at St. John's University, New York City in 2004, Monsignor Patrick McCahill, who is pastor of St. Elizabeth's Deaf Church and has ministered to the Deaf in the Archdiocese of New York since he was ordained in 1968, asked me

if I would preside at the Holy Week liturgies and lead a communion service at St. Elizabeth's Church. Msgr. McCahill was supposed to preside at the Holy Week liturgies; however, he suddenly became ill and therefore, he could not do the liturgies. He could have asked hearing priests if they would preside over them with sign language interpreters. Instead, he preferred that I preside. More than sixty Deaf people participated in the liturgical service that I, at the time a Deaf lay person, led. Three Deaf people in the congregation carefully observed me as I explained God's Word in sign language. A question came into their minds. They asked me if I was hearing or Deaf. When I replied, "I am Deaf," they were very surprised because they never thought that Deaf people could lead liturgies and preach. They believed that it was impossible for Deaf people to be ordained or become lay leaders because they never saw Deaf leaders serving the church. Their attitude and beliefs changed through those Holy Week services. That experience was significant for me as well. It was a reminder that Deaf people have agency and are responsible for the Deaf church.⁷

I was ordained to the priesthood in 2007 and appointed as chaplain of the Deaf community in the Archdiocese of Seoul. Before that time, Fr. Michael Soono Jeong, the hearing son of Deaf parents who was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Seoul in 1989, was appointed chaplain to the Seoul Catholic Deaf Association. He celebrated Mass with them in sign language every Sunday.

Before I was sent to the Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, established in 1986 by Deaf people from both Myeong dong Cathedral and Don-am dong Parish, they did not have their own church building. They borrowed a school auditorium for monthly signed Mass and a local hearing parish for signed Sunday Mass. The Benedictine Sisters permanently lent their Caritas

⁷ I tell this story at the beginning of my article Park, "Considerations for Pastoral Ministry," 26-27.

Rehabilitation Center to the Seoul Catholic Deaf Association and allowed Deaf people to use the chapel there. This Center, run by the sisters, had a history of ministering with Deaf people who were homeless.

When I celebrated Mass at the chapel, there were about 100 people who attended regularly. Later the number of the Deaf people increased and about 150 people attended. The capacity of the chapel was 80 persons only. It was too small for the Deaf community, so I decided to enlarge the chapel. The chapel could not be enlarged because it was owned by the religious congregation and not by the Archdiocese of Seoul. I met with Cardinal Andrew Soojeong Yeom, Archbishop of Seoul, and said to him that Deaf people and I needed a new church building. Instead of offering a church, the archbishop encouraged me to go to hearing parishes in the Archdiocese of Seoul to ask parishioners for their financial support to help build a new church.

I celebrated Masses with hearing parishioners at approximately 150 hearing parishes for eight years. A few pastors of the hearing parishes wanted to support my project of building a new church. They hesitated to ask me to celebrate Mass for their hearing parishioners because they believed that a celebrant must vocalize the words of institution. I explained to them that I could consecrate the Eucharist in sign language with vocal interpreters; they did not accept this arrangement.

The reactions of these priests baffled me. If Jesus knew that I was deaf and the church ordained me as a priest, why wasn't I accepted to celebrate Mass in sign language? Not all, but some priests perhaps, did not know that sign language is a language for Deaf people. Or was this part of a greater history of how Deaf people were denied access to some sacraments and ministries because hearing was presumed to be necessary for participation? These were questions

I had explored in my MDiv thesis and now I was experiencing them as an ordained priest.

Even though many challenges confronted me, I did not give up. I continued going to hearing parishes and later I bought land and built a church that was named Ephphatha Parish for the Deaf. I was appointed as pastor in 2019. About 200 Deaf people usually attended Mass at the Deaf parish on Sundays and about 30 people also attended weekday Masses daily.

These questions of inclusion, participation and agency by Deaf people in the Church are important to me on many levels in my ministry locally as well as regionally. I also became aware of the need for a regional Asian gathering and in 2015 this resulted in the creation of the Asian Deaf Catholic Conference.

Intended Audiences

Primary Audiences

A primary audience would be Deaf Korean Catholics in the Archdiocese of Seoul who may be empowered to full participation in the church and invited to consider being in leadership and ministry.

A primary audience would be hearing people including bishops, priests, the religious and lay people in the Archdiocese of Seoul, South Korea. This thesis-project may help hearing people to understand and appreciate the history of Deaf Catholics in the archdiocese, Deaf culture, and Deaf Church so that they can minister effectively and respectfully with Deaf people and support what Deaf people identify as needs.

A primary audience would be Deaf Catholics in South Korea, Asia and beyond. Deaf people could learn from this particular experience of Deaf agency in the establishment of Deaf ministry in the archdiocese of Seoul, including of the Deaf parish, and feel empowered to be more involved in Deaf Church

Secondary Audiences

A secondary audience would be Asian and Asian diasporic hearing theologians who may recognize in this story of Deaf struggle and agency other ways of being church.

A secondary audience would be those responsible for synod on synodality that they address who has been left out of the process.

Anticipated Outcomes

Achievable Goals

1. Establishing that Deaf people can participate fully in the destiny, life, ministerial and liturgical activities of the Church as well as hearing people do and that Deaf Church is not divided from hearing church, but it is part of the Universal Church.
2. Retrieving the history of the agency of Deaf Catholics in the Archdiocese of Seoul and cultivating awareness of that story and its importance for furthering effective ministry with and by Deaf Catholics.
3. Cultivating increased knowledge and respect among hearing people regarding Deaf culture and sign language(s) as the native language(s) of Deaf people, in order to support Deaf Church in its various manifestations including Deaf parish, and small Deaf communities within a hearing parish.
4. Fostering recognition by church leaders (e.g., bishops, theological educators, pastoral leaders, lay ecclesial ministers) that Deaf people need Deaf priests for Deaf Church, and there need to be ways and accommodations to welcome, accept, and support Deaf men who are interested in the Roman Catholic priesthood.

Recognized Limitations

1. There may be resistance by hearing people, including clergy and church leaders, for a

number of reasons, including that many do not realize that sign languages are accepted as liturgical languages in the Roman Catholic Church and are used in expressions of Deaf Church.

2. Many Deaf people understand themselves as part of linguistic and ethnic minority communities; they do not identify necessarily as disabled. While these distinctions are important, especially because in the Catholic Church many people consider the Deaf as a community for/of the disabled, this will not be a major focus of this thesis-project. This thesis-project will primarily consider the Deaf who use sign language and identify as a linguistic minority community.
3. I, as the researcher am also clergy, and former pastor and founder, of the Deaf parish in the Archdiocese of Seoul, Korea. I need to be aware of the effects of that power dimension and of my biases in my engagements with sources (human subjects, archival, literature) on my research.
4. The pool of resources includes materials in languages other than English including Korean, ASL, other signed languages particularly from Asia. Such sources may be unfamiliar to hearing people.
5. The topic of this thesis-project is under-studied and limited resources exist.

Potential Broader and Ministerial Import

1. Deaf Church helps Deaf people empower their faith and identity. Hearing church can help Deaf people, who go to the hearing church, feel that they are welcome, and able to be involved in liturgical, ministerial, and social activities in the hearing church.
2. Deaf people recognize that the Roman Catholic Church is the universal church. They come to understand that they are called to participate fully whether in a small Deaf

community within a hearing parish or in a Deaf self-run church. Deaf people can feel comfortable with both Deaf parish and a small Deaf community in a hearing parish.

3. Hearing priests, religious brothers, religious sisters, seminarians and pastoral workers are inspired to become involved in ministering with Deaf people in either Deaf Church or hearing parishes. It is important for hearing priests and seminarians to learn sign language at seminaries so that they can celebrate Mass in sign language with Deaf people.
4. While this research is focused on Archdiocese of Seoul, it will be useful to other Catholic communities- throughout Asia, USA and other countries.
5. Church leaders at all levels will recognize and address the absence of Deaf Catholics in the synodal process in ways that will result in their/our inclusion and active participation in synodality.
6. While my intended audience is primarily pastoral, my research and scholarship may bring forward the lived stories and lived experiences of Deaf Korean Catholics thus contributing to Asian theologies that privilege stories.

Methodology

For eleven years, Pope Francis has called church to be inclusive and attentive to the margins, the existential peripheries. This call brings us to a time and participatory process of synodality that involves paying deep attention to stories, in other words "listening." As I explained earlier, listening plays an important role in this thesis-project because it is part of the practical method encouraged by Pope Francis in the doing of theology and the living of synodality. I use listening in the broad sense of engaging and paying deep attention to the stories of others that is not dependent on the sense of hearing.

Deaf Catholics are and have been at the peripheries of the Church for various historical, cultural, practical reasons.⁸ Their/our stories as Church remain not known, or not listened to, or ignored. That is evident as well in the synodal process as reflected in my particular regional context of Asia and my local context in the Archdiocese of Seoul. Through Pope Francis and the synodal process a practical method emerges that involves encountering people where they are at, honoring their stories, listening deeply and in ways that encourage dialogue and inclusion.

Deaf theologian Hannah Lewis, writes, "I am really not interested in what hearing people, however involved with deaf people they might be, have said about what deaf people think and what a theology of deaf people might look like."⁹ I too have learned that what many hearing people think about Deaf people is sometimes wrong. I will intentionally privilege and draw on Deaf experiences, sources, scholarship, and theologians especially because these have been ignored (including in the synodal process). At the same time, while Deaf people have been invisible to many hearing theologians, some of the insights from hearing scholars are helpful. In order to raise up and foster cultures of encounter and deep listening this thesis-project will draw on the insights of Deaf Studies, select Asian theologians, Deaf theologians, some hearing theologians who accompany Deaf communities, lived experiences of Deaf Asian Catholics, and my own story as a Deaf Asian Catholic minister-theologian.

As an Asian minister-theologian, whose thesis-project focuses on Catholic communities in Asia and specifically South Korea, I am looking to the scholarship developed by Asian theologians on the importance of narrative and the telling of one's own story in the doing of theology. Their admission that without their experience, theology would be meaningless strikes

⁸ See Park, "Considerations for Pastoral Ministry," 28.

⁹ Hannah Lewis, *Deaf Liberation Theology*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology Series, (New York and London: Routledge, 2007, 2016) 6.

me as relevant in my research with the Deaf because they/we have felt marginalized in our own church. The autoethnographic work of Grace Ji-Sun Kim in *Invisible: Theology and the Experience of Asian American Women*¹⁰ and *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective* edited by Peter Phan and Jung Young Lee¹¹ are especially significant in informing my perspective on the need for stories and the agency of story-telling.

As a Deaf theologian-minister whose thesis-project focuses on Deaf Church, I will engage the scholarship of Deaf theologians like Kirk VanGilder from the USA, and Hannah Lewis and Peter McDonough from England.¹² It should be noted that most Deaf theologians and many scholars in Deaf studies are white, North Americans mostly from the USA, and British from the United Kingdom. In Deaf theologies I will pay particular attention to those that understand themselves as coming from liberation perspectives. Lewis and VanGilder have also modeled dialogue in their theological collaboration on Deaf theology being rooted in Deaf ontology.

Asian theologians studied theology that was written by whites. Asian feminist theologians studied theology that was written white women and mostly men. Deaf people have studied many things that are from hearing people's ideas yet some hearing theologians learn from the Deaf and include Deaf perspectives in their theologizing. These are insights that come from time spent

¹⁰ Grace Ji-Sun Kim. *Invisible: Theology and the Experience of Asian American Women*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2021).

¹¹ Peter Phan and Jung Young Lee, editors, *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in an American-Asian Perspective*. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999).

¹² Peter McDonough, "Ministry amongst Deaf People," in *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf: Proceedings of a Conference on Deaf Liberation Theology*, held at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven, May 19, 2003, ed. Marcel Broesterhuizen (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2003).

accompanying and learning from Deaf people, communities, scholars and cultures. For example, the scholarship of Kristine Meneses from the Philippines,¹³ Latin@ theologian Carmen Nanko-Fernández from the USA,¹⁴ pastoral theologian Marcel Broesterhuizen from the Netherlands,¹⁵ and Singaporean-American liturgical theologian Audrey Liyan Seah.¹⁶ These theologians model ways of dialogue arising from encounter and listening.

There are a variety of means used to access the perspectives and to listen deeply to people and communities being accompanied through research. Among those who identify as practical theologians and/or whose work can be understood as practical theology because they explore congregations¹⁷ and lived theologies is the Deaf theologian Hannah Lewis, the author of *Deaf Liberation Theology*. I access the stories and perspectives of Deaf Catholics in Asia in three ways. I reached out to Professor Kristine Meneses and Professor Agnes Brazal and secured permission to use the limited database of interviews with Asian Deaf Catholics prepared for the Asian regional final report *Doing Theology From The Existential Peripheries*. This report is part of “a research project of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting

¹³ Kristine Meneses, “Biblical Conversations with the Deaf: The Word Made Flesh, Seeing Biblical Theology in Pictorial and Performance,” *Asian Horizons* 13 no. 3, (Sept 2019): 373-388.

¹⁴ Carmen Nanko-Fernández, “Handing on Faith en su propia lengua,” *Theologizing en Español: Context, Community and Ministry* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), Kindle Edition, Chapter 5.

¹⁵ Marcel Broesterhuizen, *The Gospel Preached by the Deaf: Proceedings of a Conference on Deaf Liberation Theology*, held at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven, May 19· 2003. (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2003).

¹⁶ Audrey Liyan Seah, “Signs of Hope: Narratives, Eschatology, and Liturgical Inculturation in Deaf Catholic Worship,” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2021).

¹⁷ For example, from a Catholic context see Susan Bigelow Reynolds, *People Get Ready: Ritual, Solidarity, and Lived Ecclesiology in Catholic Roxbury* (Fordham University Press, 2023). She understands her study of St. Mary of the Angels parish in Boston as a way of exploring “community in a racially and culturally diverse church.”

Integral Human Development, Holy See.”¹⁸ They graciously provided me with the transcripts of those video interviews. Second, in order to get perspectives of Deaf Catholics from the Archdiocese of Seoul I created a SurveyMonkey questionnaire that was distributed and completed electronically.¹⁹ I decided that the best way to get Deaf perspectives is through a focused questionnaire with some open-ended questions using SurveyMonkey. I realize the limitations of my approach but the number of languages involved here would require an extraordinary amount of time and resources that makes video interviews prohibitive. Korean Sign Language (which is a combination of Korean and Japanese signs) would have to be translated into Korean and then into English. Third, I draw on my own story in a move consistent with the autobiographical turn demonstrated in *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective* and an autoethnographic turn illustrated in Grace Ji-Sun Kim in *Invisible: Theology and the Experience of Asian American Women*. Storytelling is also a part of Deaf culture. Key insights of Deaf theologians will guide my analysis.

Organization

This thesis-project is organized into six chapters with an introduction. Chapter 1, entitled “Encountering Deaf People and Deaf Culture” introduces Deaf communities as linguistic and cultural minorities, and explores sign languages as their native languages. These distinctions are necessary to ground my understanding of Deaf Church in the greater context of the Catholic Church where Deaf histories and people are ignored and pushed to the margins, including in the

¹⁸ Agnes M. Brazal, PhD. STD, *Doing Theology from The Existential Peripheries* Report, 12 October 2022, <https://migrants-refugees.va/resource-center/publications/>.

¹⁹ Min Seo Park, *Deaf Church*, San Mateo, CA: SurveyMonkey Inc, 2023, www.surveymonkey.com.

current synod process. Since many hearing people know little to nothing about Deaf people, this chapter helps readers understand and encounter Deaf people on their/our own terms.

Chapter 2, “Telling Our Stories as Source of Our Theologies,” focuses on the insights that particular Asian theologians bring to the doing of theology with respect to the importance of narrative and experience. This chapter develops those theological insights because, while listening is necessary, it is equally important for marginalized people to find encouragement, opportunities, and spaces to tell our own stories in our own way. Stories are sources of theologies. While hearing people need to be encouraged to listen carefully to the stories of Deaf people, Deaf people need to be encouraged to share their stories. Storytelling is also an important part of Deaf culture.

Chapter 3 shifts the focus to “Telling the Story of Deaf Catholics in the Archdiocese of Seoul.” The chapter situates the story of the Deaf parish of Ephphatha in Seoul, South Korea within the greater context of the history of Deaf ministry in the archdiocese. It functions as a narrative for understanding the practices of what I have identified elsewhere as Deaf Church, in other words ecclesial contexts that explicitly center Deaf faith experiences and cultivate active Deaf participation in the life of the church.²⁰ This can occur in churches like Ephphatha in Seoul specifically identified as a Deaf parish or in predominantly hearing parishes that include a smaller active Deaf community. It is important to note that only providing sign language interpreters does not make a context an example of Deaf Church.

Chapter 4, “Listening to Korean Deaf Catholics in the Archdiocese of Seoul,” listens to Deaf stories by presenting their perspectives collected from a 21-question survey that I designed

²⁰ Min Seo Park, “Deaf Culture and Deaf Church: A Pastoral Ecclesiology for Deaf Ministry,” (MDiv thesis, Saint John’s University, New York, 2004). Going forward this source will be referenced as “A Pastoral Ecclesiology for Deaf Ministry.” Min Seo Park, “Considerations for Pastoral Ministry,” 26-35.

on SurveyMonkey© and distributed electronically to Deaf Catholics from the Archdiocese of Seoul. The data gathered in questions 1-14 (Q 1-14) are addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 5, “Dialoguing with Deaf Theology,” is influenced by a dialogue between Deaf theologians Lewis and VanGilder.²¹ Their insights guide my analysis of Deaf experiences accessed through the open-ended questions on my survey (Q 15-21), and in the narrative data set of interview transcripts used as part of the *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries* project. I identify and analyze several themes from across these sources so that they may shed light on what is needed for a synodal church, especially in terms of inclusion.

In Chapter 6, “Toward Inclusion and Deaf Church,” I conclude by pointing to directions that may arise from Deaf people signing back “Ephphatha, be open,” to our own Catholic Church in this time of synodality. Removing obstacles to inclusion requires encounters where Deaf Catholics get to own and tell their/our stories and others need to listen in ways that shape inclusive ecclesiologies. This includes paying attention to stories about Deaf agony and agency in creating Deaf Church. According to *Lumen Gentium*, “All [women and] men are called to belong to the new people of God.”²² This invitation extends to the Deaf faithful. The changes brought about by Vatican Council II influenced the Deaf church to see itself as equal to the hearing church and to affirm that the Deaf faithful are also God's People. Historically, the Deaf resided on the margins of the church's life, excluded at times from catechetical instruction, from some sacraments and from most ministries, including priesthood.²³ While this situation has

²¹ Lewis and VanGilder. “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 169-190.

²² Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, #13, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

²³ See Park, “Considerations for Pastoral Ministry,” 27-28.

improved, the absence or limited participation of the Deaf in the global, regional, and local synodal conversations prompts a push for new opportunities to press for inclusion in ways that take seriously the obligation to encounter and listen deeply.

Chapter 1

Encountering Deaf People and Deaf Culture

Many hearing people know little to nothing about Deaf people. In order to help readers understand and encounter Deaf people on their own terms, this chapter introduces Deaf communities as linguistic and cultural minorities, and explores sign languages as their native languages. These distinctions are necessary to ground my understanding of Deaf Church in the greater context of the Catholic Church where Deaf histories and people are ignored and pushed to the margins, including in the current synod process.

The Deaf as Cultural and Linguistic Minority Communities

Douglas Baynton writes, “For most profoundly deaf people, to be deaf is not to not hear, but a social relation—that is, a relation with other human beings, hearing and deaf.”¹ In general hearing people think that Deaf people are persons with disabilities because Deaf people lose their sense of hearing and abilities associated with that sense. Too often, hearing people believe that Deaf people need to learn how to speak orally so that Deaf people can socialize with hearing people. “Consider what happens when a hearing person meets Deaf people. He or she cannot communicate with the Deaf because he or she does not know sign language. Should hearing people think that Deaf people are disabled persons? Rather would not Deaf people think that the hearing person is disabled?”²

Many scholars of Deaf Studies insist that Deaf people are not persons with

¹ Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign against Sign Language* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 24.

² Min Seo Park, “Considerations for Pastoral Ministry,” 30.

disabilities, but a linguistic minority and cultural community like Latin@ communities and Asian immigrants who form ethnic and linguistic communities in the United States. Carol Padden and Thomas Humphries explain that “Disabled is a label that historically has not belonged to Deaf people.”³ Deaf people have their native language, sign language, and thus they have built their own cultures.

People who cannot hear sounds are called ‘Hard of hearing’ and ‘Deaf people.’ People who can hear sounds are called ‘Hearing people.’ The word ‘Hearing people’ is mostly used in the Deaf community. The term ‘Hearing Impaired’ sometimes is used in place of ‘Hard of hearing’ and ‘Deaf people.’ In the past, hearing people used to call Deaf people and hard of hearing people “Deaf and Dumb” and “Deaf and Mute.” This is inappropriate and today is considered offensive.

While some disabilities are more visible than others, “hearing loss is an invisible disability,”⁴ because before hearing people meet Deaf people and hard of hearing people for the first time and talk with them, they cannot “see” deafness or diminished hearing. “Deaf people are commonly placed in that large, amorphous category labeled, most commonly today, ‘disabled.’”⁵ Hearing people view that Deaf people and hard of hearing people have lost their hearing sense and thus their hearing needs to be fixed.

Hearing loss is classified in terms of degrees and measured in decibels that describe

³ Carol Padden and Thomas Humphries, *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture*. (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1988), 44.

⁴ Brittany Beckner and Donald Helme, “Deaf or Hearing: A Hard of Hearing Individual’s Navigation Between Two Worlds.” *American Annals of the Deaf* 163, no. 3 (2018): 395.

⁵ Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 2.

how loud sound has to be in order for a person to hear it.⁶ According to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), audiologists categorize hearing losses using this guideline:

Normal hearing: -10 to 20 dB
Mild hearing loss: 20 to 40 dB higher than normal
Moderate hearing loss: 40 to 70 dB higher than normal
Severe hearing loss: 70 to 90 dB higher than normal
Profound loss: 90 dB or more⁷

Generally, people might think that Deaf people and hard of hearing people are born from Deaf parents or hearing-impaired parents. In fact, “95% of children who are deaf or hard of hearing have hearing parents.”⁸ Globally only “5% of the population of all Deaf people have been born to Deaf parents.”⁹

Some profoundly deaf people can hear some sounds with powerful hearing aids; however, they do not understand clearly what hearing people say vocally. Therefore, some profoundly Deaf people struggle and get frustrated when communicating with hearing people who are unfamiliar with sign language and Deaf culture. “The profoundness of being deaf and the realization that there are others with the same condition creates a Deaf culture. The Deaf culture impacts many communication issues such as message channel preferences,

⁶ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, “Degree of Hearing Loss,” <https://www.asha.org/public/hearing/degree-of-hearing-loss/>.

⁷ Alexandra Schirn, “ASA/ANSI S3.6-2018 (R2023): Specification for Audiometers,” American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Blog, April 7, 2023, <https://blog.ansi.org/?p=175671>.

⁸ Brittany Beckner and Donald Helme, “Deaf or Hearing: A hard of Hearing Individual’s Navigation Between Two Worlds.” *American Annals of the Deaf* 163, no. 3 (2018): 395.

⁹ Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2003), 42.

feelings about interacting with hearing people, and attitudes about time and space.”¹⁰ Deaf culture has been developed mostly by profoundly Deaf people who have had the similar experiences and feelings. “Since most of the hearing community believes that deafness is a disability, there may be strong cultural clashes between a hearing person and a culturally Deaf person.”¹¹ This means that the hearing community does not accept the Deaf culture because many believe that Deaf people are deficient so they should be fixed medically in order to be with hearing people together in the hearing society. The perspective of many Deaf people is different.

Culturally deaf people are not just deaf, they view their situation as unique rather than as a deficit. As one person said in our focus group “the only thing that doesn’t work in me is my ears; otherwise I’m normal...Culturally Deaf people prefer to look at their deafness positively as a different culture instead of as impairment, which is at odds with the medical/professional community’s view of deafness as an illness.”¹²

Not only profoundly Deaf people, but also Deaf people, who were born deaf or became deaf when they were under 3 years of age, prefer their own Deaf culture. They view their deafness not as a medical issue but as a cultural issue. Their perspective on deafness is positive. Deaf people have their own culture, Deaf culture. What is Deaf culture?

Deaf culture has worldwide membership. Most members meet at least two criteria: a sufficient degree of hearing loss, and proficiency in sign language. People lose their hearing in various ways. The most common causes of hearing loss are: childhood illness, pregnancy-related illness, injury, excessive or prolonged exposure to noise, heredity, and aging. Whether or not a person would be a Deaf culture member depends on the severity of the hearing loss and on the time of life in which the loss occurred. Thus, severe deafness at birth makes one an immediate candidate for membership. Those who lose their hearing later in life

¹⁰ Blaine Goss, “Hearing from the Deaf Culture,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 12, no 2. (2003): 3.

¹¹ Goss, “Hearing from the Deaf Culture,” 3.

¹² Goss, “Hearing from the Deaf Culture,” 3.

(aging) are the least likely to become members of the Deaf culture. Signing skill is also necessary, and if the person has never learned to sign, she or he will not become a member of the culture. Oddly enough, there are people who have full hearing who are members of the Deaf culture. But they know how to sign. They are accepted by the Deaf because the Deaf can readily communicate with them. Thus, the main ticket for admission is the ability to communicate in a language used by the members.¹³

Deaf people have developed their Deaf culture and community through sign language. In part that is why many scholars in Deaf studies consider the Deaf to be a linguistic minority group. “Historically, Deaf people have fought against hearing professionals who educate Deaf children in the oral modality, . . . using sign language only as a last resort, if at all.”¹⁴ Even though sign language was the native language of Deaf people, Deaf people were oppressed and forced to learn how to speak orally and prohibited to use sign language. Deaf scholar Katherine A. Jankowski explains using the academic field of communication as an example:

Numerous communications departments, textbooks, and even the national organization define communication as “speech,” and when communication departs from the norm, it is labeled a “communication disorder.” Because of this perceived “deviation from the norm,” the communication and language of Deaf people are devalued and denigrated.¹⁵

As Jankowski shows, the dominant hearing attitude was negative toward sign language which was used by Deaf people and was a language distinct from English. They did not understand how Deaf people were frustrated with the privileging of spoken language.

This philosophy is based on the belief that speech is the most valuable educational attainment for Deaf children. Inherent in this belief is the notion that Deaf people should become as much like hearing people as

¹³ Goss, “Hearing from the Deaf Culture,” 3.

¹⁴ Katherine A. Jankowski, *Deaf Empowerment: Emergence, Struggle, and Rhetoric*, (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2013), 8.

¹⁵ Jankowski, *Deaf Empowerment*, 15.

possible. Deaf children become adults who are able to “integrate” into mainstream society.¹⁶

This attitude implied that hearing people believed that Deaf people could not separate themselves from the dominant community, create their own communities and find fulfillment. Integration with hearing people was the goal of education, Deaf people must live with hearing people together in the dominant community, so sign language is not needed.

Many members of the dominant society remain oblivious, until enlightened, to the fact that there is indeed a group of people in this world who use speech only occasionally or not at all. Yet, the Deaf cultural community constitutes such a group. In this community, communication is not taken for granted. In fact, communication is so highly valued that it is at the core of the conflict between the Deaf community and the dominant society.¹⁷

Deaf people liberated themselves from oral linguistic superiority. Even though Deaf people live in the dominant hearing society, they use sign language as their primary language.

American Sign Language has been recognized as a full-fledged language, with its own unique phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatic, all distinct from English. This, by itself, legitimizes Deaf culture and makes Deaf people members of a linguistic community.¹⁸

Even though American Sign Language is different from Korean Sign Language and other sign languages, Deaf people in the world can feel that they have been oppressed in their respective hearing dominant communities. Sign Language helps Deaf people to create their own cultures and communities.

The recognition of sign language, not by linguists or scholars, but by Deaf people themselves, was a pivotal moment. While Deaf people had been aware that their sign language met their needs and provided them with an aesthetic pleasure that only languages can provide, the

¹⁶ Jankowski, *Deaf Empowerment*, 8.

¹⁷ Jankowski, *Deaf Empowerment*, 8.

¹⁸ Thomas K. Holcomb, *Introduction to American Deaf Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 20.

realization that sign languages were equal to yet uniquely interesting among human languages brought to Deaf people a sense of vindication and pride.¹⁹

Sign language and Deaf culture help Deaf people feel that they are proud of themselves and their identity.

In her book *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard*, Nora Ellen Groce studied the impact of the Deaf community on Martha's Vineyard Island, Massachusetts from the 1640s through the 1950s. Deaf people and hearing people had settled in Martha's Vineyard in the 1640s. There was a disproportionately large presence of Deaf people. Most of the Deaf people there were congenitally deaf, and they in turn gave birth to deaf children, as well as to hearing children.²⁰ The hearing residents, including those who were not members of a Deaf family, were bilingual, able to communicate in the local sign language and in English. They did not see their Deaf neighbors as disabled people nor did they see a difference between hearing people and Deaf people. This attitude comes through in Groce's interviews with the longtime hearing residents. One interviewee, Gale Huntington explained that the hearing people,

“didn't think anything about them; they were just like everybody else.”

“But how did people communicate with them – by writing everything down?”

“No,” said Gale, surprised that I should ask such an obvious question. “You see, everybody here spoke sign language.”

“You mean the deaf people's families and such?” I inquired.

... “and everybody else in town too—I used to speak it, my mother, everybody.”²¹

From her research, Groce suggested that the widespread knowledge and use of the

¹⁹ Carol A. Padden and Tom L. Humphries, *Inside Deaf Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 157.

²⁰ Nora Ellen Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 100.

²¹ Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*, 2-3.

sign language by both deaf and hearing people in this context, “eliminated the wall that separates most deaf people from the rest of society.”²²

A Brief History of Deaf Exclusion in the Catholic Church

For many centuries, hearing church leaders believed that because Deaf people could not hear the Word of God, they could not understand it. Deaf people could not receive sacraments except infant baptism from the Catholic Church. This position was based on a misinterpretation of Romans 10:17, “Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.”²³ This misinterpretation, challenged by Pedro Ponce de León, a Spanish Benedictine monk (1520-1584), prevented church leaders from recognizing the rights of Deaf people to participation, catechesis, and reception of the sacraments.²⁴ In many ways these attitudes persist and, when Deaf people go to Catholic churches to attend Mass or seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation for example, they may feel that they are marginalized if there is no access to communication in sign language. Experiences of exclusion leave the Deaf faithful feeling that to be Catholic means one has to become hearing.

It is obvious that St. Paul did not say that Deaf people could not have faith. One of the Church fathers, St. Augustine of Hippo, interpreted Paul’s letters. He understood that deafness involved a loss of hearing and thus Deaf people could not hear the Word of God.

²² Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*, 4.

²³ Romans, *New American Bible*, revised edition, (Washington, D.C: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 2010).

²⁴ See Min Seo Park, “Considerations in Pastoral Ministry,” 28; and James A. Pahz and Cheryl S. Pahz, *Total Communication: The Meaning Behind the Movement to Expand Education Opportunities for Deaf Children*, (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1978), 6.

Therefore, he commented that Deaf people could not have faith. Deaf Episcopal priest and Gallaudet alumnus Otto Berg explains:

Even St. Augustine remarks that “deafness from birth makes it impossible for such a one to have faith, since he who is deaf can neither hear the word or learn to read it,” and though he admits that the “hearing” whereby faith cometh (Rom. 10:17), refers to mental understanding and acceptance into the heart, and not to the mere physical sense of hearing, for he speaks of reading as a means whereby the deaf may receive faith, yet in his time no deaf and dumb person had ever learned to read.²⁵

Literal acceptance of St. Augustine’s interpretation of Rom. 10:17 by many in the Church “held out no hope for deaf people either. The apostle Paul had written that ‘faith cometh by hearing,’ and according to Saint Augustine, deafness ‘hinders faith itself.’”²⁶

People assumed Augustine meant Deaf people, however he knew a Deaf youth who communicated by signing and that caused him to also write that “both of these pertain to the soul.”²⁷ Scholar Susan Plann²⁸ explains, “If signs, like speech, pertain to the soul, then signs

²⁵ Otto B. Berg, *A Missionary Chronicle: Being A History of the Ministry to the Deaf in the Episcopal Church (1850-1980)*, (Hollywood, MD: St. Mary’s Press, 1984), 6-7. To learn more about Berg (1915-1991) and access his archive go to “Manuscripts - Papers of Rev. Otto B. Berg, 1909-1995.” Gallaudet University, <https://gallaudet.edu/archives/archives-collections/manuscript-collection/manuscripts-papers-of-rev-otto-b-berg-1909-1995/>.

²⁶ See Susan Plann, “Pedro Ponce de León: Myth and Reality,” in *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations of the New Scholarship*, ed. John Van Cleve, (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1996), 7; and Susan Plann, *A Silent Minority: Deaf Education in Spain, 1550-1835*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 17.

²⁷ See Plann, *A Silent Minority*, endnote #23, where she references Augustine, *De quantitate animae liber unus*, chapter. 18, quoted in Edward Allen Fay, “What Did St. Augustine Say?” *Annals* 57 [January 1912]: 119.

²⁸ Plann is a hearing professor who has taught in the area of Spanish and Portuguese languages. Her bio explains, “Her training in linguistics led to an interest in minority language communities and publications on the Spanish deaf community, which she views as a cultural and linguistic minority.” See <https://chavez.ucla.edu/person/susan-plann/>.

too should be effective for communication, and it would follow that deaf people could learn and achieve salvation.”²⁹ Unfortunately, however Augustine’s words “taken out of context, were widely interpreted to mean that deaf people could not be taught the Christian faith.”³⁰ Therefore, exclusion resulted and “for more than a thousand years, Deaf people were not allowed to be baptized and to become members of the Church.”³¹

The ministers of the Church did not initially recognize which were hearing babies or which were deaf babies; so, they baptized all the infants. Later they found who was deaf and they could not give them First Communion. Deaf people could not receive the Sacraments including Penance and at times Marriage. Physically disabled people and blind people could hear the Word of God and speak in response, thus it was believed that they could have faith and give oral consent. They could be baptized, go to confession, and could attend Mass. Deaf people would be among the most marginalized and excluded people.

The medieval Church was influenced by Aristotle thanks to the reintroduction of his works to Europeans by Muslim scholars. Like with the words of Augustine, Aristotle too was pulled out of context and “Although Aristotle never wrote that deaf people could not be taught, in time his remarks came to be so construed, and the belief that deaf individuals were ineducable, wrongly attributed to him, was widely accepted.”³²

Curiously, signed languages and the education of the Deaf have their roots in Catholic religious orders. Ponce de León was a Spanish Benedictine monk who learned

²⁹ See Plann, *A Silent Minority*, endnote #23.

³⁰ Susan Plann, “Pedro Ponce de León: Myth and Reality,” in *Deaf History Unveiled*, 7.

³¹ John Vickrey Van Cleve and Barry Crouch A, *A Place of Their Own* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), 4.

³² Plann, *A Silent Minority*, 17; Plann, “Pedro Ponce de León,” 7.

some sign language in his Benedictine religious community. The monks in the monastery at Oña used 360 signs as their own language to communicate with each other during the Solemn Silence when they were not allowed to speak vocally.³³ From this experience of monastic life, he realized that he could understand what people said not only by hearing but also through their sign language. “For it must have been amply clear to Ponce that speech was not the only possible conveyer of reason: reason could also be conveyed by the hands.”³⁴

Therefore, Ponce de León believed that Deaf people were capable of reason and could receive the Word of God through using sign language. He began to introduce the sign language of the Benedictine community to Deaf children and to teach them how to write and speak. In this manner, they could “hear” the Word of God through his educational way.

What becomes modern Deaf education is traced from Ponce de León “to his Spanish compatriot Juan Pablo Bonet, then to the French abbé Charles-Michel de l’Épée, to the American educator Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, and finally to his youngest son Edward Minor Gallaudet.”³⁵ The National Institute for the Deaf in Paris, the world’s first public

³³ “According to the chronicler of the Order of Saint Benedict, Ponce de León 's order, the monks ‘had learned signs for all the most important things and with them made themselves understood,’ and the fifteenth century *Liber cerimoniarum Monasterii Sancti Benedictine Vallisolenti* described 360 signs that apparently were in use at Oña during Ponce de León 's era.” See Plann, “Pedro Ponce de León,” 7-8 referencing Antonio de Yepes, *Crónica general de la Orden de San Benito* (Salamanca: 1607) 300.

³⁴ Susan Plann, “Pedro Ponce de León : Myth and Reality,” in *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations of the New Scholarship*, ed. John Van Cleve, (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1996), 8.

³⁵ John Vickrey Van Cleve, Review of *Benedictine Roots in the Development of Deaf Education: Listening with the Heart* by Marilyn Daniels. *History of Education Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1998): 96–97. <https://doi.org/10.2307/369680>.

school for the Deaf was founded by l'Épée, and the younger Gallaudet founded the world's only university for the Deaf in Washington DC, and named it after his father.

The role of these Catholic priests in the history of Deaf education was in part motivated by their concern for religious education. Through methods that utilized sign languages, one rooted in Benedictine monastic signs and the other in the sign language of the French Deaf, they demonstrated that the Deaf were able to receive and engage the Word of God through sign. The connection to education alone deserves further study, beyond the scope of this thesis-project. Marcel Broesterhuizen observes, "In times when most Deaf children did not receive school education, Deaf people were often deprived of knowledge of the faith and they were not admitted to the sacraments."³⁶ He goes on to note; however, that "Although school education has made faith more accessible for Deaf people, their participation in the faith community has remained far from easy."³⁷

Studies of Deaf church history tend to focus on Europe and the USA. In her 2021 book *Be Opened! The Catholic Church & Deaf Culture*, Lana Portolano writes, "Deaf people and their signed languages were marginalized through much of history precisely because sign language cannot be expressed in the dominant print and spoken modes."³⁸ Because of the focus of my thesis-project on Deaf Asian Catholics, I was interested in what Portolano had to say about Asia. Her assessment was disappointing, "The story of Deaf Catholic history shifts to Asia and Africa in chapter 13, where many nations are still at the educational or missionary

³⁶ Marcel Broesterhuizen, "Faith in Deaf Culture," *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 307.

³⁷ Broesterhuizen, "Faith in Deaf Culture," 307.

³⁸ Lana Portolano, *Be Opened! The Catholic Church & Deaf Culture* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 5.

stages of deaf ministry.”³⁹

In the chapter entitled “Signs of God in Asia and Africa,” the “signs” seem to be three significant missionaries who served the Deaf in Asia, Fr. Harry Stocks, CSC, Fr. Charles Dittmeier, and Fr. Cyril Axelrod, CSsR. Stock and Dittmeier were hearing and Axelrod was Deafblind. Stocks studied for the priesthood in Scotland and Canada and was sent to Asia. He learned Indian Sign Language and preached the Word of God in sign language throughout India and also visited Deaf Catholic communities in Singapore, Sri Lanka and Hong Kong. Dittmeier is a diocesan priest for the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky. He asked his bishop to allow him to be an associate priest with the Maryknoll missionaries. He was sent to Hong Kong to minister to Deaf people in 1980s. He learned Hong Kong Sign Language and celebrated Mass in sign language for more than ten years. Then he moved to Cambodia and established an educational project for the Deaf because there were no Deaf schools in Cambodia. Axelrod was born Deaf and studied at a Deaf Catholic School in South Africa. He became a diocesan priest and later entered a Redemptorist religious community. After eighteen years of ministering with the Deaf in Africa, he was sent to Asia and learned written Chinese and other sign languages, and ministered to the Deaf in Macau, Hong Kong and the Philippines for years.

There is no denying the good they accomplished in the decades of their committed service to various Deaf communities primarily across Asia, but in relation to Asia, these men were white foreign missionaries and two were hearing. The chapter focuses on them and what they did *for* Deaf people. Portolano admits that “this chapter says little about Deaf Catholics

³⁹ Portolano, *Be Opened*, 16.

in Africa.”⁴⁰ It also says little about Deaf Catholics in Asia. On both continents Deaf Catholics, it seems, are passive objects for evangelization. Surprisingly absent, by name, are women religious, some from missionary orders, others native to Asian countries. This can suggest that their ministries were not as important as the ordained. Finally, also missing are the Deaf laity, the Deaf Church in Asia, communities marginalized even in this chapter. They receive at best a passing reference, “Asian Deaf Catholic associations are particularly active in the Philippines, Singapore, and South Korea, where Catholicism is accepted, and Deaf Catholic leadership has been especially strong. Members of several national associations of Asian Deaf Catholics meet for fellowship, liturgy, and discussion of the challenges to integrating deaf people in church life.”⁴¹

While I appreciate that Portolano mentions myself, ordained in 2007, and Rowland Yeo, OFM ordained in 2015, as the first two Deaf men ordained in Asia, we are hardly “new.” I have ministered as a priest for 17 years, a year shy of the 18 years Fr. Axelrod ministered in Africa.⁴²

Without investigating or presenting perspectives and stories from Deaf Asian Catholics, Portolano’s conclusion reflects a western hearing bias, “From pioneering apostles to large deaf-run international associations, the pattern of deaf evangelization in Asia is

⁴⁰ Portolano, *Be Opened*, 265.

⁴¹ Portolano, *Be Opened*, 263.

⁴² I was disappointed to see incorrect information about me in the paragraph. I was born in 1968 and since 2007 I have been chaplain and pastor. I studied and earned my MDiv at St. John’s University, New York City that was one of the most important moments in my life. While I do not believe the oversights are intentional, it does reinforce the reasons why I write this thesis-project. As Deaf people and Deaf Church we must tell our own stories, and maintain our agency.

remarkably similar to the missionary history of Deaf Catholics in Europe and the United States.”⁴³ In the past, foreign missionaries came to Asia to minister to the Deaf; however, it should not be erased that Deaf people were pioneers and are apostles too.

Deaf Exclusion at the Synod on Synodality

In November 2009, I was one of two representatives sent by the Catholic Church in South Korea to the Vatican for the *Ephphatha! The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church* International Conference organized by the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers. Invited to attend this XXIV International Conference were 498 people, 89 of whom were deaf. The three-day conference was divided into sections examining the themes of: Deaf people in the world, past and present; the medical aspects of deafness; the Deaf family; pastoral care and the Deaf.⁴⁴ Speakers included Deaf and hearing people. Across four sessions there were eight main speakers, two of the four at the first session were Deaf, and the speaker of the third session was Deaf. There were three roundtable sessions that included nine Deaf presenters.⁴⁵ Among the Deaf speakers and presenters were professors, counselors, priests, catechists, parents, a religious sister, a deacon, an artist, and a married couple.

Held in the New Synod Hall, the event was remarkable because of the presence of

⁴³ Portolano, *Be Opened*, 263-64.

⁴⁴ Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, Proceedings of the XXIV International Conference, *Ephphatha! The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church*, (November 19–21, 2009), *DOLENTIUM HOMINUM* (*Journal of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers*) No. 73: 2010, 3-4, https://www.humandevlopment.va/content/dam/sviluppoumano/pubblicazioni-documenti/archivio/salute/dolentium-hominum-en-1-72/DH_73_en.pdf.

⁴⁵ To read the addresses and presentations of the conference see, Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, Proceedings of the XXIV International Conference, *DOLENTIUM HOMINUM*.

Deaf participants and Deaf speakers and presenters on the program. The Final Recommendations offered twelve proposals that sought the “full integration of the of deaf people into the life of the Church.”⁴⁶ The recommendations emphasized “that handicap at the level of hearing which is purely sensorial should necessarily be treated separately from other physical disabilities when one speaks about faith and religious practice.”⁴⁷ On the positive side, several proposals called for Deaf participation: on committees that addressed issues like catechesis, pastoral care, and family (#4, #6); in formation as priests and religious (#10); in liturgy (#5). Such participation required measures that increased accessibility through interpreters (#11), video screens (#9), and the training of clergy and seminarians (#2, #3). The ongoing formation of the Deaf faithful meant the provision of opportunities like courses (#8) and a website (#7).

It is important to raise some concerns too. The medical model of addressing deafness was especially present in the second session. At times it seemed that there was more effort to appeal to hearing people to pay attention to the Deaf and not exclude them than there was to encouraging Deaf people to become more active and assume leadership in the Church. Unfortunately, since 2009, it can feel to Deaf people as if nothing has changed. What frustrated Deaf people in 2009 is not much different than what other Deaf people struggle with in the Church today. This is evident as well in the results of my survey for this thesis-project and in the transcript of interviews from the *Doing Theology from The Existential*

⁴⁶ Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, “Final Recommendations,” XXIV International Conference *Ephphatha! The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church* (19-20-21 November 2009), <https://www.rockforddiocese.org/deafapostolate/files/files/Pontifical%20Council%20f>.

⁴⁷ Pontifical Council or Health Care Workers, “Final Recommendations.”

Peripheries report. In her reflections on this 2009 gathering, Portolano noted, “However, not all recommendations from the Vatican reach their intended audience, and in some cases the audience is not yet prepared to listen. In many nations, including the United States, the Conference of Bishops never sent a letter addressing the special needs of Deaf Catholics as a language minority to each local diocese.”⁴⁸

Eight of the final twelve proposals had appeared in some form in the presentation by a Deaf married couple.⁴⁹ Franco Albiero, like a number of other presenters and speakers, pointed to the exclusion experienced by Deaf people in the Church. “Unfortunately, we deaf people have the impression that we are somewhat neglected.... We are still a part of the Christian community but often we seem to understand that priests and the community are not aware of us and our difficulties in belonging to it.”⁵⁰ At the same time he reminded the hearing church, “We, too, can be evangelisers. Sign language is a language that enables us to reach deaf people in a way parallel to what happens with a spoken language. Our God of the Pentecost, amongst the many languages, certainly also knew sign language.”⁵¹

The active and visible presence of Deaf Catholics at the Vatican in the New Synod Hall in 2009 suggests that expectations for Deaf participation in the Synod on Synodality is not unreasonable. In the continental region designated as Asia, the Asian Discernment and Writing Team for Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences collected opinions and

⁴⁸ Portolano, *Be Opened*, 277-278.

⁴⁹ Franco Albiero and Rita Stesi, “2.1 The Experience of the Albiero Family,” *DOLENTIUM HOMINUM*, 48-49. In his testimony, Albiero identifies that he is there presenting with his wife Tesi Rita, note the byline identifies her as Rita Stesi.

⁵⁰ Albiero and Stesi, *DOLENTIUM HOMINUM*, 47-48.

⁵¹ Albiero and Stesi, *DOLENTIUM HOMINUM*, 48.

suggestions from the Catholic Church throughout Asia. They wrote the Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality issued on March 16, 2023 and submitted it. According to Article 169 of Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality, “significant pastoral care should be provided to... persons with disabilities (PWDs).”⁵²

A close read of the document reveals that there are no mentions about the Deaf or evidence of Deaf people being involved in the process that produced the Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality. The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference seems to see Deaf people as part of “persons with disabilities” and does not seem to realize that Deaf people understand themselves instead as a linguistic minority.⁵³ Therefore it can be inferred that the document sees Deaf people as covered under persons with disabilities who should be cared for pastorally.

Pope Francis encouraged the Church to listen carefully to all the faithful in launching the synodal process in October 2021. The Catholic Church in South Korea listened carefully to the parishioners of the local parishes throughout all the dioceses in South Korea, and in June 2022, twenty-six people, including Bishop Hyun Jun Ok, two religious representatives, and four lay representatives, participated in the national-level meeting for the Synod on Synodality under the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea (CBCK). They read all the collected documents from the local parishes throughout South Korea, discussed, and wrote the final opinions and suggestions. The opinions and suggestions for the Synod on Synodality

⁵² Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), “Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality,” March 16, 2023, <https://www.synodresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ACAS-Final-Document-16-Mar-2023.pdf>.

⁵³ Min Seo Park, “Considerations for Pastoral Ministry,” 29-30.

were submitted to the Pontiff. There is only one statement about Deaf people in the final opinions and suggestions. According to the document, “농인 신자들은 미사 중에서 수어 통역이 더 많이 이루어져 많은 본당에서 이들이 미사 전례에 온전히 참여할 수 있기를 원했다.” In English this translates as “Deaf faithful wanted to participate fully in Mass with sign language interpreters provided in many hearing parishes.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, *The Opinions and Suggestions of the Korean Catholic Church for the Synod on Synodality*, II. Section 4, www.synod.or.kr/synod111.

한국 천주교 주교회의, 세계 주교 시노드 제 16차 정기총회: 한국교회 종합의견서, II 본론 4항, www.synod.or.kr/synod111.

Chapter 2

Telling Our Stories as Source of Our Theologies

Listening is necessary to the synodal process, but it is equally important for marginalized people to find encouragement, opportunities and spaces to tell our own stories in our own way. Stories are sources of theologies as some Asian, Asian diasporic, and Asian North American theologians have demonstrated. The theological scholarship of Grace Ji-Sun Kim, especially as presented in her book *Invisible: Theology and the Experience of Asian American Women*,¹ and of Peter Phan, as told in the volume he co-edited entitled *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*² offer examples and inspiration for the liberating power of story-telling. They illustrate the importance of narrative and experience in developing theologies respectful of Asian contexts.

Storytelling is also an important part of Deaf culture. In this chapter I will draw on my own story in a move consistent with the autobiographical turn demonstrated in *Journeys at the Margin* and an autoethnographic turn illustrated in Grace Ji-Sun Kim in *Invisible*.

Telling Her Korean Story: Grace Ji-Sun Kim

Grace Ji-Sun Kim is a Korean American feminist theologian. She was born hearing and raised in South Korea. When she was a child, she immigrated with her family to Canada to make their life better. Her parents were brought to a local Presbyterian church for Koreans,

¹ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Invisible: Theology and the Experience of Asian American Women*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2021).

² Peter Phan and Jung Young Lee, editors, *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in an American-Asian Perspective*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999).

so she followed them to the church. Kim was baptized and was actively included in the church. She studied theology and obtained a PhD degree in systematic theology from the University of Toronto and became a Presbyterian pastor. She moved to the United States to teach theology to college students.

While St. Anselm perceived theology as faith seeking understanding, Kim perceives her theology as coming from having encountered God through her experiences in Korea and North America. Kim writes, “Theology is autobiographical. We come to know God from our experiences. As we reflect on God from our particular circumstances, we must consider multiple practical and cultural contexts.”³ She explains what she thinks about the definition of theology:

Theology is an experience of God in a culture from one’s personal and contextual point of view. In our comprehension of God, we reflect on our experiences, our praxis, and our cultural context to come to a deeper understanding of how God’s presence is felt on earth. God appears not just to white men but to all people.⁴

Kim tells of her experience of being controlled by males in Korea and whites in North America. Kim’s lived experience is used to develop her Asian American Theology and thus become part of Asian American Theology. When Kim lived with her grandparents and parents in Korea, she experienced a lot of social and family problems.

Kim writes:

In Asian culture, it is very difficult to speak up against abuse. My grandmother and women like her endured in silence. Their society did not value women’s bodies, emotional health, or psychological needs. Abuse is one of the most appalling accepted behaviors that has remained in Korean culture across generations. It is understood that women are abused at the hands of their husbands and fathers, and it is understood that they will just

³ See Kim, *Invisible* 154. Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 46.

⁴ Kim, *Invisible*, 126.

suffer through it, work through it, and succeed through it.⁵ She explains how women are expected, in a patriarchal culture, to be “obedient, subservient, and enduring of suffering.”⁶ Kim writes, “Women endure pain silently and privately, as being vocal is a sure way of to bring shame onto themselves and thereby their whole family.”⁷ Rooted in Confucian understandings of obedience, Koreans were strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy that the role of women was to take care of their husbands and children, as housewives and women could not have control over men. Korean women were not encouraged to do advanced studies.

Other Asian male students I encountered who knew of my predicament told me to quit my PhD studies- as if my degree meant nothing to me. They thought that as a newly married woman, I had an obligation to stay home and raise children. They wanted to keep women inside, residents of a domestic life rather than a professional or academic one, just as women were during Confucian times in Korea.⁸

Kim was not asked before she was born whether she wanted to be male or female. Kim experienced that maleness was more important than femaleness in her contexts and males used gender to exercise control over females in Korea. She might have thought that women were equal to men in North America. She immigrated to North America and studied with students from all countries around the world. She experienced that not only in Korea but also in North America, Korean women were not treated as equals to men.

Korean American women do not come to live on the margins by choice but are forced into this existence. Korean American women feel this, even as members of second, third, or fourth generations that continue to live in America. White society still does not fully accept Korean American women

⁵ Kim, *Invisible*, 21.

⁶ Kim, *Invisible*, 21.

⁷ Kim, *Invisible*, 21.

⁸ Kim, *Invisible*, 116.

as part of the dominant society, as they are made out to be perpetual foreigners. On the one hand, they can never speak English well enough to appease Americans; on the other hand, they cannot be fully accepted into Korean culture because they speak Korean with an American accent.⁹

Since Korean men used to control their spouses, children, younger people in their communities and those who had less power in Korea, they did not feel marginalized there. Ironically, they immigrated to North America and there felt marginalization. Kim explains, “Euro-Americans only allowed Asian Americans to exist in the margins because of discrimination and fear. As a result, Asian Americans are made less worthy of God and less worthy in society. Asian Americans are understood as perpetual foreigners.”¹⁰ Not only Korean and Asian American women were marginalized, but Korean and Asian American men also. Kim writes however that “Asian American women are further discriminated, as a white male God doubly marginalized them based on race and gender.”¹¹ Confucian philosophy was not the only thing that caused men and women to be considered in relationships of superiors and inferiors. One other thing also caused people to feel that they were marginalized.

Asian American women are doubly marginalized by their own Asian culture and Western culture. They have been subjected to traditional patriarchy, and for too long- like all minority women-they have had to battle undignified depictions of who they are. Alone, they had to adapt in a cross-cultural setting, shifting expectations of sex and race in their ethnic communities and in the world.¹²

Asian American women are created by God just as Eve was created. “We are all created in the image of God. This is part of the invisibility equation. Asian American women

⁹ Kim, *Invisible*, 53.

¹⁰ Kim, *Invisible*, 155.

¹¹ Kim, *Invisible*, 155.

¹² Kim, *Invisible*, 158.

bear the image of God, yet they continue to be marginalized, subjugated, oppressed, and made invisible by the church.”¹³ Even though Asian American men and women are children of God, they still feel that they are marginalized by European Americans in the church because “Eurocentric theology is centered on whiteness. White people have defined, developed, published, and stated what theology is.”¹⁴ That is how Asian American theologians, including Kim, began to develop an Asian American theology from their experiences. They claimed that Asian Americans should not be marginalized by European Americans as all people were created by God to be equal. Kim writes, “Just as liberation from patriarchy is for both women and the men who oppress them, liberation from white supremacy is for both Asian Americans and the whites who continue to oppress them.”¹⁵

Just as there are three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; however, there is one God in three persons, there are many races in the world; however, we are one family in God. No matter which race one is, we have the right to be liberated from those who oppress, discriminate and marginalize. God has welcomed all people as one family to the church and kingdom of God. Kim writes,

The theological concept of invisibility is explored to understand how the marginalized and outcasts can be welcomed into the kingdom of God. Invisibility is a spiritual issue. People of color, women, and queer and disabled persons have been made invisible throughout much of church history, and even in our modern times, the marginalized still struggle. Being part of God’s kingdom is being given agency, voice, and visibility so that all people are welcome into the church and kingdom of God.¹⁶

¹³ Kim, *Invisible*, 150.

¹⁴ Kim, *Invisible*, 127.

¹⁵ Kim, *Invisible*, 126.

¹⁶ Kim, *Invisible*, 158.

Kim claims negative and oppressive attitudes have “infiltrated into the churches in Korea and the United States. Women are expected to carry a pose of obedience in the Korean American churches. The gender roles are more clearly defined in churches as many congregations are still resistant to women leaders or pastors.”¹⁷ Kim draws attention to the use of language “We cannot achieve any level of equality between men and women if our language about God remains masculine.”¹⁸ She believes that the liberation of God language from masculinity “will help work toward Korean American women’s liberation in the church.”¹⁹ She weaves her own story, and the story of her mother throughout *Invisible* in ways that suggest possibilities for how Asian Deaf Catholics, myself included, can narrate our own stories as individuals and communities of faith.

Telling His Story: Peter Phan

Peter Phan is a Vietnamese American theologian and has been a Catholic priest in the United States. He was born in Vietnam; however, he had to escape from his home country because of the war. Phan experienced being educated by non-Asians. His thoughts have been influenced by white theologians. He explains that even though he has lived in the United States for many years, he still experiences being marginalized and dominated because of his Asian race. He has developed his own Asian theology by incorporating his own story.

Vietnam was invaded and controlled by France; therefore, it was influenced by French

¹⁷ See Kim, *Invisible*, 118; Grace Ji-Sun Kim, “Korean American Women and the Church: Identity, Spirituality, and Gender Roles,” *Feminist Theology*: 29(1), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735020944893>.

¹⁸ Kim, *Invisible*, 120.

¹⁹ See Kim, *Invisible* 120; Kim, “Korean American Women and the Church.”

culture. French people introduced Catholicism to Vietnamese people. Under colonization, Vietnamese culture was mixed with the French culture, and French culture, including language, education, religion and philosophy, was considered superior in Vietnam. Phan reminisced about the impact of this colonization on his childhood,

I not only had to use French as my mother tongue, but also to study French literature, history geography, art, and way of life. Textbooks were the very same ones approved by the French Department of Education and used throughout France and its colonies. I memorized the names of all of France's kings and queens, military victories and defeats, rivers and mountains and valleys that every French schoolchild must know.²⁰

Phan did not have the opportunity to study non-French subjects. He says, "Meanwhile I learned nothing of Vietnam's history and geography and literature and art. Ancestors that gave birth to our nation were nameless ghosts to me."²¹ Phan went to Rome to study for the priesthood and realized that theology was developed by European theologians. Writing about his experience in Rome, he reflects:

While residence in Europe and theological studies in Rome vastly expanded my intellectual horizon, they removed me further from my own cultural roots. Cultural and religious pluralism was an unknown category in the theological language of the day, at least at our university, and no course was offered in Asian theology and history. I remained as ignorant as ever of Vietnamese and other Asian cultural and religious traditions. Fortunately, one thing seemed to remedy my heavily Roman Catholic and Eurocentric theological education.²²

Phan did all the Western studies in both Vietnam and Rome. Also, he moved to the United States and continued to do Western studies. His physical body was Vietnamese; his

²⁰ Phan, "Betwixt and Between," "Betwixt and Between: Doing Theology with Memory and Imagination," in *Journeys at the Margin*, 116.

²¹ Phan, "Betwixt and Between," 116.

²² Phan, "Betwixt and Between," 119.

invisible intelligence was like a European American. Phan writes, “I was trained to think and behave like a French boy and to live, vicariously, in my adopted fatherland.”²³ He goes on to explain, “I was subtly brainwashed to look upon anything Vietnamese as uncouth and barbarian. I was betwixt and between two cultures and worlds, belong to neither and yet somehow being part of both.”²⁴

Phan uses this experience to do theology differently, “Theology betwixt and between is theology done with both memory and imagination; it is contemplating the past and creating the future at the same time.”²⁵ Theology that was created by European theologians has been used as sources for those who have studied for the priesthood and become theologians throughout the world. European and European American theologians might not have developed Asian theology and Asian American theology, but Asian theologians and Asian American theologians studied Western theology. In order to develop Asian theology and Asian American theology, they used their experiences and memories as sources. Phan writes, “Both memory and imagination in their mutual interaction are indispensable tools for theology. Without memory, theology would be empty; without imagination, it would be blind.”²⁶ His experience was a source for his doing Asian American theology. Asian American theology helped him to remember who he was and where he came from. It helped decolonize him from Eurocentric theology and the supremacy of the whites.

²³ Peter C. Phan, “Betwixt and Between,” 116.

²⁴ Phan, “Betwixt and Between,” 117.

²⁵ Phan, “Betwixt and Between,” 114.

²⁶ Phan, “Betwixt and Between,” 115.

Telling My Own Story

Like me Kim is Korean and like me Phan is an Asian Catholic priest. Like me both theologians are from Asia and have spent influential time in higher education and ministry in the USA. But they are hearing and I am Deaf, and I will be returning home to continue my ministry with Deaf communities in the Archdiocese of Seoul and in the greater context of Asia.

Not only are women and Asians still oppressed and dominated, but also Deaf people are still oppressed and dominated. I have my experience of being controlled by hearing people. For example, even though I am Deaf, I was forced to learn how to speak orally like hearing students do, and I was not allowed to use sign language. Hearing people believe that Deaf people, who cannot hear and speak well, cannot get an education and jobs. When I was a teenager, I wanted to become a Catholic priest but I was told that it was impossible for Deaf people to be ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood.

Some people may think that my family members are all Deaf people. I am the only Deaf person in my family. My parents, one older brother and one older sister were hearing. I was born hearing and two years later I became deaf. The reason why I became deaf is that, according to my parents, I fell ill and lost my hearing due to a medicine I was given.²⁷ I could have learned how to speak when I was an infant; however, after I became deaf, I could no longer hear and lost an opportunity to learn how to speak. I did not realize that I was deaf myself until I entered an elementary school because I do not remember what I did during my infancy and very early childhood. I was curious how my parents felt when I became deaf; however, they never shared their experience with me, I learned after they passed away.

²⁷ Pamela Hill Nettleton, "Words Made Flesh," *U.S. Catholic* (September 2022):11.

According to my older brother and older sister, when my parents learned that I became deaf, they were shocked and immediately brought me to hospitals throughout South Korea. Unfortunately no doctors could cure me. My parents cried a lot and were pained in the heart; however, they accepted my deafness and took care of me. They met the challenges, including prejudice, myth, and superstition, which made them suffer terribly. At the time when I was an infant, generally people were influenced by Confucianism and they were conservative in South Korea. They believed that the reason why families had disabled or deaf children was that they did bad things, so they could not be blessed but had bad fortunes.²⁸ “Others see disability as a punishment by supernatural forces including karma or God.”²⁹

Buddhism was introduced from India through China to Korea about 1,500 years ago. It was the largest religion in South Korea. Korean Buddhists had learned about karma meaning in Sanskrit the force created by a person’s actions. It was believed in Buddhism to determine what that person’s next life would be like; they believed that karma exists. Buddhists felt sympathy and pity for deaf people when they looked at them because they believed that a deaf person’s previous life was immoral and evil.³⁰ The issue of karma might make deaf people feel their present life would be meaningless and that deaf people were inferior to hearing people; it might make their parents feel ashamed of having them.

²⁸ Jina Chun, Annemarie Connor, John F. Kosciulek, Trenton Landon and Jinhee Park, “Career Development for Youth with Disabilities in South Korea: The Intersection of Culture, Theory, and Policy,” *Global Education Review*, 3, no. 3 (2016), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A548323173/AONE?u=nysl_oweb&sid=googleScholar&xid=0346954e.

²⁹ Chun et al.

³⁰ Acharya Shree Yogeesh, “Why are People Born Deaf? Exploring the Spiritual Aspect of Karma and Past Lives,” YouTube video, 10:15, May 17, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZySPCmBPLNw>.

Some hearing people tried to avoid deaf people because they were afraid of getting bad luck and bad fortune from deaf people. “Individuals and families experience a range of feelings, thoughts, and emotions in reaction to disability ranging from shame and helplessness to admiration and acceptance.”³¹ Some hearing people were advised by their hearing parents not to marry deaf spouses because the parents were afraid that they might have deaf children if they marry deaf spouses. The perspective and attitude of the hearing people were negative toward deaf people.³² Therefore, Deaf people were not friendly toward and familiar with hearing people; they were not welcome in the hearing community and hearing society. Also they were not hired by companies in which hearing people worked and were not allowed to get educated with hearing students at hearing schools including colleges.³³ There was no hope for Deaf people. My parents’ relatives and friends learned that I was deaf and felt sad and sorry for them; they would not say, “That is okay.” That made my parents feel powerless and hopeless, and made them feel ashamed; however, they did not care about what other people thought and said, and they believed that I could do all things except hear as well as hearing people do; therefore, they decided to take care of me.

When I got ready to enter an elementary school, I was supposed to go to a school for the Deaf in Seoul and live in the dormitory of the school; however, my parents did not want

³¹ Chun et al, “Career Development for Youth with Disabilities in South Korea.”

³² David A. DeLambo, Kananur V. Chandras, Debra Homa, Sunil V. Chandras., “Adolescent Attitudes Toward Disabilities: What Every School Counselor Needs to Know,” *Georgia School Counselors Association Journal*, 14 (2007): 30-38, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ900079.pdf>.

³³ 안경환, “장애인의 차별받지 않는 나라를 향한 꿈,” *신동아*, 2012년 4월 20일. Kyunghwan Ahn, “A Dream For A Country Where People With Disabilities Are Not Discriminated Against,” *Shindonga*, April 20, 2012, <https://shindonga.donga.com/society/article/all/13/111107/1>.

me to live separately. They sent me to a nearby elementary school for hearing students instead of a deaf school. There I was the only deaf student at the school. When I was in class, I could not hear anything from the teacher and students and I could not understand what the teacher explained. I could not communicate with my classmates. So, I realized that I was different from them; I was deaf. The teachers did not teach me by myself how to write, read, and speak. When the teacher was teaching in class, I asked my classmates to help write for me what the teacher said; however, they did not help and ignored me. I learned nothing and could not write and read. Whenever the classmates looked at me, they laughed or mocked me. I did not understand why they scoffed at me and felt that I was like a monkey in a zoo. My classmates did not try to make friends with me, and I also did not try. So, I always felt lonely like a Trappist monk even though I was with my classmates and teachers.

My father was a professional soldier for thirty years. He frequently moved to different military bases, so his family had to follow him and move to the residences near to his army bases. I had to transfer to hearing schools three times until I graduated from elementary school and middle school. When I transferred to another hearing school, my new classmates did not welcome me because they thought that I was a strange student. They tried to communicate with me; however, they learned that I could not write and read, and gave up trying to make friends. They despised me and left me alone, so I was hurt and felt lonely and thought that I was the only deaf person in the world. I could have said to my parents that I was not happy with the hearing schools; however, I did not do so because I did not want them feel hurt and cry. I transferred to another hearing school again and my new classmates looked at me as an interesting student because they had never seen deaf people. They did not want to play with me for fun. When they played soccer, they did not want me to join them. They thought that they would get nothing worthwhile out of me.

In 1976, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared that 1981 would be the International Year of Disabled Persons, and encouraged all people around the world to pay attention to Disabled Persons.³⁴ So, a broadcast station launched a movie called "...And Your Name is Jonah"³⁵ throughout South Korea about the life of a Deaf American boy. As sixth grade student, I accidentally watched the movie. According to the movie, the Deaf child had been unhappy because he could not communicate with his family. His parents brought him to a school for the Deaf. The Deaf boy saw Deaf students communicating with each other in sign language. A Deaf teacher saw him and learned that he came to the school for the first time and did not know sign language. The teacher met him and began to teach sign language to him. He learned it well and tried to communicate with the other Deaf students. They understood his signs and welcomed him. So, the Deaf boy became happy and joyful. When I watched the movie, I was surprised that the Deaf boy was like me because I had never thought that there were many Deaf people in the world. The movie gave hope to me, so I wanted to meet Deaf people and learn sign language.

My parents believed that I could be like a hearing person, so they encouraged me to practice speaking orally and to write instead of going to a Deaf school and learning sign language. No teachers and tutors personally taught me to write and speak orally and I studied by myself until I was in the ninth grade, but it did not work out. In order to be a high school

³⁴ "The International Year of Disabled Persons 1981," United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs Disability, accessed December 28, 2023, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/the-international-year-of-disabled-persons-1981.html#:~:text=In%201976%2C%20the%20General%20Assembly,rehabilitation%20and%20prevention%20of%20disabilities>.

³⁵ Richard Michaels, *...And Your Name is Jonah*, (Los Angeles, CA: Charles Fries Productions, Inc., 1979). The movie is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ks6zrneO-rU>.

student, I was required to have an interview with some teachers in the nearby hearing high school. When I had an interview with the teachers, they learned that I could not speak and hear. They discussed it and concluded that it would be impossible for me to study at the high school. My parents heard the news and cried a lot. I was happy because I felt that the hearing school was like a prison for me and I would be freed from the school. When my parents asked me where I wanted to go, I quickly responded that I really wanted to go to a deaf school as I remembered from the movie. Finally, they accepted my wish and supported my hope.

I entered a deaf school called “Seoul National School for the Deaf”³⁶ as a high school student. There were 60 Deaf classmates including me in class. My Deaf classmates asked me if I could sign, but I did not understand what they said. I needed to learn sign language. Sign language was not approved as an official language by the Korean government, especially by the Ministry of Education, so teachers did not teach sign language as one of subjects at the Deaf school. The Korean government viewed sign language as one educational method for Deaf Education and as one communication method for the Deaf community. Deaf students could learn Korean, Mathematics, Science, English, Japanese, Sociology, Ethics, Physical Education, Art, and Vocational Education and so on; however, they never learned Korean Sign Language at the Deaf school. They learned Korean Sign Language from Deaf senior students and Deaf graduates, not in class, but during break time and at the dormitory after they entered the school as elementary students. Their sign language skills were excellent.

When some hearing teachers were teaching subjects to Deaf students in Korean Sign

³⁶ “Seoul National School for the Deaf,” Seoul National School for the Deaf, accessed December 28, 2023, <https://seoulnong.sen.sc.kr/163246/subMenu.do>.

Language as one teaching method, they did not know the vocabulary in sign language, so ironically the Deaf students helped teach sign language to the teachers. Teachers preferred Deaf students to practice writing Korean rather than Korean Sign Language because Korean Sign Language was less used than Korean in South Korea. Deaf students might have felt that Korean was the dominant language and a colonizing language for the Deaf Korean community. The teachers did not teach Korean Sign Language to me in class; my classmates taught me signs during the 10 minute-break time and lunch time. I began to learn Korean Sign language, how to write and read Korean systemically after I entered the Deaf school. I also learned how to communicate with Deaf people in the right way.

My studies at the school changed my life. I was happy to know who I was and felt that I was proud of myself and my Deafness. I also realized that signing language was God's gift.³⁷ At the time, generally hearing people did not want Deaf people to use sign language but to speak orally so that Deaf people could join in the dominant hearing community. Deaf people continued to request that the Korean government to approve Korean Sign Language as another official language and to recognize Korean Sign Language as the native language for the Deaf community in South Korea.

A division of the Deaf school for Deaf high school students provided the vocational education program so that they could get careers and jobs after graduation. There were studies in carpentry, ceramic art, shoemaking, clothes-making, commercial art and so on in the program. I was asked to choose one of them so I could receive intensive training. Before I made a final decision, I discussed it with my parents. They wanted me to be a professional painter or artist like Ki Chang Kim, a Deaf painter and one of the greatest Korean artists, so I

³⁷ Hill Nettleton, "Words Made Flesh," 11.

chose commercial art. The teacher of commercial art carefully looked at my picture and advised me to go to a private art academy to learn how to draw well because I was poor at art.

I went to a private art academy about 5 miles away from the school and learned that the academy had been owned and run by a Deaf art teacher. The teacher taught art to me in sign language. During break time, he hung out with me and we became good friends. I learned that he was Catholic and I wanted to know about Catholicism, so I asked him if he could introduce me to the Roman Catholic Church. I learned a lot from him and became interested in becoming Catholic. I joined in the Sunday school for Deaf students as part of the Sunday school of the local hearing parish. There were about 20 Deaf students at the parish. I studied Catechism and Bible for eight months and received the Sacrament of Baptism with my Christian name, Benedict, at the age of 17. I attended Mass with sign language interpreters at the hearing parish every Sunday. Myself and other Deaf students did not understand the priest's homily even though the interpreters signed well. The homily was not easy for Deaf people to understand, and Korean was not their native language, but it was like a foreign language for them. Deaf students might feel like they were elementary school students taking class at college or law school.

Most Deaf students at the Deaf school were Protestants and were excited to go to Protestant churches for the Deaf because all the pastors were Deaf and they preached very well in Korean Sign Language. The number of Deaf Protestant pastors increased little by little. Many Deaf Protestants were inspired with the Deaf pastor's preaching and could be included actively in religious activities. There were no signing Catholic priests in the Archdiocese of Seoul. So, sign language interpretation was available at hearing parishes; however, Deaf people preferred signing priests.

I went to church and looked at the crucifixion of Jesus, and prayed to Him. In prayer,

I asked Jesus to send me a signing priest. I felt that Jesus said to me, “Why not you?” I replied, “Me?” I had never thought about a priestly vocation.³⁸ For the first time I considered the priesthood. At the time, I knew that Deaf people were allowed to be pastors in Protestant churches; however, it was impossible for Deaf men to become Catholic priests. I believed that if God wanted me to be a priest, He could make me a priest in many ways; the gospel verse came to my mind, “Jesus looked at them and said, ‘for human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God’” (Mark 10:27). I knocked on the door of the Catholic Church in Seoul to ask if I could become a priest, but all the church officials said that Deaf men could not become priests and did not accept me as a seminarian. That made me feel down, and, when I read the Bible, I found a verse that says, “And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren” (Luke 1:36). The verse consoled and comforted me, so I became stronger and did not give up my priestly vocation; I could wait as Elizabeth waited for a baby for so many years.

I waited for about ten years and one day I heard that a Deaf Catholic priest was visiting South Korea, but I did not meet the Deaf priest. My friend told me about the visit of Father Thomas Coughlin. He was born deaf in the United States and was ordained to the priesthood in Baltimore, Maryland becoming the first Deaf Catholic priest in North America in 1977.³⁹ When Fr. Coughlin visited South Korea in the early 1990s, he met Fr. Michael Soono Cheong, a hearing Korean priest for the Archdiocese of Seoul and shared his

³⁸ Hill Nettleton, “Words Made Flesh,” 11.

³⁹ Janis Johnson, “First Deaf Priest Ordained in MD,” *The Washington Post*, May 8, 1977, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1977/05/08/first-deaf-priest-ordained-in-md/baba2394-72c0-4ca3-9c49-e5bd4e47335f/>.

ministerial experience with him. Since he visited South Korea only for a few days, he did not have any opportunity to celebrate Mass and to talk with Deaf faithful.

I felt that God helped prepare me to study for the priesthood through Fr. Coughlin and Fr. Cheong. I met Fr. Cheong, chaplain for the Deaf in the Archdiocese of Seoul, and shared my priestly vocation with him. I was frustrated and struggled with it because the Catholic Church in South Korea dismissed my priestly vocation because of what they saw as my disability. Surprisingly Fr. Cheong was glad to know that I wanted to become a priest and supported my priestly vocation. He said, “There are a lot of doors and if one door is closed, then other doors will be available for you, so don’t give up.” He sent a letter to Fr. Coughlin to introduce me and to ask what I should do for the priesthood, and a few months later he received a letter from him. According to the letter, Fr. Coughlin was happy that I was interested in becoming a priest. I could study for the priesthood in the United States with his support. If I did not have a Bachelor’s degree, I needed to go to Gallaudet University to study philosophy before going to a seminary. Fr. Cheong knew that I did not have a Bachelor’s degree and asked me if I could go to Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.

I hesitated at his request because I did not know English and American Sign Language, and I could not afford to pay for my undergraduate studies. He and I prayed for a while and continued to look for a way that I could study Basic English in order to be enrolled in the undergraduate program of Gallaudet University. A Deaf Korean student in Gallaudet University visited his friends in Korea and accidentally heard from them that Fr. Cheong and I were looking for a way to study Basic English and American Sign Language. He came to see Fr. Cheong and me and described the English Language Institute (ELI) of Gallaudet University and encouraged me to enter the program founded in 1986 for those who wanted to study English as their second language. Fr. Cheong received scholarship funds from his

benefactors to support my academic expenses and sent me to the ELI program at the age of 26. Before I was sent to United States, Fr. Cheong took me to the office for priestly vocations for the Archdiocese of Seoul to introduce me to Fr. Jamoon Kim, director of the office for priestly vocations. Fr. Kim encouraged me to submit a report monthly to him about my academic and spiritual activities in the United States. Fr. Cheong and I met Cardinal Stephen Kim, Archbishop of Seoul. Cardinal Kim said to Fr. Cheong, “You are good at Korean Sign Language and ministering to Deaf people, but is a Deaf priest necessary?” Fr. Cheong responded to him, “Deaf people told me that they really need Deaf priests.” Cardinal Kim said nothing and prayed in silence for a while. Then he said to Fr. Cheong, “It is up to the Holy Spirit and I will pray for his priestly vocation.”

I studied for five years in both the ELI program and the undergraduate program at Gallaudet University, the only Liberal Arts College for the Deaf in the world, and obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Philosophy and Mathematics. Fr. Coughlin looked for major seminaries in the United States so that Deaf seminarians could study theology for the priesthood. He met his hearing priest friend, Msgr. Patrick McCahill, pastor of St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church for the Deaf in New York City and asked him if they could meet Cardinal John O’Connor (1920-2000), Archbishop of New York, to talk with him about establishing a program for the Deaf seminarians. Cardinal O’Connor carefully listened to Fr. Coughlin’s explanation with Msgr. McCahill’s sign language interpretation and became interested in Fr. Coughlin’s new project. Cardinal O’Connor wrote:

With Msgr. McCahill’s support, the enthusiastic agreement of the then-rector of our seminary, Bishop Edwin O’Brien (a position strongly affirmed by his successor, Msgr. Francis McAree), I gave Father Coughlin the nod... . . .If one day enough trained priests can teach them through sign, their seminary may become uniquely theirs. In the meanwhile, we have invited bishops from throughout the United States to use our option, should they identify qualified candidates in their own

dioceses. Nor will candidates from foreign lands be excluded. None of this would have proceeded, of course, without explicit approval by the Holy See and explicitly the Congregation for Catholic Education, responsible for supervising seminaries. I turned to America's good friend, former Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to the United States, Cardinal Pio Laghi, who enthusiastically supported our experiment. What will be the future of the experiment? God writes straight with crooked lines. Who knows what will happen? We do know, of course, however, that the Holy Spirit breathes where the Holy Spirit will, sometimes in tongues of fire, sometimes in a roaring wind, sometimes in a gentle breeze. Neither deaf nor mute is excluded from his love.⁴⁰

I was accepted as a seminarian and enrolled in St. Joseph's Seminary, the seminary for the Archdiocese of New York, located in Yonkers, New York. There were less than twenty seminarians including me in the class. I took theology courses with a stenographer's help for a year. The theology courses were not easy, but I did not give up and was tested. Fortunately I passed all of them; and a few days later, when I heard the news, I was shocked and saddened. According to the *New York Times*, "Cardinal O'Connor died of cardiopulmonary arrest at 8:05 p.m. . . . the death was the result of the tumor and the cancer that he was suffering from."⁴¹ I attended Cardinal O'Connor's funeral Mass and a few days later, received a letter from the rector of St. Joseph's Seminary.

As this academic year draws to a close, it is my sad duty to inform you that the faculty of the Seminary has decided that you should not continue your studies for the priesthood at St. Joseph's Seminary.

⁴⁰ John Cardinal O'Connor J, "Cardinal O'Connor's Viewpoint: The Possibility of Becoming Priests," *Catholic New York*, March 12, 1998, https://www.cny.org/stories/the-possibility-of-becoming-priests,2594?content_source=&category_id=&search_filter=&event_mode=&event_ts_from=&list_type=&order_by=&order_sort=&content_class=&sub_type=stories&town_id=.

⁴¹ Peter Steinfels, "Death of a Cardinal; Cardinal O'Connor, 80, Dies; Forceful Voice for Vatican," *The New York Times*, May 4, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/04/nyregion/death-of-a-cardinal-cardinal-o-connor-80-dies-forceful-voice-for-vatican.html>.

The reason for this decision is the overall faculty estimate of the year resulting in a poor prognosis for future success.

I know that this will be a difficult decision to accept. I will pray that God will guide you in your future plans and I hope that you will pray for us as well.⁴²

Beside this letter, the rector of St. Joseph's Seminary also sent another letter to Fr.

Coughlin on the same day. According to the letter:

After consultation with the Office of the Vicar General, the Faculty of St. Joseph's Seminary has unanimously decided that the Program for the training of deaf candidates for the priesthood be suspended indefinitely until certain issues are resolved. Among these issues are:

- 1) That the members of the Faculty believe themselves to be sufficiently competent to handle such a program both personally and institutionally.
- 2) That the candidates be capable of fulfilling the canonical requirements for ordination. Consultation with the appropriate Roman authorities should be undertaken.
- 3) That the next Archbishop of New York believes this program to be viable and endorses its reinstatement.⁴³

If Cardinal O'Conner had lived longer, the program for the training of Deaf candidates for the priesthood might not have been closed and I might have continued to study. When I read the rector's letter, I felt that God did not call me to the priesthood, but He would lead me in another way I would not expect. After I left the seminary, I was about to return to South Korea to make a new life. Fr. Coughlin said, "I do not agree with the rector's decision. The rector and faculty did not understand Deaf culture. They did not call me to have a meeting about me before the rector made a final decision. You have studied hard, so I believe that you will be able to become a priest. Don't give up! I will help look for a seminary for

⁴² Correspondence from Rev. Msgr. Francis J. McAree, S.T.D. to Min Seo Park, May 22, 2000, included as Appendix V in Park, "A Pastoral Ecclesiology for Deaf Ministry," 117.

⁴³ Memorandum from Msgr. Francis J. McAree to Rev. Thomas Coughlin, May 22, 2000, included as Appendix IV in Park, "A Pastoral Ecclesiology for Deaf Ministry," 116.

you.”⁴⁴ He sent letters to other seminaries and theological schools to ask if I could study theology for the priesthood.

While I was waiting for the news from all the theological institutions, I was in the chapel looking at the crucifixion of Jesus and praying. In prayer, I asked Jesus Christ, “What do you want me to be? I left the seminary, you know! If you wanted me to become a priest, why didn’t you make the seminary faculty let me continue studying? If you do not want me to become a priest, please tell me!” I waited for His answer, but Jesus said nothing and looked at me in silence. I accidentally saw a book that was in the chapel and read it. The book was about life of Saint John Maria Vianney. I learned that St. Vianney was asked to leave the seminary in France when he was a seminarian because his Latin was poor and the seminary faculty believed that Vianney would not be qualified to be a priest. Vianney left the seminary and went to the parish where he had attended Mass. The pastor of the parish did not agree with the seminary faculty’s judgment and final decision. He encouraged Vianney not to give up his priestly vocation and asked his bishop if Vianney could study Latin and theology by himself under the pastor’s direction at the parish. The bishop accepted the pastor’s request. When Vianney finished studying all the courses that were required for the priesthood, a theology professor of the seminary was sent to the parish to give him an exam. The professor reported to the bishop that Vianney passed the whole exam. Eventually Vianney was ordained to the priesthood by the bishop. St. John Maria Vianney is the patron for diocesan priests globally. I felt that Jesus encouraged me to read the book and I thought that He would help

⁴⁴ Conversation with Fr. Thomas Coughlin, (Yonkers, NY: June 2000). Fr. Thomas Coughlin was the formation director of the DePaul House for Deaf Seminarians. The formation house was located in Yonkers, NY. I resided with Fr. Coughlin at the house while I studied theology at St. Joseph’s Seminary in Yonkers, NY.

me as He did for St. Vianney through the pastor. I believed that Jesus gave hope to me through the book and He wanted me to become a priest. Fr. Coughlin received letters from the theological institutes and according to the letters, none of them accepted me as a seminarian because I was deaf. He said that the letter of the last school did not come yet and would wait for it. If the last school official did not accept me, I would give up my priestly vocation and return to South Korea.

Fr. Coughlin received the letter from the last school and according to the letter, Father Jean-Pierre Ruiz, STD, chairperson of the department of Theology at St. John's University, New York City, was interested in me and would like to interview me. Fr. Coughlin and Msgr. Patrick McCahill went with me to St. John's University. When Fr. Ruiz interviewed me through Msgr. McCahill's interpretation, he asked a question, "Do you really want to become a priest?" I replied, "Yes, I do." Fr. Ruiz immediately accepted that I would be enrolled in the Master of Divinity program at St. John's University and hired two sign language interpreters and a stenographer for me because the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) required accommodations if Deaf people are accepted as students of the university. I realized that if Fr. Ruiz did not accept me, then my life would have been different and I could not have been ordained to the priesthood. I believed that Fr. Ruiz's decision was God's gift itself.

I was required to take ninety-nine credits for a Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree. So, I spent four years taking theology courses including writing a Master's thesis. When I took the last course, for the Master's thesis I asked Fr. Ruiz what I should write about. He suggested that I should write about Deaf culture and Deaf church. Fr. Ruiz told me that he had a good friend who was a Latin@ theologian who knew sign language and was familiar with Deaf culture and Deaf church. He introduced me to Dr. Carmen Nanko-Fernández, a professor of Hispanic Theology & Ministry at Catholic Theological Union and recommended

that she be the externa reader on my thesis. I wrote a thesis successfully with Dr. Nanko-Fernández's direction. I earned my MDiv degree in Spring 2004. Over the course of ten years, I had studied English, American Sign Language, mathematics, philosophy and theology in the United States and then returned to South Korea with two academic degrees.

The entire time I was in the United States, I reported monthly on my academic and spiritual activities to Fr. Kim, director of the office for priestly vocations for the Archdiocese of Seoul. Generally, the director of the office for priestly vocations was supposed to serve at least three years, up to five years. However, before I went to study abroad in the United States, Fr. Kim was the director of the priestly vocation office, and after I completed my studies and returned to Seoul, he was still the director. He knew well my academic and spiritual affairs and reported frequently to Cardinal Nicholas Cheong, Archbishop of Seoul, his successor Cardinal Stephen Kim about me. Surprisingly he was the director for more than ten years. If he left the position and another priest took over while I was studying in the United States, another priest might not have thought positively about my priestly vocation and might not have proposed that I should be ordained to the priesthood. Fr. Kim was very supportive in my priestly vocation and strongly requested Cardinal Cheong to ordain me a priest. Cardinal Cheong accepted his proposal; however, he was concerned that after I was ordained to the priesthood, I might feel lonely when I lived alone without priest friends and might leave the priesthood for good. So he wanted me to make hearing seminarians my future priest friends and sent me to the Seoul Archdiocesan seminary, Seongshin Campus, the Catholic University of Korea.

There were around three hundred and fifty seminarians there. I had about forty fellow diocesan seminarians and studied, prayed, hung out with them and communicated through gestures, writing and basic sign language for two and half years. Some of my classmates

wanted to learn sign language, so I taught it to them. Five fellow seminarians practiced it a lot and could interpret for me during academic lectures, spiritual lectures, Mass and meetings. They became my future priest friends. Cardinal Cheong heard that reviews from my fellow seminarians' perspectives were positive about my diaconate and priestly ordination. He made the final decision that I would be ordained to the diaconate.

My father died of cancer one day before I would be ordained to the diaconate. I had mixed feelings, gladness and sadness, and wanted to stay at his funeral home for three days. I asked Fr. Chong, who sent me to study abroad, if I could postpone my diaconate ordination. He dissuaded me and encouraged me to be ordained to the diaconate the next day. He did not want the bishop to change his mind and cancel my ordination. There were a number of senior conservative priests who opposed my ordination because of my deafness and their resistance might increase. Even though I had mixed feelings, I was ordained to the diaconate and immediately I went to the funeral home. I felt sad because my father could not witness my diaconate ordination.

After my diaconate ordination, Cardinal Cheong heard from a few diocesan senior priests' suggesting that I should not be ordained to the priesthood because I could not speak vocally while I consecrated the bread and wine to become the Body and the Blood of Christ. Fr. Kim and Fr. Cheong explained to Cardinal Cheong about sign language, as the native language for Deaf people. Sign language was not a communication method, but it was another language in itself. After the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI allowed priests to celebrate Mass in sign language. Deaf priests could use sign language while they consecrated the bread and wine. Cardinal Cheong prayed and discerned before he made a final decision. Even though some conservative priests did not support my priestly ordination, eventually he decided to ordain me. On July 6, 2007, I was ordained to the priesthood by Cardinal Cheong

in Seoul, South Korea at the age of thirty-nine and became the first Deaf Asian priest. I realized that God wanted me to be a priest, so He ordained me through Cardinal Cheong; God used Fr. Cheong, Fr. Coughlin, Msgr. McCahill, Cardinal O’Conner, Fr. Ruiz, Fr. Kim and Cardinal Cheong in order to ordain me.

Retelling the Gospel Story from a Deaf Hermeneutic

Reflecting back on my own journey, in light of my encounters with the stories of Asian theologians Grace Kim and Peter Phan I have come to an awareness of the colonization that each writes about from their respective contexts. While our narratives intersect in many places, my experiences, because of my deafness, cause me to further complicate understandings of colonization. From my perspective, hearing people attempted to, what I call, “hearingize” Deaf people. They did not allow Deaf people to use sign language and forced them to learn how to speak orally. Hearing people did not accept that Deaf people claimed that they had their own Deaf culture and language. Deaf people were forced to be “hearingized” people. For Deaf people, this imposition reinforced a sense that they were inferior to hearing people, who, because of their ability to hear and communicate orally, are somehow superior. These experiences may also lead Deaf people to feel that they were marginalized by God.

When I was a seminarian, I studied theology that was created by hearing theologians. Hearing-centric theology is centered on hearingness. I was brainwashed that God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were hearing. If Jesus, hearing, loved me, why did he leave me, a Deaf person, alone in my struggles? If so, I could have thought that I was marginalized by Jesus. Jesus was hearing and He welcomed a Deaf person. This story, told in the gospel of Mark (7:31-37), is a biblical narrative that is particularly meaningful to Deaf Christians. Jesus did not talk with the Deaf person. He only said, “*Ephphatha* (Be opened).”

How does a Deaf hermeneutic “open up” this text?⁴⁵ In my interpretation, when I read the story, I am wondering if the hearing people had asked the Deaf man if he wanted to hear and speak before they brought him to Jesus. They wanted him to hear again and speak. It can appear that the hearing people did not respect the Deaf man's desire and his agency.

There is no indication in this gospel story that Jesus healed the man because his deafness was against God's will. The hearing people demanded that Jesus Christ heal the Deaf man. Jesus Christ could have refused to accept their demand; rather, he accepted it and led the Deaf man off to another place. When Jesus was about to heal the Deaf man, he did not say, "Hear and speak," or "Let him hear and speak." Instead, he said, "Ephphatha" meaning, "Be opened." "Be opened" is different from the meaning of the words "Hear and speak." If Jesus said "Hear and speak" to the Deaf man, then deafness could be seen as a disability. Jesus's message was not just for the Deaf man; he wanted all the people to open their hearts and minds so that they could receive the Word of God and proclaim it. This implies that physical deafness is not a problem in itself; the problem is that people are not willing to attend to the Word of God.

Deaf people must decolonize a hearing Jesus and a hearing Christianity. They must liberate themselves and hearing people from the notion that hearing and orality bring supremacy. By exploring how select Asian theologians use their own stories in their distinctive theologies, and by including my own story, I propose that our Deaf, Asian, and Catholic perspectives and experiences are sources for doing Deaf Theology and envisioning Deaf Church. At the same time as an Asian Catholic Deaf theologian-minister, my story and

⁴⁵ The following interpretation is an adapted version of what I have already written and published in “Consideration for Pastoral Ministry,” 33-34. It remains relevant to this chapter's focus on narratives.

those of other Deaf Asians expands the sourcing of Asian theologies as well. It de-centers hearing and orality. The call, “*Ephphatha* (Be opened),” from Jesus through the Deaf man, is an invitation to all of us.

Chapter 3

Telling the Story of Deaf Catholics in the Archdiocese of Seoul

This chapter focuses on the history of ministry with the Deaf in Seoul, South Korea, and tells the story of the Ephphatha Deaf parish. It functions as a narrative for understanding the practices of what I have identified elsewhere as Deaf Church.¹ It underscores the importance of marginalized communities telling our own stories.

In the 2000s, there were Deaf Catholic communities in fourteen dioceses throughout South Korea, and, in most Deaf Catholic communities, sign language interpretation was provided during Mass celebrated by hearing priests who did not know sign language. There were no Deaf priests in South Korea at the time; however, there were fourteen Deaf priests in the world. There were about one hundred Deaf Protestant pastors whose native language was the sign language of South Korea (KSL). Some Deaf Protestant pastors established their own Deaf Protestant communities throughout South Korea and were inclusive and active in preaching the Word of God to Deaf people, and therefore the number of the Deaf people who attended the signed worship services increased rapidly.²

Although there were no Deaf Catholic priests, many Deaf Catholics had attended Mass with the help of sign language interpretation at nearby local hearing parishes. The Deaf Catholics did not always understand clearly what the priest said even with sign language

¹ Park, “A Pastoral Ecclesiology for Deaf Ministry;” and Park, “Consideration for Pastoral Ministry,” 26-35.

² 이승환, “박민서 신부 탄생 의미와 전망,” *가톨릭 신문*, 2007년 7월 15일. Seunghwan Lee, “The Meaning and Prospects of the Priestly Ordination of Father Min Seo Park,” *Catholic Times*, July 15, 2007. https://m.catholictimes.org/mobile/article_view.php?aid=160816.

interpreters. Therefore, the number of the Deaf Catholics who attended Mass decreased little by little, and some Deaf Catholics converted to Protestant churches to attend worship in sign language with Deaf Protestant pastors. Some Deaf Catholics wanted to confess their sins to priests, but the priests did not know sign language and the Deaf people did not feel comfortable writing in Korean, their second language. Some Deaf people were frustrated with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Also, following Mass, Deaf people could socialize with hearing people yet they could not communicate with them because of their different languages and limited oral skills. They wanted to talk with Deaf people in sign language and to create their own community.

History of Deaf Ministry in the Archdiocese of Seoul

Deaf ministry is not new in the Archdiocese of Seoul. In 1930s, a German religious sister of Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing, Sr. Caritas Hopfensits, OSB (1913-2005),³ was sent to Won-san, presently located in the eastern part of North Korea, to take care of parishioners and teach religion class.⁴ Sr. Hopfensits accidentally met Deaf people and began to minister to the Deaf in Won-san. That is considered to be the first Deaf Catholic ministry in both North Korea and South Korea. Unfortunately, the Korean War happened in 1950; therefore, the Won-san Deaf ministry no longer existed and Sr. Hopfensits had to leave Korea for Germany.

After the war ceased, Sr. Hopfensits was sent to Donam-dong Catholic parish in the

³ 툇정포교베네딕도수녀회 대구수녀원, *하느님은총의 길, 65년: 툇정포교베네딕도수녀회 대구수녀원 남한정착 65년* (1950-2015), (대구, 분도출판사, 2015), 778. *Dae-gu Priory of Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing, 65th Anniversary Dae-gu Priory of Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing (1950-2015)*, (Dae-gu, South Korea: Benedictine Press, 2015), 778.

⁴ 이정순, *원산수녀원사* (대구, 대구베네딕토수녀회, 2005) 179. Lee Jungsoon, *The History of the Benedictine Sisters in Wonsan* (Daegu, Daegu Benedictine Sisters Publisher, 2005) 179. Translations into English of this material are provided by the author/researcher of this thesis-project, Min Seo Park.

Archdiocese of Seoul to take care of the parishioners. Surprisingly she met a Deaf person who had been a member of the Deaf Catholic community in Won-san. The Deaf man introduced the Catholic Church to his Deaf friends and brought them to Don-am dong Parish. That marked the beginning of Deaf ministry in the Archdiocese of Seoul. The number of the Deaf faithful increased little by little.



Deaf Catholic Community at Donam-dong Parish in 1957-58⁵

In October 1957, Sr. Hopfensits and Deaf people established the Deaf Catholic community belonging to Donam-dong Parish.⁶ Some young Deaf students, who learned catechism from Sr. Hopfensits and were baptized at the same parish, asked Sr. Simon Choonkun Lee, a Korean Sister of the Sisters of Saint Paul of Chartres, if they could establish a Deaf Catholic community at the Myeong-dong Cathedral because the Seoul school for the Deaf was nearer to the Cathedral than Donam-dong parish. The rector of the Cathedral accepted their request through the Korean sister, and therefore they established a Deaf Catholic community belonging to the Cathedral in 1965. On March 2, 1986, the Deaf members of the Donam-dong Deaf community and the Deaf members of the Myeong-dong Deaf community discussed together and agreed that the two communities would be united and founded, “Seoul Catholic

⁵ 서울가톨릭농아선교회, *은총과 함께 60년사*(서울, 가톨릭출판사, 2017) 62-63. Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community* (Seoul: The Catholic Publisher, 2017) 62-63. Translations into English of this material are provided by the author/researcher of this thesis-project, Min Seo Park.

⁶ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 22.

Deaf Association.”⁷ The thanksgiving Mass of founding Seoul Catholic Deaf Association was celebrated by Fr. Sangdo Han, who was born in Spain and was a religious priest for Claretian Missionaries (CMF).⁸ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association was accepted as the Archdiocesan Deaf Catholic Community by Cardinal Stephen Soohwan Kim, Archbishop of Seoul. Caritas for the Archdiocese of Seoul took care of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association.⁹



Seoul Catholic Deaf Association was founded in 1986¹⁰

Fr. Sando Han began to celebrate monthly Mass on Oct 5, 1986 at Ae Hwa School for the Deaf,¹¹ the only Catholic Deaf School in Seoul. Deaf members of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association attended Mass each month.¹²

Deaf members of the Donam-dong Deaf community attended Mass three Sundays each month and Deaf members of the Myeong-dong Deaf community attended three Sundays each month. Sign language interpretation was accessible at Donam-dong Parish; however, it was not

⁷ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 79.

⁸ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 79.

⁹ 김한수, “우리의 사랑은 소리가 필요없습니다,” *조선일보*, 2006년 11월 22일. Hansoo Kim, “Sound is needless for Our Love,” *Chosun News*, November 22, 2006, https://www.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2006/11/22/2006112260660.html.

¹⁰ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 79

¹¹ Aehwa School for the Deaf was founded in 1975 by Sr. Caritas Hopfensits, OSB. <https://aehwa.sen.sc.kr/>.

¹² Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 211.

available at Myeong-dong Cathedral. So, a hearing volunteer helped interpret Mass for Deaf people at the cathedral. The hearing volunteer was CODA.¹³ His name is Michael Soono Cheong and his parents were members of the Don-am dong Deaf community. Deaf members of the Myeong-dong Deaf community needed more sign language interpreters, so Cheong began to teach sign language to hearing people in the 1980s and established a club of sign language interpreters called “Firefly Club” for the Myeong-dong Deaf community.¹⁴

There had been no signing Seoul Archdiocesan priests since 1957 and Deaf people struggled to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation because they could not communicate with hearing priests who did not know sign language. Sign Language interpretation was available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Deaf people did not feel comfortable with sign language interpreters in confession because they did not want to tell their secrets to a third party. So, Sr. Hopfensits asked CODA members if they were interested in the priesthood to minister to Deaf people. Cheong felt that he was called to be a priest and entered Seoul major seminary with Cardinal Stephen Kim’s special permission and support in 1983. Cheong studied philosophy and theology and was ordained a priest on February 4, 1989.¹⁵ Cardinal Stephen Kim appointed Cheong to be parochial vicar of a local hearing parish and chaplain of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association. Fr. Michael Cheong, successor of Fr. Sangdo Han, began to celebrate monthly Sunday Mass in sign language with the Deaf members of Seoul Catholic Association at Aehwa School for the Deaf. His hearing parish was far from the school; therefore, in 1990 Cardinal Kim

¹³ CODA is the abbreviation of Children of Deaf Adults. CODA members are born hearing with Deaf parents and learn sign language from their parents so that they can communicate with their parents. They are a bilingual and bicultural group whose first language can be sign language.

¹⁴ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 75.

¹⁵ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 86.

sent him to another hearing parish, Suyu-dong Parish¹⁶ where many Deaf people lived nearby and it was near Aehwa School. When Fr. Cheong was parochial vicar of Suyu-dong Parish, he asked Fr. Deokje Kim, pastor of the parish if he could celebrate Mass with Deaf people in sign language at Suyu-dong Parish. The pastor accepted his request and then Fr. Cheong began to celebrate Mass in sign language at 2 PM on April 8, 1990.¹⁷ Once he started celebrating Mass at Suyu-dong Parish at 2 PM every Sunday, monthly Sunday Mass at Aehwa School, interpreted Masses at Donam-dong Parish and Myeong-dong Cathedral were no longer celebrated.¹⁸

Fr. Cheong and board members of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association agreed that an office for the association was necessary and they asked Sr. Hopfensits if the office of the association could be set up in Caritas Independence Center for the Deaf. Caritas, which was founded by Sr. Hopfensits in Mia-dong, Seoul in 1961, was a training center to help Deaf people who were homeless people get jobs, learn how to manage money, and live independently.¹⁹ In 1975, Sr. Hopfensits founded Aehwa School for the Deaf in the location of the Caritas Independence Center, so she bought new land of 12,000 sq ft in Suyu-dong and built a new building. The Caritas Independence Center for the Deaf homeless was moved to the new building in 1976.²⁰ Sr. Hopfensits and her Benedictine sisters ran the center; and the Deaf homeless resided there. In

¹⁶ Website of Suyu-dong Parish in the Archdiocese of Seoul, <http://syc.or.kr/syc/>.

¹⁷ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 216.

¹⁸ “서울가톨릭농아선교회: 수화미사봉헌,” *가톨릭신문*, 1990년 4월 1일. “Seoul Catholic Deaf Association: Sign Language Mass,” *Catholic Times*, April 1, 1990.

¹⁹ Dae-gu Priory of Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing, *65th Anniversary Dae-gu Priory of Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing (1950-2015)*, 182.

²⁰ “이웃사랑 집념 불태우는 애덕농아자활원,” *가톨릭신문*, 1980년 11월 2일. “Caritas Independence Center for the Deaf Homeless: Love of neighbor,” *Catholic Times*, November 2, 1980, https://m.catholictimes.org/mobile/article_view.php?aid=210317.

1990, the Korean government built permanent rental apartments for people who were homeless, poor, and low-salary workers.²¹ Deaf people who had who lived in the Caritas Independence Center moved to the apartments. Therefore, the number of the Deaf residents at the center decreased and there were some empty rooms in the center. So, Sr. Hopfensits agreed that the office of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association would be established in the center. The office was opened on April 17, 1989.²²

While Cheong was a seminarian, he was encouraged by the seminary faculty to teach Korean Sign Language to seminarians and began a sign language class. The number of the seminarians who learned sign language increased little by little, and in 1985 Cheong founded a club called “Cornerstone” for seminarians who were interested in ministering to Deaf people and people with disabilities at Seoul major seminary. When the academic conference was held at the seminary, Cheong gave a lecture about Deaf Ministry of South Korea in 1985.²³ The seminarians were trained to be sign language interpreters through the Cornerstone club and some seminarians interpreted sign language for the Deaf members of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association when the annual events, including the Priestly Vocation Day and Homecoming, were held at the seminary. They participated in the events, including pilgrimage and youth camp programs, which were hosted by Seoul Catholic Deaf Association.²⁴ They frequently communicated with Deaf people in

²¹ 배문호, “최초의 사회주택, 영구임대주택,” *서프라이즈뉴스*, 2002년 5월 22일. Moonho Bae, “Building First Social Housing: Permanent Rental Apartments,” *Surprise News*, May 22, 2022. <http://www.surprisenews.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=267944>.

²² Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 212.

²³ “가톨릭대 개교 백주년 기념행사: 예비사제로서 미래교회 조명,” *가톨릭신문*, 1985년 11월 10일. “100th Anniversary of Seoul Major Seminary: Seminarians’ Perspective on Future Church,” *Catholic Times*, November 10, 1985. https://m.catholictimes.org/mobile/article_view.php?aid=295207.

²⁴ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 78.

sign language and they taught sign language to new seminarians at the seminary. After the seminarians were ordained to the priesthood, they celebrated a thanksgiving Mass in sign language with Deaf people.

One of them was Fr. Heejun Shin who was ordained a priest in 1998. Fr. Heejun Shin was appointed as parochial vicar of Nakseongdae Parish, a local hearing parish, located in the southern part of Seoul. He asked Seoul Catholic Deaf Association to send sign language teachers to Nakseongdae Parish (later its name was changed to Hangun-dong Parish) to teach sign language to his parishioners. Fr. Shin and the sign language teachers began a Korean Sign Language class. Fr. Shin began to celebrate Mass in sign language and founded the Parochial Deaf community called “Fingertips Love,” at Nakseongdae Parish in February, 1999.²⁵ After Fr. Shin moved to another parish, sign language interpreters began to interpret Mass at Nakseongdae Parish. The parochial Deaf community, “Fingertips Love” has been active and the interpreted Mass has been provided at Hangun-dong Parish since 1999. Some priests, who learned sign language at the seminary, began to celebrate in sign language and opened sign language classes with the support of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association at local parishes; however, after they left the parishes, Mass in sign language and sign language class were no longer offered. Some priests could communicate with Deaf people in sign language while the Sacrament of Reconciliation was celebrated. About twenty Seoul Archdiocesan priests, who studied Korean Sign Language at Seoul Major Seminary, can sign.²⁶

²⁵ 이나라, “손끝에서 울려 퍼지는 사랑언어: 낙성대성당 “수화미사,” *함께 걸음*, 2001년 4월 11일. Nara Lee, Language of Love came from Fingertips: Mass in Sign Language, Nakseongdae Parish, *Cowalk News*, April 11, 2001. https://www.cowalknews.co.kr/bbs/board.php?bo_table=HB03&wr_id=9903&page=408&device=pc.

²⁶ 김한수, “열 손가락으로 미사 드리는 이 곳, 누구든 오세요,” *조선일보*, 2019년 8월 19일. Hansoo Kim, “Mass is

Fr. Michael Cheong celebrated Mass in sign language with about one hundred fifty Deaf people and hearing volunteers at Suyu-dong Parish at 2 PM on Sundays from 1990 to 1992 and was sent to another local parish called “Nonhyun-dong Parish,” located in the southeastern part of Seoul. Fr. Clement Yeonjun Kim was appointed as parochial vicar of Suyu-dong Parish to take over Fr. Cheong’s position. He learned sign language from Fr. Cheong at the seminary when he was a seminarian and he celebrated Mass in sign language on Sundays from 1992 to 1994. Fr. Cheong was appointed as assistant director for Caritas in the Archdiocese of Seoul in 1994 and then he went to Suyu-dong Parish to help celebrate Mass in sign language. Another priest, Luke Minsoo Ko, who learned sign language at the seminary, was sent to Suyu-dong Parish in 1996 and celebrated Mass with Deaf faithful on Sundays.²⁷

The Deaf board members of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association would host event activities after Mass, so they needed a place including a social hall and a dining hall. However, except for some small lecture rooms, the auditorium, social hall, and dining room at Suyu-dong Parish were unavailable for Seoul Catholic Deaf Association because the hearing parishioners always used them for their events. The Caritas Independence Center for the Deaf was about 0.5 mile away from Suyu-dong Parish. There were not only family rooms for the Deaf homeless but also an auditorium and a dining hall in the center. The board members of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association asked Sr. Hopfensits if the auditorium and dining hall could be used for event activities. Sr. Hopfensits accepted their request and said that they could use them not only on Sundays but also weekdays if they needed to. Fr. Cheong blessed the rooms on May 3, 1992, and

Celebrated in Ten Fingers Here, All Are Welcome,” *Chosun News*, August 19, 2019.
https://www.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2019/08/19/2019081900025.html.

²⁷ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 237.

then the Deaf members of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association began to use them.²⁸ After Deaf people attended Sunday Mass at Suyu-dong Parish, they walked to the Caritas Independence Center and participated in activities including, meetings, Legio Mariae, lectures, Bible class and various events. Refreshments and food were served in the dining hall.

The board members of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association suggested that it would be helpful to use the auditorium of the Caritas Independence Center for Sunday Mass instead of Suyu-dong Parish. Sr. Caritas agreed with the board members and said that Seoul Catholic Deaf Association could use it permanently. Mass in sign language at Suyu-dong Parish was no longer celebrated and Mass in the auditorium started on Oct 6, 1997.²⁹ Fr. Cheong as chaplain for Seoul Catholic Deaf Association and other signing priests took turns celebrating Mass in the auditorium until I (Fr. Benedict Minseo Park) was appointed as chaplain of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, successor of Fr. Cheong, in 2007.

Story of the Ephphatha Deaf Parish

I was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Seoul on July 6th, 2007 and became the first Deaf Asian priest.³⁰ Since Cardinal Nicholas Cheong, the archbishop of Seoul, knew that I was Deaf, he appointed me as chaplain of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association. I was sent to the principle Archdiocesan Deaf Catholic community, the Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, and began to celebrate Mass in sign language in the chapel, (originally in the

²⁸ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 92.

²⁹ Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 241.

³⁰ 이한수 & 허영환, “아시아 첫 청각장애인 신부 탄생,” *조선일보*, 2007년 6월 26일. Hansoo Lee & Younghun Heo, “First Deaf Asian Priest,” *Chosun News*, June 26, 2007, https://www.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2007/06/26/2007062600419.html: “First Deaf-Mute Priest in Asia,” *Catholic News Agency (CAN)*, July 20, 2007, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/9931/first-deaf-mute-priest-ordained-in-asia>.

auditorium), in the Caritas Independence Center in December, 2007.



*Caritas Independence Center for the Deaf Homeless in Suyu-dong, Seoul, South Korea.*³¹

When I celebrated Mass at the chapel, there were between 120 and 130 attendants. A few months later, many Deaf people heard that a Deaf priest had celebrated Mass in sign language, so they came to see my signed preaching and were impressed with it. They began to attend Mass on Sundays. The number of the Deaf people increased little by little to between 150-180 people in attendance. The capacity of the chapel was 80-100 persons only.³²



*The Chapel in Caritas Independence Center for the Deaf Homeless in Suyu-dong.*³³

³¹ 에파타성당 성전건립위원회, *에파타성당 성전건립 기록지*, (서울: 에파타성당, 2020), 6. Architectural Team of the Ephphatha Parish, *Documents of Building Ephphatha Parish*, (Seoul, South Korea: Ephphatha Parish, 2020), 6.

³² 강지원, “청각장애 사제와 신자들: 눈빛과 손짓으로 미사 올리는 ‘에파타 성당,’” *한국일보*, 2019년 8월 26일. Jiwon Kang, “Deaf Priest and Parishioners: ‘Ephphatha Parish’ Where Mass is Celebrated with Eyes and Hand gestures,” *Hankook News*, August 26, 2019. <https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201908251508314390>.

³³ 에파타성당 성전건립위원회, *에파타성당 성전건립 기록지*, 6 & 8. Architectural Team of the Ephphatha

It was too small for them, and therefore, I sought permission to enlarge the chapel. The building of the Caritas Independence Center was owned by the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing.³⁴ Unfortunately Sr. Hopfensits passed away in 2005, so I had to meet the prioress of the Seoul priory of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing and ask her if the chapel could be enlarged by the Sisters. However, the prioress said that the Sisters could not afford to redo the building. I asked her if the Sisters could donate the building and the land to Seoul Catholic Deaf Association. The prioress discussed this with the board members of the priory, and some sisters suggested that the Sisters should donate the building and the land to Seoul Catholic Deaf Association because Sr. Hopfensits devoted her life to Deaf people and she collected a lot of money from supporters in order to buy the land and to build the building. All the sisters of the Seoul priory voted, and the result was that the building should be given to Seoul Catholic Deaf Association. The prioress decided to donate the building; however, she needed approval from her superior general in Rome. The superior general of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing came to Seoul for discussions with the board members of the Seoul priory about the building. Unfortunately the superior general did not agree that the building and the land would be given to Seoul Catholic Deaf Association because she believed that the sisters would need the building in the future. Therefore, Seoul Catholic Deaf Association could not enlarge the chapel. I could not continue to celebrate Mass with 150-180 attendants at the chapel which was limited to 80-100 persons only.

Parish, *Documents of Building Ephphatha Parish*, 6, 8.

³⁴ 허연, “청각장애인 위한 에파타성당 건립,” *매일경제*, 2019년 8월 14일. Yeon Heo, “Building Ephphatha Church for the Deaf,” *Daily Economy News*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.mk.co.kr/news/culture/8940394>.

I spoke to the board members of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association about my idea to build a new church building. The board members disagreed with me and persuaded me not to build it because they could not afford to buy new land and to build a new church building. Most Deaf members of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association were low-salary workers or blue collar laborers, unemployed people, and poor people. They could not help run Seoul Catholic Deaf Association themselves, so they encouraged me to give up my plan and to continue to keep the chapel. However, I could not give the idea up.³⁵

I met Cardinal Andrew Yeom, the Archbishop of Seoul and explained to him about the situation of the chapel. Deaf people needed a new church building. Cardinal Yeom listened carefully and prayed in silence awhile. He strongly supported my idea and wanted to offer a new church building; however, if he offered it to Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, then other communities, blind and physically disabled people would demand that he offer them new church buildings as well. He could not offer new church buildings to all the communities, Instead of offering a new church building, Cardinal Yeom encouraged me to go to hearing parishes in the Archdiocese of Seoul not only to ask parishioners to help build a new church building with financial support but also to explain to them about Deaf culture and why a new church building for the Deaf was needed.³⁶ Cardinal Yeom was concerned that hearing parishioners might object to building a new church for the Deaf because they would not consider it necessary since Deaf

³⁵ 김한수, “수화로 진한 감격: 60년만에 우리 성당 지어요,” *조선일보*, 2017년 7월 28일. Hansoo Kim, “Emotion Conveyed through Sign Language: We are Building our Church for the First time in 60 years,” *Chosun News*, July 28, 2017, https://www.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2017/07/28/2017072800136.html.

³⁶ 문미정, “청각장애인 위한 에파타성당: 서울 마장동에 문 열어,” *가톨릭 프레스*, 2019년 8월 26일. Mijeong Moon, “Ephphatha Church for the Deaf Opens in Majang-dong, Seoul,” *Catholic Press*, August 26, 2019, <http://catholicpress.kr/m/view.php?idx=6071>.

people could go to local hearing parishes, where sign language interpretation would be available. I agreed with Cardinal Yeom and decided to go to local hearing parishes in the Archdiocese of Seoul.

Funding the Building of a Deaf Church

The project to build a new church building began in 2010. There were about 230 parishes in the Archdiocese of Seoul. I needed to contact all pastors and parochial vicars. Since I could neither hear nor speak Korean, I could not communicate with the priests who did not know sign language. So I texted or emailed them in written Korean. I asked if I could celebrate Mass in sign language and explain to their parishioners about Deaf culture and the importance of Deaf church at their parishes, but I heard nothing from them. I realized that the project was not easy and was about to give up. Before I gave it up, I went to a local hearing parish and met the pastor who understood Deaf culture well and used Korean Sign Language since he was a seminarian. I shared with him about the Deaf church building project and asked him what he thought. The pastor said that Deaf church was important for Deaf people; therefore, a church building for the Deaf was necessary. He advised me not to give up my project and invited me to his hearing parish to celebrate Mass in sign language with his voice interpretation. The first parish to raise funds for building a new church was Dongdaemun Parish. The parishioners were surprised that I was a Deaf priest because they had never seen Deaf priests like me. They were impressed with Mass and preaching in sign language and they gave a lot of funds that I did not expect.

I asked Fr. Cheong, chaplain for Seoul Catholic Deaf Association (1989-2007) if I could celebrate Mass at his hearing parish to raise funds. Yongsan Parish became the second parish to assist the project. I heard nothing from other pastors but I continued to send texts and emails to them. Finally, some responded. They wanted to invite me to their parishes; however, they were

concerned that their parishioners might not know sign language when I celebrated Mass. I explained that I could celebrate Mass with voice interpreters for hearing parishioners, and then I was welcomed. I went with ten volunteers to their parishes to celebrate usually five Masses in sign language with the hearing parishioners at 6 pm on Saturdays and 6 am, 9 am, 11 am and 6 pm on Sundays.

Many parishioners could understand about Deaf culture and Deaf church; they supported my project and gave a lot of money. The pastors saw my Mass and spoke to their brother priests about it. Some priests called me to come to their parishes because they wanted to help build a new church building. The number of the parishes, where the pastors invited me to raise funds, increased little by little. I went to 135 parishes in the Archdiocese of Seoul. The pastors of the Korean Catholic communities in Los Angeles and New York City USA, Tokyo, Japan, Manila in the Philippines and Buenos Aires, Argentina called me to come to their parishes. So I went with Fr. Vianney Jaeseop Kim, OFM as my sign language interpreter.³⁷ Also pastors of other dioceses in South Korea called me to come to their parishes: the Diocese of Suwon, Diocese of Chuncheon, Diocese of Ujeongbu and Diocese of Incheon. I went to about one hundred fifty parishes for eight years from 2011 to 2019.³⁸ Forty thousand Korean people gave some money and prayed for Deaf church. Out of the 40,000 people I spoke to, a Korean hearing couple who were senior citizens gave one hundred thousand US dollars (100 million Korean won) to Seoul

³⁷ 성슬기, “청각장애인 위한 에파타본당: 새 성당 봉헌,” *가톨릭 신문*, 2019년 9월 1일. Seulki Seong, “‘Ephphatha Parish’ New Church Dedicated for the Deaf,” *Catholic Times*, September 1, 2019, https://m.catholictimes.org/mobile/article_view.php?aid=316565.

³⁸ 양정우, “서울 마장동에 청각장애인 전용 에파타성당 문 연다,” *연합뉴스*, 2019년 8월 14일. Jeongwoo Yang, “Ephphatha Church for Deaf people Opens in Majang-dong, Seoul,” *Yeonhap News*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20190814148900005>.

Catholic Deaf Association.³⁹ While I was celebrating Mass and preaching the homily, they cried and realized that they were blessed even though they were not rich. This generous couple attended the dedication Mass of Ephphatha Church on August 25, 2019. Since the husband passed away in 2022, I have taken care of his wife.

When I went to Gaebong-dong Parish, in the southwestern part of Seoul, and celebrated Mass in sign language, a hearing parishioner, who had helped interpret for the Deaf at Cheolsan Parish in the Diocese of Suwon, was impressed with my Mass. Later he wanted to found a new Deaf parochial community at Gaebong-dong Parish and the pastor of the parish allowed him to found it in 2018 and to interpret Mass for Deaf people at 9am every Sunday morning.⁴⁰

I was able to collect enough money to buy land and to build a new church building; I asked Cardinal Yeom where a new church building should be built and he said that it could be built anywhere in the Archdiocese of Seoul because Deaf members of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association lived throughout the Archdiocese of Seoul and not in any particular local parish. The Caritas Independence Center for the Deaf homeless was located in Suyu-dong, the northern part of Seoul, so some Deaf people, who resided in the southern, eastern, and western parts of Seoul, could not go to the center for Mass because it was too far for them to travel. They attended Mass at local hearing parishes, Hangun-dong Parish and Gaebong-dong Parish instead of the chapel in Suyu-dong.

³⁹ 강지원, “청각장애 사제와 신자들: 눈빛과 손짓으로 미사 올리는 ‘에파타 성당,’” *한국일보*, 2019년 8월 26일. Jiwon Kang, “Deaf Priest and Parishioners: ‘Ephphatha Parish’ Where Mass is Celebrated with Eyes and Hand gestures,” *Hankook News*, August 26, 2019, <https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201908251508314390>.

⁴⁰ “개봉동성당 농아선교회,” 개봉동성당, 2023년 12월 13일 접속했음. “Deaf Community in Gangbong-dong Parish,” Gangbong-dong, accessed Dec 13, 2023. <https://gaebongsd.com/the-deaf/>.

I thought that it would be good to build the church in central Seoul so that Deaf people might not feel that it was too far. After looking for land for a year, I was told about property in Majang-dong, central Seoul about a mile away from the Cathedral in Myeong-dong. Suyu-dong was farther from the Cathedral than Majang-dong. The new land was 500 ft away from the Majang Subway Station. Most Deaf people did not have their own cars and they used the subway for free because of their deafness. Seoul Catholic Deaf Association bought the new land of 10,000 Sq ft⁴¹ for 5 million US dollars (5.5 billion Korean won) in 2015.

Designing a Deaf Church Building

I hired professional architects and building contractors and had discussions. The architectural team for the building of the new church consisted of 9 committee members, eight hearing architectural specialists and me. A sign language interpreter was always present. Other Deaf people were not involved in the architectural team; however, they participated by actively praying for the building of a new church.

The architects suggested that the new church building would be like local hearing parishes. But I explained to them that hearing parishioners could hear and see; however, Deaf people could not hear but only see. It was important for Deaf people to see sign language clearly and read written Korean on the monitor and it must not be dark but have light in the new church so that Deaf people could see everything within the church. I shared my experience with the architects and registered building contractors. In the chapel in Suyu-dong, it was sometimes dark in the chapel and the monitor was too small, so Deaf people could not see everything in the chapel. Deaf people could not see my sign language clearly because they saw the back of other

⁴¹ 에파타성당 성전건립위원회, *에파타성당 성전건립 기록지*, 9. Architectural Team of the Ephphatha Parish, *Documents of Building Ephphatha Parish*, 9.

Deaf people. So new seats needed to be set up like stairs in the new church building so that they could see the celebrating priest's signs and the lectors' signs clearly.⁴²

I explained to the architecture specialists that a rectory, small chapel, parish office, lecture classrooms, dining hall, multipurpose room, social hall, auditorium, parking lot, and restrooms also needed to be included. The seating capacity of the church would be for 350 people. The architecture specialists drew up plans.

The new church building is an eight-story building including two floors underground. The whole building is a total of 25,000 Sq ft.⁴³ Part of the first-floor underground is a parking lot and the other part of the first-floor underground contains a dining hall and multipurpose room. The second-floor underground also has a parking lot. Five cars were limited to park on street level. The land was too small, so drivers could not go with their cars into a parking lot underground. Instead, a mechanical system automatically takes the cars without drivers through the elevator to underground lots. It is called "Automated Parking Garages." The capacity of the parking lot underground is 24 cars.

Deaf parishioners go to the dining hall and multipurpose room on the first floor underground after Mass. Deaf volunteers cook and provide lunch to Deaf parishioners. Deaf parishioners socialize with each other. They multipurpose room is used for gatherings of more than 50 people, for example lectures, classes, and meetings.

Above ground, the parish hall and security office are on the first floor. Parish office,

⁴² 김정호, "마장동에 청각장애인 위한 성당 건립," *서울신문*, 2019년 8월 21일. Jungho Kim, "Building a Church for Deaf People in Majang-dong," *Seoul News*, August 21, 2019, <https://www.seoul.co.kr/news/newsView.php?id=20190821029001>.

⁴³ 에파타성당 성전건립위원회, *에파타성당 성전건립 기록지*, 41. Architectural Team of the Ephphatha Parish, *Documents of Building Ephphatha Parish*, 41.

social hall, lecture classrooms and pastor’s office and restrooms are on the second floor. Sanctuary, Eucharistic adoration chapel, and a broadcasting room are on the third floor. The fourth floor consists of the upper sanctuary, where more seating is available, and a family-style suite for guests or retreatants. The rectory is on the fifth floor and two guest rooms for priests are on the sixth floor.



Plans of Ephphatha Parish⁴⁴

In July, 2017, Timothy Kyungchon Yu, Auxiliary Bishop of Seoul celebrated Mass with Deaf people and supporters for the groundbreaking in Majang-dong and the new church building was completed in in August 2019.



Groundbreaking Ceremony in Majang-dong, Seoul⁴⁵

⁴⁴ 에파타성당 성전건설위원회, *에파타성당 성전건설 기록지*, 35, 38, 41. Architectural Team of the Ephphatha Parish, *Documents of Building Ephphatha Parish*, 35, 38, 41.

⁴⁵ 김한수, “수화로 전한 감격: 60년만에 우리 성당 지어요,” Hansoo Kim, “Emotion Conveyed through Sign Language: We are Building our Church for the First time in 60 years,” and 배영민 & 이정훈, “청각장애인 위한 새 성당 첫 삽,” *가톨릭평화신문*, 2017년 7월 26일. Youngmin Bae & Jeonghoon Lee, “New Church for the Deaf Begins Construction,” *Catholic Peace News*, July 26, 2017.

From a Church Building to Ephphatha Parish

The Seoul Catholic Deaf Association paid 10 million US dollars (11 billion Korean won) to the architects and building contractors for construction. Fortunately, Seoul Catholic Deaf Association had no debts.



Construction of Ephphatha Parish⁴⁶

On August 25, 2019, Cardinal Andrew Yeom dedicated the church building and blessed it at a celebration of the Mass attended by about 2,000 people in the church building. Three hundred fifty people attended Mass in the sanctuary. The other people attended Mass through live-streaming in the Eucharistic adoration chapel on the third floor, lecture classrooms on the second floor, and in the dining room and the multipurpose room underground. Cardinal Yeom announced that the church of Seoul Catholic Deaf Association was elevated to Ephphatha Parish, the only Deaf parish in the Archdiocese of Seoul.⁴⁷ Ephphatha Parish was added to 232 hearing parishes in the archdiocese. Also, he appointed me as pastor of Ephphatha Parish.

⁴⁶ 에파타성당 성전건설위원회, *에파타성당 성전건설 기록지*, 71. Architectural Team of the Ephphatha Parish, *Documents of Building Ephphatha Parish*, 71: 에파타성당 성전건설위원회, *에파타성당 성전건설 기록지*, 241. Architectural Team of the Ephphatha Parish, *Documents of Building Ephphatha Parish*, 241.

⁴⁷ “에파타성당 봉헌과 본당 승격 의미 되새기자,” *가톨릭 신문*, 2019년 9월 1일. “Let Us Reflect on the Meaning of the Dedication of Ephphatha Church and Its Elevation to a Parish,” *Catholic Times*, September 1, 2019. https://m.catholictimes.org/mobile/article_view.php?aid=316536.



Dedication of Ephphatha Parish in Majang-dong, Seoul⁴⁸

Cardinal Yeom said, “Ephphatha Parish is a place of dreams fulfilled with new hope and spirit. I pray that not only Deaf people but all of us will open our hearts and minds to accept God’s will.”⁴⁹ When a reporter interviewed me, I said, “I want our parish to become a church that

⁴⁸ 에파타성당, *천주교 에파타성당 새 성전 봉헌 기념화보*, (서울: 에파타성당, 2020), 6, 10, 21, 24, 25, 44. Ephphatha Parish, *Photobook of New Church, Ephphatha Parish*, (Seoul, South Korea: Ephphatha Parish, 2020), 6, 10, 21, 24, 25, 44; 강지원, “청각장애 사제와 신자들: 눈빛과 손짓으로 미사 올리는 ‘에파타 성당,’” Jiwon Kang, “Deaf Priest and Parishioners: ‘Ephphatha Parish’ where Mass is celebrated with eyes and hand gestures: 김한수, “열 손가락으로 미사 드리는 이 곳, 누구든 오세요.” Hansoo Kim, “Mass is Celebrated in Ten Fingers Here, All are Welcome:” 문미정, “청각장애인 위한 에파타성당: 서울 마장동에 문 열어.” Mijeong Moon, “Ephphatha Church for the Deaf Opens in Majang-dong, Seoul:” 에파타성당 성전건립위원회, *에파타성당 성전건립 기록지*, 238. Architectural Team of the Ephphatha Parish, *Documents of Building Ephphatha Parish*, 238.

⁴⁹ 강지원, “청각장애 사제와 신자들: 눈빛과 손짓으로 미사 올리는 ‘에파타 성당,’” *한국일보*, 2019년 8월 26일. Jiwon Kang, “Deaf Priest and Parishioners: ‘Ephphatha Parish’ where Mass is celebrated with eyes and

breaks down the wall between hearing people and Deaf people and allows people to live well while loving each other.”⁵⁰

Third Floor of Ephphatha Parish: Sanctuary, Eucharistic Adoration Chapel



Second Floor of Ephphatha Parish: Parish Office, Classroom, Pastor’s Office, Social Hall



hand gestures,” *Hankook News*, August 26, 2019.
<https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201908251508314390>.

⁵⁰ Jiwon Kang, “Deaf Priest and Parishioners: ‘Ephphatha Parish’ where Mass is celebrated with eyes and hand gestures,”

First Floor of Ephphatha Parish: Parish Hall



First Floor Underground, Ephphatha Parish: Dining Room and Multi-Purpose Room



I began to celebrate daily Mass in sign language, except Mondays, in September, 2019. The number of the Deaf attendants increased little by little. More than 200 people regularly attended Mass at 11 AM on Sundays and about 20 people regularly attended Sunday vigil Mass at 6 PM on Saturdays, unfortunately COVID 19 impacted Ephphatha Parish. The parish building was closed; therefore, the number of the attendants decreased. However, Deaf parishioners attended Mass through the YouTube link until the archbishop of Seoul announced that people could return to parish buildings. Weekday Masses have been a challenge for parishioners of Ephphatha Parish because their houses are far from the parish and Seoul is large. An average of 20-30 parishioners attends Mass on weekdays. Mass is celebrated at 7 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, at 11 am on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Cardinal Yeom knew that I did a lot of work to build the new church building, so he encouraged me to take a sabbatical year and sent me to Washington, DC, USA in January, 2021. Fr. John Kim, a hearing diocesan priest, was appointed pastor of Ephphatha Parish. He celebrates

Mass in sign language and also preaches in sign language.

A Diverse Community

About five hundred Deaf people are registered parishioners of Ephphatha Parish.⁵¹ Some Deaf people parishioners, who were from the Caritas Independence Center and learned catechism from Sr. Hopfensits, are now registered parishioners of Ephphatha Parish. Some Deaf people, who graduated from National Seoul School for the Deaf, learned catechism from Sr. Lee, Fr. Cheong and Fr. Clement Yeonjoong Kim at Myeong-dong Cathedral⁵² are also registered parishioners. Some Deaf people who studied Religious Education when they were students at Aehwa School for the Deaf, the only Catholic School for the Deaf in Seoul, became parishioners after they graduated. Some Deaf people graduated from the Sacred Heart School for the Deaf located in Choongju city in the Diocese of Cheongju and they moved to Seoul. They are now involved in Ephphatha Parish as registered parishioners. Other Deaf parishioners received baptism at hearing parishes and studied at hearing schools. They learned sign language later and came to Ephphatha Parish. Many Deaf people, who lived outside of the Archdiocese of Seoul, heard that a Deaf priest celebrated Mass in sign language and they came to see my preaching. They were impressed with it and registered to be parishioners of Ephphatha Parish. The parish includes many hearing-impaired people who received cochlear implants when most of them were

⁵¹ 강지원, “청각장애 사제와 신자들: 눈빛과 손짓으로 미사 올리는 ‘에파타 성당,’” Jiwon Kang, “Deaf Priest and Parishioners: ‘Ephphatha Parish’ Where Mass is Celebrated with Eyes and Hand gestures.”

⁵² Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, *Sixtieth Anniversary of the Deaf Catholic Community*, 70-71.

infants.⁵³ They entered mainstream programs for the Deaf⁵⁴ at hearing schools instead of going to Deaf schools. Some of these younger Deaf people, who received cochlear implants and learned sign language after they graduated from hearing high schools or colleges, attend Mass at Ephphatha Parish. Hearing people learned sign language and became sign language interpreters or volunteers. They too registered to be parishioners of Ephphatha Parish.

Parish Leaders

The Parish Pastoral Council in Ephphatha Parish meets monthly and consists of the

⁵³ According to National Institute on Deafness and Other communication Disorders, “A cochlear implant is a small, complex electronic device that can help to provide a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard-of-hearing. The implant consists of an external portion that sits behind the ear and a second portion that is surgically placed under the skin. An implant has the following parts: 1. A microphone, which picks up sound from the environment. 2. A speech processor, which selects and arranges sounds picked up by the microphone. 3. A transmitter and receiver/stimulator, which receive signals from the speech processor and convert them into electric impulses. 4. An electrode array, which is a group of electrodes that collects the impulses from the stimulator and sends them to different regions of the auditory nerve. An implant does not restore normal hearing. Instead, it can give a deaf person a useful representation of sounds in the environment and help him or her to understand speech. A cochlear implant is very different from a hearing aid. Hearing aids amplify sounds so they may be detected by damaged ears. Cochlear implants bypass damaged portions of the ear and directly stimulate the auditory nerve. Signals generated by the implant are sent by way of the auditory nerve to the brain, which recognizes the signals as sound. Hearing through a cochlear implant is different from normal hearing and takes time to learn or relearn. However, it allows many people to recognize warning signals, understand other sounds in the environment, and understand speech in person or over the telephone.” See website of National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, “Cochlear Implants,” 2021, <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/cochlear-implants>.

⁵⁴ According to William Vicars, “Mainstreaming is the practice of placing deaf children into the "mainstream" of public schools instead of placing them into residential schools for the Deaf or other Deaf-focused programs. Many culturally Deaf individuals oppose mainstreaming because even though the deaf child is surrounded by other students -- the child may actually end up experiencing increased isolation and loneliness due to communication barriers than the child would experience if taught in a program specifically designed for and populated by deaf students.” William Vicars, n.d. “Mainstreaming,” <https://www.lifefprint.com/asl101/topics/mainstreaming.htm>.

officers and the coordinators of ten committees. The officers are the pastor, a religious Sister (sent by the Seoul Priory of Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing), a chairperson who is elected by Deaf parishioners and then approved by the pastor, an assistant chairperson, and a secretary. The assistant chairperson and secretary are Deaf lay people and appointed by the pastor after the pastor accepts the chairperson's suggestion. Currently, the pastor, the religious Sister, and the two-sign language-related committee coordinators are hearing, all the other officers and committee leadership positions are held by Deaf lay people. All committees are appointed by the pastor after the pastor accepts the chairperson's recommendation. The council includes eight Deaf lay people and two hearing lay people who are coordinators of the following: ten committees:⁵⁵

- The Education Committee oversees the planning and execution of parish spiritual retreats, faith-related education, training and seminars.
- The Mission Committee aims to spread the Gospel and promote the spiritual growth of the parish community through catechesis (catechumens, newly baptized people) and missionary activities. It supervises missionary activities in cooperation with each parish organization and carries out activities such as guiding catechumens, teaching catechism class for catechumens, converting indifferent members, supporting new members, and distributing materials. It sponsors the Legion of Mary (*Legio Mariae*)⁵⁶ and the Catechumen Class.

⁵⁵ Parish Council of *Ephphatha* Parish, Annual Report of Planning Pastoral Activities, (Seoul: *Ephphatha* Parish, 2023).

⁵⁶ On December 28, 1989, a Legion of Mary praesidium for the Deaf was founded in the Caritas Independence Center for the Deaf. The praesidium was called "Queen of Heaven." Queen of Heaven Pr. has met weekly since 1989. After *Ephphatha* Parish was opened, Deaf members of

- The Liturgy Committee serves to ensure that all liturgies, including Mass, are done smoothly and helps parishioners actively participate in liturgies. It has a reading group, a Korean drum group,⁵⁷ an altar-preparing group, a signing choir, and a group for altar servers.
- The Social Service Committee assists with various parish events and manages the kitchen. In particular, it is responsible for purchasing supplies for lunch service and preparing food for major parish events.
- The Sunday School Committee educates Ephphatha Sunday School students and altar boys and girls to grow in their faith and achieve spiritual maturity, and supports event planning and devotional activities to help them become active leaders of the parish in the future.
- The Youth, the Middle-Age and Senior Citizen Committee is responsible for all matters related to youth group organization, middle-age group organization, and senior citizen group organization. They promote the religious life and spiritual growth of young people, middle-aged people and senior citizens and encourage them to actively participate in and support parish events. For example, there are a

the Queen of Heaven Pr. moved to the parish and continue to attend the weekly Pr. meeting. Four officers, including chairperson, assistant chairperson, treasurer, secretary, and three members are Deaf people. One member is hearing and helps interpret for various events of Legion of Mary hosted by hearing people. See 박대옥, “우리는 지금- 서울대교구 에파타성당: 청각장애 딛고 33년간 레지오 활동,” *월간 레지오 마리아*, (2023년 12월호). Daeok Park, “We are now – Ephphatha Church, Archdiocese of Seoul: Legion Activity for 33 Years, Overcoming Deafness,” *Legion of Mary Magazine*, December 2023, <https://lm.or.kr/?p=28793&ckattempt=1>.

⁵⁷ A Deaf altar server hits a Korean drum instead of ringing a bell when the presider elevates the host. The reason why the altar server hits a drum instead of ringing a bell is that most Deaf people cannot hear the sound of a bell; however, they can hear and feel the sound of a Korean drum.

number of age-specific groups such as a “Spring Water” group for young people, “Little Holy Mary” group for middle-aged women, “Paul” group for middle-aged men, “Holy Mary” group for senior citizen women, and “Joseph” group for senior citizen men.

- Planning Event and Public Relations Committee is responsible for planning for and executing major events in the parish. It generates the annual event schedule, coordinates the activities of each committee, and compiles and reports the budget of each committee. They send press releases to promote the parish, support the production of various publicity materials, supervise the management of the parish bulletin, and assist in the management of the parish website,⁵⁸ Facebook,⁵⁹ and YouTube⁶⁰ sites which are regularly managed by the official of the parish office.
- The Finance Committee reviews whether the financial record keeping and accounting system required for the diocese is being applied to all finances at the parish level.
- The Sign Language Education Committee is responsible for planning for and executing sign language classes at Ephphatha Parish, Myeongdong Cathedral, and local hearing parishes. They train those who are interested in sign language to be sign language interpreters and volunteers for Deaf people.
- The Sign Language Support Committee helps interpret in sign language when

⁵⁸ Ephphatha Parish, www.epphatha.org.

⁵⁹ Ephphatha Parish Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/eptdeaf/>.

⁶⁰ Ephphatha Parish on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqMNYEhb8yeVQElddqAN5PA>.

priests, who do not know sign language, celebrate Mass and when lecturers who do not know sign language present at retreats, seminars, and other parish-sponsored activities. They help interpret vocally what Deaf people say to hearing people who do not know sign language. They are also responsible for interpreting in sign language when diocesan level-major events are held and when Sunday Mass is celebrated on the Catholic Peace Broadcasting Station.⁶¹

A Window into Activities at a Deaf Parish

Deaf parishioners are involved in these committees, parish activities, and liturgical ministries including as lectors, altar servers, signing choir, Korean drummers, and in Mass and altar preparation.



Queen of Heaven Pr. Meeting⁶²

Some features reflect the distinctiveness of being a Deaf church. For example, in the Eucharistic liturgy, a Deaf altar server hits a Korean drum instead of ringing a bell when the presider elevates the host. The reason why the altar server hits a drum instead of ringing a bell is that most Deaf people cannot hear the sound of a bell; however, they can hear and/or feel the

⁶¹ Parish Council of *Ephphatha* Parish, Annual Report of Planning Pastoral Activities, (Seoul: *Ephphatha* Parish, 2023).

⁶² 박대옥, “우리는 지금- 서울대교구 에파타성당: 청각장애 딛고 33년간 레지오 활동.” Daeok Park, “We are now – Ephphatha Church, Archdiocese of Seoul: Legion Activity for 33 Years, Overcoming Deafness.”

sound of a Korean drum.



A celebrant first signs and then elevates the host. Altar server hits a Korean drum.

Hearing people pray orally while fingering their rosary beads. Deaf people may not be comfortable praying the rosary because they use sign language, making such prayer challenging. A Deaf parishioner who is a carpenter produced a large wooden rosary. This practical and creative innovation enables Deaf people to pray in sign language and then keep count by fingering the rosary beads.



Praying in Sign language and then fingering the rosary beads.⁶³

Generally, in parishes, hearing parishioners go to confessionals to confess their sin to a confessor through a partition. However, for Deaf people the confessional partition is an obstacle to communication. In the confessional of Ephphatha Parish, a confessor opens the partition and sees a Deaf person and his/her confession in sign language, and communicates with him/her in sign language. When a hearing confessor sees a hearing person, he closes the partition and then

⁶³ CPBC News, “청각장애인은 묵주기도를 어떻게 할까,” YouTube Video, 1:51, May 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwVMRobIBaY>. CPBC News, “How Do Deaf People Pray Rosary?” YouTube Video, 1:51, May 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwVMRobIBaY>.

they communicate orally through the partition. When a Deaf confessor sees a hearing person who does not know sign language in the confessional, he opens the partition and then communicates with her/him in written Korean.



Confessional at Ephphatha Parish

Many Deaf parishioners go to Ephphatha Parish to attend Mass and have lunch offered for free by Deaf volunteers who cook in the basement each Sunday. People tend not to go back home early, but they stay longer to chat with each other because they regularly work with hearing people at their jobs during weekdays and cannot communicate with them and feel lonely. Many Deaf parishioners feel comfortable being with their Deaf friends and chatting with them in sign language all day on Sundays. In such company, they find opportunities to be refreshed and healed. Ephphatha Parish is a spiritual spring water, an oasis, and a shelter for Deaf people and hearing people. A place to belong and be Church.



Parishioners of Ephphatha Parish

Chapter 4

Listening to Deaf Catholics in the Archdiocese of Seoul

Deaf theologian Kirk VanGilder notes that the “elusive nature of deaf theology might arise from methods of recording conversations in signed languages, which either forces a translation to written forms of other languages or requires a formalized video recording that often takes away from the spontaneity of folk discourse.”¹ Because of the challenges VanGilder notes, and the complications of translations in the case of Deaf Catholics in Seoul, I decided that the best way to get Deaf perspectives was through a focused questionnaire with some open-ended questions using SurveyMonkey. I realize the limitations of my approach but the number of languages involved would require an extraordinary amount of time and resources that make video interviews prohibitive. Korean Sign Language would first have to be translated into Korean and then into English; that is beyond the available resources and time available for the completion of this work.

I submitted my exemption application form and was approved by the Review Board at Catholic Theological Union on October 13, 2023. I used SurveyMonkey to create a survey of twenty-one questions in written Korean.² The intent of the survey was to provide an opportunity for Deaf Catholics in the Archdiocese of Seoul to express their perspectives on their experience of the Catholic Church. There are four Deaf Catholic communities in the Archdiocese of Seoul. The Deaf Catholic communities are Ephphatha Parish, the Deaf community of Haengun-dong

¹ Hannah Lewis and Kirk VanGilder. “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology: Deaf Ontologies Seeking Theology,” in *Innovations in Deaf Studies: The Role of Deaf Scholars*, Annelies Kusters, Marartje De Meulder, and Dai O’Brien, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) 175.

² Min Seo Park, “Survey-Korean Deaf Catholics,” last modified December 20, 2023, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XBJ757Y>.

hearing Parish, the Deaf community of Gaebong-dong hearing Parish, and Aehwa School for the Deaf. I posted the link with an invitation on select social media sites used by the Deaf and sent the link to the survey via an e-mail announcement to Deaf Catholics and hearing volunteers who were involved in the Deaf Catholic communities of the Seoul Archdiocese. The survey was available online from November 4 through December 4, 2023. I recognized that some Deaf people might not be able to understand the survey questions in written Korean because Korean is not their native or primary language; Korean Sign Language is their native language and, like ASL, it is not a written language. To insure, as best as possible that participants understood both informed consent³ and the survey questions, I made a YouTube video in KSL, captioned in Korean.⁴ In KSL, the video included the consent form, the survey questions, and the response options so that Deaf people could understand them more clearly (see the screenshots below).



Min Seo Park, survey in KSL on YouTube⁵

³ See the INACCESSIBLE INFORMED CONSENT section of Michael McKee, Deirdre Schlehofer, and Denise Thew, “Ethical Issues in Conducting Research with Deaf Populations,” *American Journal of Public Health*, December 2013, 103(12): 2174-8, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3966694/>. The article is about health research; however, the insights are relevant to the challenges of obtaining consent and facilitating understanding.

⁴ Min Seo Park, “Survey,” YouTube video, 16:57, October 27, 2023. <http://youtube.com/watch?v=6DTifajNxqM&si=ScHolAVt2NCQDPLu>

⁵ Min Seo Park, “Survey,” YouTube video.

I sent emails to the pastor of Ephphatha Parish, the Deaf chairperson of the Deaf community of Haengun-dong hearing Parish, a religious sister of Gaebong-dong hearing Parish who was responsible for the Deaf community of the parish, the principal of Aehwa School for the Deaf, the Deaf chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council for Ephphatha Parish and the Deaf president of the Korea National Catholic Deaf Association on October 28, 2023 asking them to encourage Deaf Catholics who belonged to the Deaf Catholic communities in the Archdiocese of Seoul to participate in the survey. I requested that they also post on their social media platforms two versions, one longer version and one shorter, of an announcement with the link. All of them supported my survey project and encouraged Deaf Catholics to participate in it. They posted the announcements with the survey link on their social media including via Kakaotalk and Band which are used by Koreans.

On November 4th, the survey consent and questionnaire were launched through SurveyMonkey, and the YouTube video was activated. Both remained available until December 4th. Between November 4 and December 4, two Deaf people, the chairperson of the Parish pastoral council for Ephphatha Parish and the president of the Korea National Catholic Deaf Association, frequently reminded Deaf people and hearing volunteers to do the survey. Some Deaf people watched my YouTube video and understood what I said in sign language; however, it was difficult to write answers to the survey questionnaires simultaneously. They asked Deaf leaders or hearing volunteers to write down their answers for them. Some Deaf people did not understand what the survey consent and questionnaires meant, so they asked Deaf leaders or hearing volunteers to help them explain it to them in sign language.⁶ Participation was

⁶ When the leaders who received my email requests read the survey, they said to me that it might be a little difficult for some Deaf people to understand the survey questions, so maybe some people would need help. The pastor asked some Deaf leaders and some hearing volunteers to

anonymous and voluntary, so the participants were unknown to me.

The experiences of Deaf Catholics in Seoul are diverse. Some Deaf people attend Sunday Mass with the help of sign language interpreters at a local hearing-dominant parish. Some Deaf People belong to Ephphatha, the Deaf parish in the archdiocese that I was responsible for building and served as first pastor. Some hearing parishioners know that physically disabled people and blind people usually go to hearing parishes to celebrate Mass; but they do not understand why Deaf people go to a parish for the Deaf instead of local hearing parishes and why Deaf people may prefer a Deaf parish rather than local hearing parishes even though some local hearing parishes provide sign language interpreters. Interestingly, there are very few hearing Protestant churches which provide sign language interpreters for the Deaf in South Korea because almost all Deaf Protestants attend their own “Deaf churches where Deaf pastors directly conduct worship in sign language.”⁷

Some Deaf people say that sign language is not their native language because they attended schools for hearing people, called “mainstreamed programs,” instead of the Deaf schools, and so they are accustomed to the hearing culture. That is one of the reasons why Deaf people may go to local hearing parishes instead of the Deaf parish. Not only in South Korea, but also in the United States and other countries, some Deaf people attend Mass in their own Deaf communities and some Deaf people attend Mass with sign language interpreters at local hearing-dominant parishes. This survey hopes to capture some of this diversity in our Archdiocese of Seoul Deaf communities. A number of the survey questions reflect that intention.

help explain about the consent and the questions to Deaf parishioners after Mass in November 2023.

⁷ Inam Ahn, “Sound of Silence: Training Deaf Ministers,” *The Presbyterian News*, April 13, 2021. 안일남, “무음의 소리: 농사역자의 양성,” *한국장로신문*, 2021년 4월 13일.

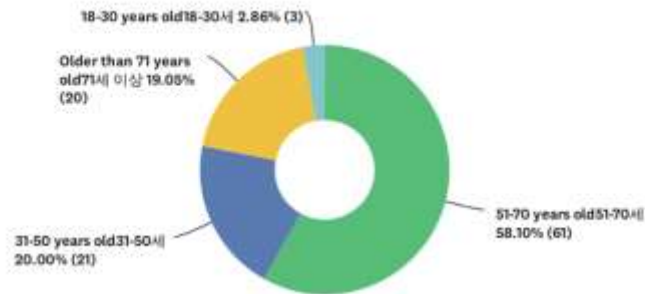
Exploring The Survey

There are two types of questions in the survey, close-ended (Q 1- Q 14) and open-ended (Q 15- Q 21). Questions (Q 1- Q 14) are close-ended questions. They include a set of demographic inquiries, followed by questions regarding the relationship of the respondent to the Catholic Church. Question 1 secured consent to participate in the survey. Those who consented moved on to Q 2.

One hundred and twenty-eight (128) people consented to participate in the survey. Of the 128, 21 respondents are hearing, 105 identify across a spectrum of deafness and auditory loss, 2 preferred not to respond. Because the focus of this thesis-project is on listening to Deaf Church, my presentation and analysis of the survey will be limited to those respondents who self-identified as Deaf (83) or under another category indicating experiences of deafness or auditory loss (22).

Demographic Data (Q 2- Q 5)

Q 2 Age

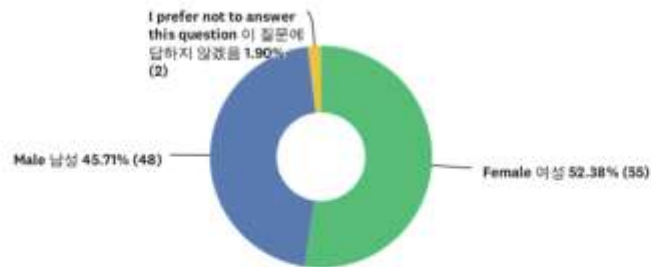


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
51-70 years old	58.10%	61
31-50 years old	20.00%	21
Older than 71 years old	19.05%	20
18-30 years old	2.86%	3
TOTAL		105

Of 105 participants, 61 are 51-70 years old, 58.10 percent of the total participants. 21 are

31-50 years old, 20 percent of the total participants. 20 participants (19.05 percent) are older than 71 years old. 3 participants (2.86 percent) are 18-30 years old.

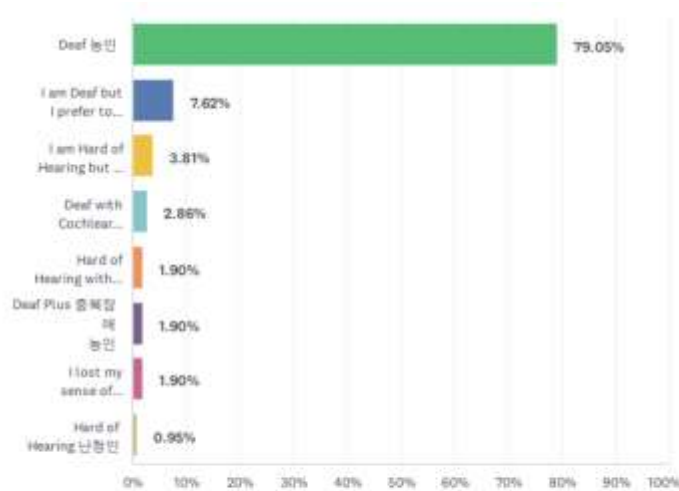
Q 3 Gender



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female 여성	52.38%	55
Male 남성	45.71%	48
I prefer not to answer this question 이 질문에 답하지 않겠음	1.90%	2
TOTAL		105

Of the 105 participants, 55 are women, 52.38 percent of the total participants, and 48 are men, 45.71 percent of the total participants. 2 (1.90 percent) are unknown gender because they prefer not to answer this question.

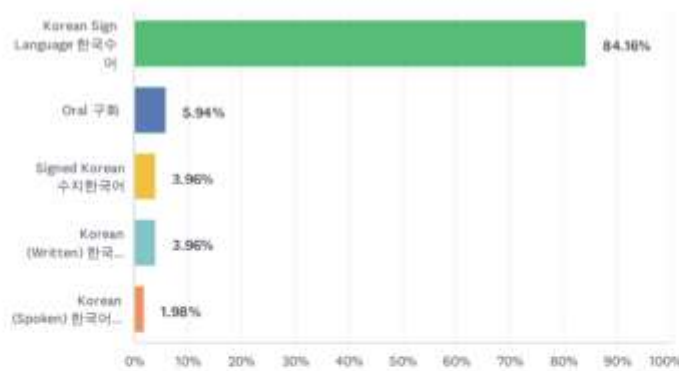
Q 4 Identification



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Deaf 농민	79.05% 83
I am Deaf but I prefer to speak orally농민이지만 구화를 선호함	7.62% 8
I am Hard of Hearing but I can use sign language난청민이지만 수어를 할 수 있음	3.81% 4
Deaf with Cochlear Implants 인공와우 기기를 착용한 농민	2.86% 3
Hard of Hearing with Cochlear Implants인공와우 기기를 착용한 난청민	1.90% 2
Deaf Plus 중복장애 농민	1.90% 2
I lost my sense of hearing, but I believe that I am hearing because I can speak as well as hearing청력을 잃었지만, 잘 인치럼 말을 할하기 때문에 스스로 청민이라고 생각함	1.90% 2
Hard of Hearing 난청민	0.95% 1
TOTAL	105

The Deaf community is diverse and includes people who identify across a spectrum of experiences in relation to the sense of hearing. In the survey the overwhelming majority, 79.05 percent of the total participants identified as Deaf. Of the remaining 22 participants, 7.62 percent identified as Deaf who prefer to speak orally. 3.81 percent identified as Hard of Hearing who can use sign language. 2.86 percent identified as Deaf with Cochlear Implants. 1.90 percent identified as Hard of Hearing with Cochlear Implants. 1.90 percent identified as Deaf Plus. 1.90 percent identified as the hearing loss who believes that she/he is hearing. 0.95 percent identified as Hard of Hearing.

Q 5 Preferred Means of Communication



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Korean Sign Language 한국수어	84.16% 85
Oral 구화	5.94% 6
Signed Korean 수지한국어	3.96% 4
Korean (Written) 한국어 (쓰기)	3.96% 4
Korean (Spoken) 한국어 (말하기)	1.98% 2
TOTAL	101

A significant majority of survey participants, 84.16 percent preferred communication in Korean Sign Language (KSL) and 3.96 percent in Signed Korean.⁸ 5.94 percent are Oral. 3.96 percent preferred Written Korean and 1.98 percent is Spoken Korean.

Analyzing the Demographic Data (Q 2- Q 5)

It is important to put these numbers in context in terms of national figures and Catholic church demographics. “The total population of South Korea as of late 2021 was projected to be around 51.8 million.”⁹ The population of the hearing impaired, including Deaf people and hard

⁸ Signed Korean means a sign system that matches signs with Korean language words and follows Korean grammar. It is mostly used for language development, allowing a teacher to reinforce the spoken word with its equivalent sign. Il Heo, “Shall teach Signed Korean? Shall teach Korean Sign Language?” lectured, April 20, 2016. <https://prezi.com/d2ixcbozujoe/presentation/>.

⁹ Yoon L, “Population of South Korea from 1960 with Projections to 2070 by Age Group,” *Statista*, Dec 12, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/712843/south-korea-population-projections-by-age-group/>.

of hearing people, in South Korea is 425,224. The population of Deaf Koreans, whose language is Korean Sign Language, is 52,000.¹⁰ According to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, the number of Catholics in South Korea is 5,949,862, over 11 percent of the total Korean population in 2022.¹¹ The number of Deaf people in Seoul is 50,306. The number of Deaf males in Seoul is 27,769. The number of Deaf females is 22,537.¹² The most populous presence of Catholics is in the Archdiocese of Seoul with 1,533,482, accounting for 15.8 percent of the area's population.¹³ There are approximately 500 Deaf registered Catholics at Ephphatha Parish.¹⁴ One percent of the Seoul's total Deaf population, 50,306 are Deaf parishioners of Ephphatha Parish.

Older people participated more in the survey than younger people. Eighty-one participants (77.15 percent) were older than 51 years old with 51–70-year-old participants constituting the largest group of respondents by age group. Only three participants (2.86 percent) were 18-30 years old making this the lowest age group to respond.

There were more female participants than male participants.

Those who identified as Deaf were the overwhelming majority of the total participants

¹⁰ “수어,” 나무위키, 2023년 12월 16일 수정함.

<https://namu.wiki/w/%EC%88%98%EC%96%B4#fn-37>. “Korean Sign Language,” Namu, last modified December 16, 2023. <https://namu.wiki/w/%EC%88%98%EC%96%B4#fn-37>

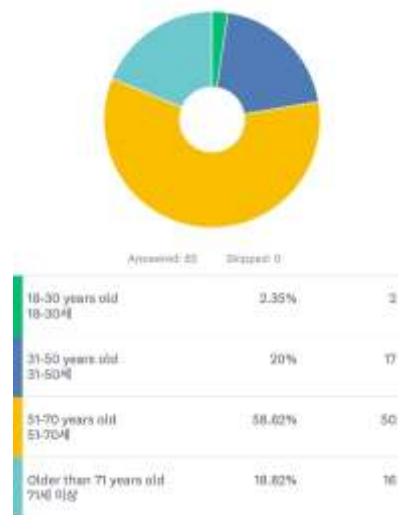
¹¹ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, *Statistics of The Catholic Church in Korea: 2022* (Seoul: CBCK, 2023) 6. <https://ebook.cbck.or.kr/gallery/view.asp?seq=214958>.

¹² “장애유형별, 장애등급별, 성별 등록장애인수,” 국가통계포털, 시도별, 2023년 4월 21일. “Number of registered disabled people by province, type of disability, grade of disability, and gender,” Korean Statistical Information Service, last modified April 21, 2023. https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=117&tblId=DT_11761_N004.

¹³ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, *Statistics*, 6.

¹⁴ 김한수, “열 손가락으로 미사 드리는 이 곳, 누구든 오세요,” *조선일보*, 2019년 8월 19일. Hansoo Kim, “Mass is Celebrated in Ten Fingers Here, All are Welcome,” *Chosun News*, August 19, 2019. https://www.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2019/08/19/2019081900025.html.

with 96 people in total identifying as Deaf in some way. Hard of Hearing people were the lowest identified group with 7 participants identifying as hard of hearing in some manner. Korean Sign Language was the preferred communication method across respondent identity groups.



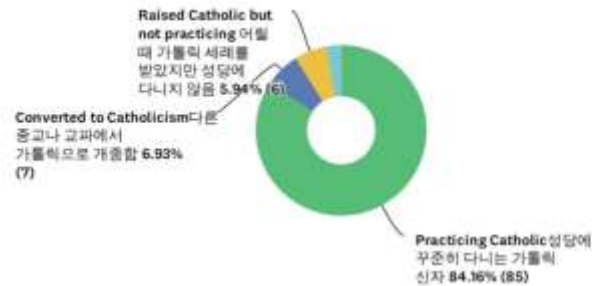
Looking at language usage by age groups shows KSL is preferred by 50 participants (58.82 percent of the total participants) aged 51-70, 17 participants (20 percent) aged 31-50, 16 participants (18.82 percent) aged older than 71, and 2 participants (2.35 percent) aged 18-30. This preference reinforces the need for pastoral ministers to be proficient in KSL in order to effectively accompany Deaf Catholic communities in the Archdiocese of Seoul.

Data (Q 6 - Q 14)

The questions in this section addressed participants’ relationship in general to Catholic Church; the level of their participation; their experience and preferences for future involvement. Of the 105 respondents who identified across the spectrum of deafness and hearing loss, not all answered every question, but typically very few skipped questions.

Relationship to the Catholic Church (Q 6 – Q 8)

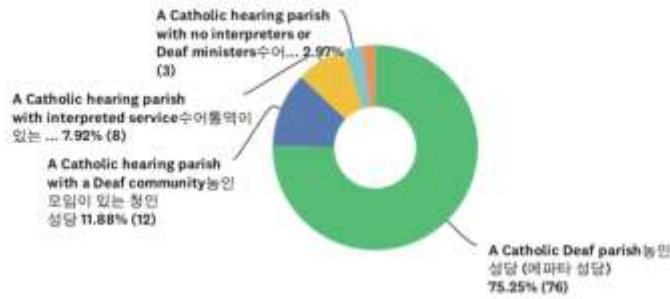
Q 6 Please check the expression that best describes your experience with the Catholic faith.



ANSWER CHOICES :	RESPONSES :	
Practicing Catholic성당에 꾸준히 다니는 가톨릭 신자	84.16%	85
Converted to Catholicism다른 종교나 교파에서 가톨릭으로 개종함	6.93%	7
Raised Catholic but not practicing 어릴 때 가톨릭 세례를 받았지만 성당에 다니지 않음	5.94%	6
I prefer not to answer this question이 질문에 답하지 않음	2.97%	3
TOTAL		101

Of 105 participants, 101 responded to the question and 4 skipped it. Of 101 respondents, 85 (84.16 percent) have been practicing the Catholic faith. Seven (6.93 percent) converted to Catholicism and 6 (5.94 percent) were raised Catholic, but they did not practice the Catholic faith. Three (2.97 percent) preferred not to answer this question.

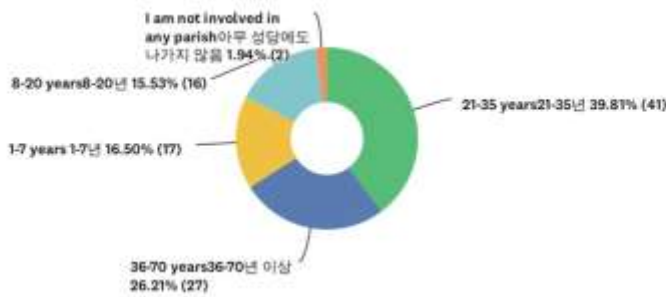
Q 7 What kind of Church do you attend most frequently?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
A Catholic Deaf parish (에파타 성당)	75.25% 76
A Catholic hearing parish with a Deaf community (농인 모임이 있는 청인 성당)	11.88% 12
A Catholic hearing parish with interpreted service (수어통역이 있는 청인 성당)	7.92% 8
A Catholic hearing parish with no interpreters or Deaf ministers (수어통역도 없고 농인 사목자도 없는 청인 성당)	2.97% 3
I do not regularly attend a Catholic parish (성당에 정기적으로 나가지 않음)	1.98% 2
TOTAL	101

Of 105 participants, 101 responded to this question and 4 skipped it. Of 101 respondents, 76 (75.25 percent) attend a Catholic Deaf parish. Twelve (11.88 percent) attend a Catholic hearing parish with a Deaf community and 8 (7.92 percent) attend a Catholic hearing parish with interpreted service. Three (2.97 percent) attend a Catholic hearing parish with no interpreters or Deaf ministers and 2 (1.98 percent) do not regularly attend a Catholic parish.

Q 8 How long have you been involved in your parish/church?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
21-35 years 21-35년	39.81%	41
36-70 years 36-70년 이상	26.21%	27
1-7 years 1-7년	16.50%	17
8-20 years 8-20년	15.53%	16
I am not involved in any parish 아무 성당에도 나가지 않음	1.94%	2
TOTAL		103

Of 105 participants, 103 responded this question and 2 skipped it. Of 103 respondents, 41 (39.81 percent) have been involved in parish/church for 21-35 years. Twenty-seven (26.21 percent) have been involved in parish/church for 36-70 years. Seventeen (16.50 percent) have been involved in parish/church for 1-7 years and 6 (15.53 percent) have been involved in parish/church for 8-20 years. 2 (1.94 percent) are not involved in any parish.

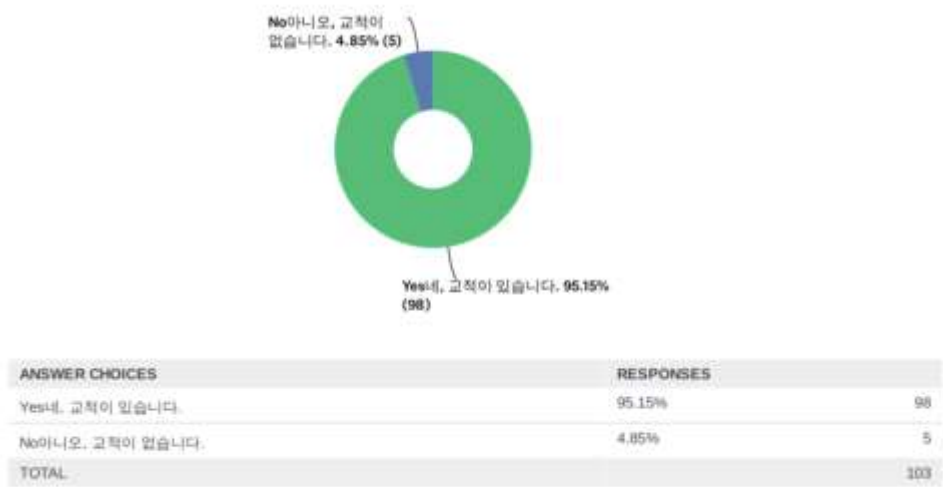
Analyzing the Demographic Data (Q 6- Q 8)

As the survey shows, most participants have been practicing their Catholic faith. Currently a majority are attending a Deaf parish; however, the Deaf parish has only been in existence since 2019. Of 103 respondents, 68 people have been involved in parishes including Ephphatha Parish, formerly, Seoul Catholic Deaf Association, for over 21 years. The number of those who have been involved in parish for over 21 years is higher than those who have been involved in parish for under 20 years. This might suggest that the number of younger believers are decreasing, more study will be needed to determine the reasons. Only 3 participants under 30

responded; two have been involved for 1-7 years and one has been involved for 8-20 years. Some Deaf people attend a hearing parish with a Deaf community. Sign language service in the Church helps Deaf people to attend Mass and be involved in Church activities. The data may suggest that the existence of a Deaf faith community can help keep Deaf people practicing their Catholic faith longer. This too is an area requiring further study, especially in considering younger demographics.

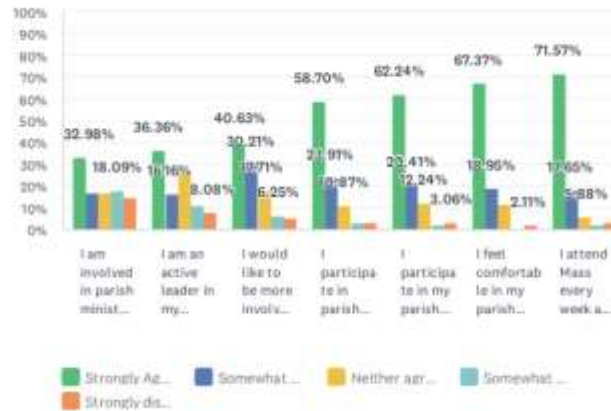
Level of Participation (Q 9 – Q 11)

Q 9 Are you a registered members of the Catholic parish/church you most frequently attend?



Of 105 participants, 103 responded to this question and 2 skipped it. Of 103 respondents, 98 (95.15 percent) are registered members of the Catholic parish/church. 5 (4.85 percent) are not registered members of the Catholic parish/church.

Q 10 The following question asks about the level of your participation in your parish/church.
Check the box that is closest to your experience.



	STRONGLY AGREE 매우 그렇다	SOMEWHAT AGREE 대체로 그렇다	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE 그저 그렇다	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE 대체로 그렇지 않다	STRONGLY DISAGREE 전혀 그렇지 않다	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I am involved in parish ministries 나는 본당 사목활동 등에 참여한다.	32.98% 31	17.02% 16	17.02% 16	18.09% 17	14.89% 14	94	2.65
I am an active leader in my parish 나는 우리 본당에서 적극적으로 활동하는 리더(지도자)이다.	36.36% 38	16.15% 16	28.29% 28	11.11% 11	8.08% 8	90	2.38
I would like to be more involved in my parish 나는 본당 활동에 지금보다 더 참여하고 싶다.	40.63% 39	30.21% 29	17.71% 17	6.25% 6	5.21% 5	96	2.06
I participate in parish events. 나는 본당 행사에 참여한다.	58.70% 54	21.91% 22	10.87% 10	3.28% 3	3.26% 3	92	1.88
I participate in my parish because it is easy to communicate 우리 본당에서는 소통하기 쉽기 때문에 본당 생활에 참여한다.	62.24% 61	20.41% 20	12.24% 12	2.04% 2	3.06% 3	98	1.63
I feel comfortable in my parish 나는 우리 본당에서 편안함을 느낀다.	67.37% 64	18.95% 18	11.58% 11	0.00% 0	2.11% 2	95	1.51
I attend Mass every week at the same church 나는 매주 같은 성당에서 미사에 참석한다.	71.57% 73	17.65% 18	5.88% 6	1.96% 2	2.94% 3	102	1.47

Of 105 participants, 102 responded to this question and 3 skipped it. Of 102 respondents, 94 addressed their level of involvement in parish ministries. Thirty-one people (32.98 percent) strongly agreed that they are involved in ministry. Sixteen (17.02 percent) somewhat agreed that they are involved. These numbers suggest that 50% (at least 47 people) are active to a degree in parish ministries. This is relevant for the following question, Q 11, which asks those who

identified as active in ministry to indicate which ministries. Sixteen (17.02 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed that they are involved in parish. Seventeen (18.09 percent) somewhat disagreed that they are involved in parish and 14 (14.89 percent) strongly disagreed that they are involved in parish.

Ninety-nine responded regarding their level of active leadership in the parish with 36 (36.36 percent) strongly agreeing that they are active leaders. Sixteen (16.16 percent) somewhat agreed that they are active leaders in parish. This means that slightly over half of the respondents considered themselves involved in leadership. These responses have implications for Q 11 as well. Twenty-eight (28.28 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed and 11 (11.11 percent) somewhat disagree that they are active leaders in parish. Eight (8.08 percent) did not identify as active leaders in parish.

Ninety-six responded regarding their interest in becoming involved. Over 70% expressed a desire to become involved. Of those who strongly agreed that they wanted to become involved, 17 were men and 22 women. In terms of age, the largest number, 27 people, were between 51-70, and the second largest group (10 people) were older than 70. Of concern was the low level of interest by the age group most necessary to the growth of a parish, namely those aged 31-50. Only 2 people indicated interest.

Participation in parish events received 92 responses and an overwhelming 83% indicated their involvement. Of that group 54 (58.70 percent) strongly agreed. A follow-up to this question would seek to identify which events received the most participation especially by age group.

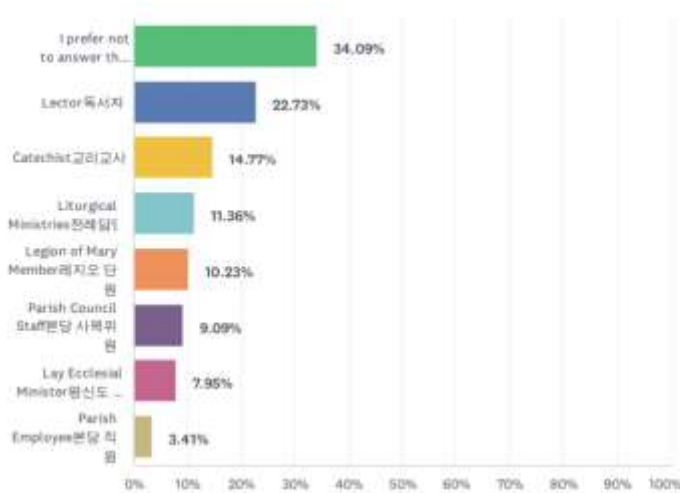
One option of particular interest to this thesis-project was the role ease of communication played in participation with a parish community. Ninety-eight responded with an overwhelming 83% affirming ease of communication, and 61 (62.24 percent) strongly agreeing that they

participated because it was easy to communicate. This too is a response that invites further investigation to determine how much the accessibility to sign language plays a role.

Of the 95 people who responded about their level of comfort in their parish, 86% were in agreement with a significant majority 64 (67.37 percent) in strong agreement and only 2 (2.11 %) in disagreement. In terms of gender, there were 34 women and 30 men who articulated strong agreement. By age, strong agreement was expressed by two-thirds of respondents between 18-30, 7 people aged 31-50, 38 people aged 51-70 and 17 people older than 70. This initially appears to be a positive assessment and further investigation may yield insights about what practices cultivate a sense of comfort in each of the settings Deaf Catholics live their faith.

The level of weekly Mass attendance at the same church received 102 responses. Seventy-three (71.57 percent) strongly agreed that they attend Mass weekly in their parish and 18 (17.65 percent) somewhat agreed. Slightly over 89% in total indicated fairly regular Mass attendance. Of the 72% that were strongest in attendance, 40 were women and 32 were men. In this category, by head count, 45 people aged 51-70 and 18 people aged older than 71 were the largest cohorts, suggesting that 86% of weekly Mass attendees are over the age of 51. Six (5.88 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed that they attended Mass every week at the same church. Two (1.96 percent) somewhat disagreed and 3 (2.94 percent) strongly disagreed. However it cannot be implied from this latter set of answers that respondees do not regularly attend Mass because the way the question was worded it contained the condition “at the same parish.”

Q 11 If you responded that you were involved in parish ministries, please check all that apply.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
I prefer not to answer this question	34.09% 30
Lector	22.73% 20
Catechist	14.77% 13
Liturgical Ministries	11.36% 10
Legion of Mary Member	10.23% 9
Parish Council Staff	9.09% 8
Lay Ecclesial Minister	7.95% 7
Parish Employee	3.41% 3
Total Respondents: 88	

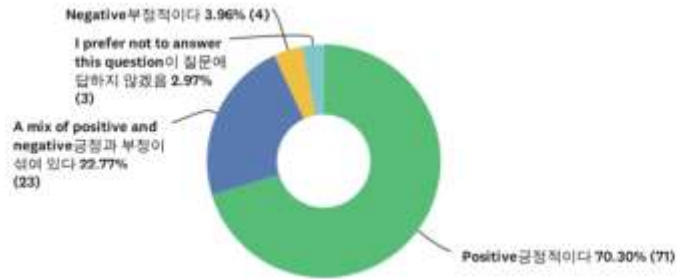
Q 11 was addressed to those respondents who had indicated in Q 10 that they were involved in parish ministry or leadership. Eighty-eight participants responded to this question, 17 people skipped it and 30 (34.09 percent) preferred not to answer this question. This corresponds with the findings in Q 10 where approximately 50% of respondents indicated involvement in ministreries and leadership. Twenty (22.73 percent) are lectors, 13 women and 7 men. Four lectors are aged 31-50, 14 aged 51-70, and 2 people are older than 71). Thirteen (14.77 percent) are catechists. Ten (11.36 percent) are liturgical ministers. Nine (10.23 percent) are legion of Mary members. Eight (9.09 percent) are on the parish council. Seven (7.95 percent) are lay ecclesial ministers. Three respondents (3.41 percent) are parish employees.

Analyzing the Demographic Data (Q 9- Q 11)

The survey indicates a high level of parish registration and involvement among the respondents. Almost all participants are registered members of the Catholic Church. It shows that they experience a strong connection of belonging to the Church. Surprisingly, of 102 respondents, 91 (89.22 percent) agree that they attend Mass weekly at the same church. Deaf people are able to attend Mass in different parishes; however, the fact that the respondents attend Mass at a Deaf parish, a hearing parish with a Deaf community, or a hearing parish with sign language interpreted services may indicate the importance of sign language. On the other hand it may also indicate that the respondents who accessed the survey received the survey link through these locations. Attending the same church every week can help Deaf people to be more involved and to cultivate a sense of belonging. Forty-three respondents, 24 women and 19 men are involved as lectors, catechists and liturgical ministers. One of those involved in these ministries is between 18-30 years old; 10 people are aged 31-50; 28 are between 51-70; and 4 people are older than 71. Involvement by those between 31 and 70 is collectively the highest, and that can be helpful to sustaining a community. The challenge will be how can young people be encouraged and mentored into assuming ministerial and leadership roles. It is important that Deaf lay people are involved in Deaf Church and see themselves in leadership and ministerial roles. Further research needs to be done to determine if Deaf people attending contexts other than a Deaf parish are participating in ministry and leadership and to what extent.

Experience and Preferences for Future Involvement (Q 12 – Q 14)

Q 12 My experience of the Catholic Church is?

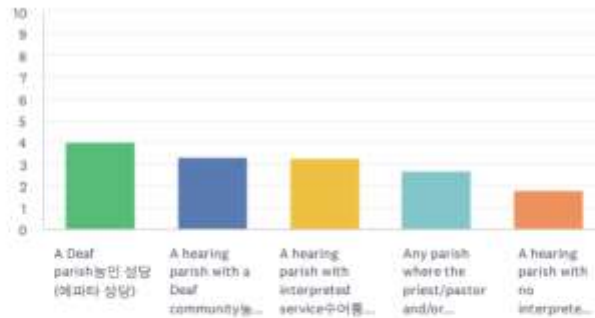


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Positive	70.30%	71
A mix of positive and negative	22.77%	23
Negative	3.96%	4
I prefer not to answer this question	2.97%	3
TOTAL		101

Of the 101 respondents who replied, 71 (70.30 percent) said that their experience of the Catholic Church was positive. This number included 38 women, 32 men and 1 person who preferred not to identify gender. By age group, all but one group expressed a positive experience: 85% of those over 71, 72% of those between 51-70; 67% of the three people aged 18-30 were positive. Of note, only 38% of people aged 31-50 associated their experience of the Church as positive; 48% of them found their experience to be a mix of positive and negative. Four (3.96 percent) said that their experience of the Catholic Church was negative, all were between 51-70 years old, 3 women and 1 man. Three (2.97 percent) preferred not to answer this question.

Q 13 What type of Church community would you prefer to participate in on a regular basis?

Rank your preferences with 1 being the option you most want.

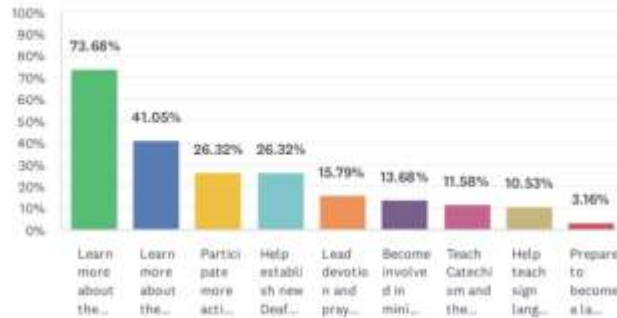


	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
A Deaf parish 농인 성당 (에피타 성당)	59.18% 58	10.20% 10	9.18% 9	15.31% 15	6.12% 6	98	4.01
A hearing parish with a Deaf community 농인 모임이 있는 청인 성당	20.41% 20	21.43% 21	28.57% 28	25.51% 25	4.08% 4	98	3.29
A hearing parish with interpreted service 수어통역이 있는 청인 성당	12.24% 12	30.61% 30	31.63% 31	20.41% 20	5.10% 5	98	3.24
Any parish where the priest/pastor and/or pastoral staff can communicate in Sign Language 사제/주임신부/사목자 가 수어로 소통할 수 있는 성당이라면 어디든지	7.14% 7	31.63% 31	10.20% 10	25.51% 25	25.51% 25	98	2.69
A hearing parish with no interpreters or and no Deaf ministers 수어통역도 없고 농인 사목자도 없는 청인 성당	1.02% 1	6.12% 6	20.41% 20	13.27% 13	59.18% 58	98	1.77

Of 105 participants, 98 responded to this question. They were asked to rank their preference of the type of parish context they favored most. The majority of respondents, 58 (59.18 percent), preferred a Deaf parish. Twenty (20.41 percent) preferred a hearing parish with a Deaf community while 12 (12.24 percent) preferred to participate in a hearing parish with interpreted services. Seven (7.14 percent) preferred to participate in any parish where the priest/pastor and/or pastoral staff can communicate in Sign Language. The least popular preference at 1% was participation in a hearing parish with no interpreters and/or no Deaf ministers. These responses could suggest that sign language is the most important factor, even more so than the presence of other Deaf people. A look at respondents' second preferences shows that 62% would be satisfied either with any parish where the priest or pastoral staff can communicate in sign language or where services were interpreted. This deserves future study

because it could appear that need for communication is a priority possibly even over belonging to a Deaf community. A look at the second and third preferences may also indicate a preference for communities closer to home and/or a desire for flexibility and more available accessible options. This requires study beyond the capabilities of this limited survey.

Q 14 I would like opportunities to... Check all that apply



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Learn more about the Catholic faith가톨릭 신앙을 더 많이 배우고 싶다	73.68% 70
Learn more about the Bible성경을 더 많이 배우고 싶다	41.05% 39
Participate more actively in my parish본당 생활에 더 능동적으로 참여하고 싶다	26.32% 25
Help establish new Deaf Catholic communities새로운 가톨릭 농인 공동체를 만드는 데 도움이 되고 싶다	26.32% 25
Lead devotion and prayer group신실 단체, 기도 모임을 이끌고 싶다	15.79% 15
Become involved in ministries사목활동에 참여하고 싶다	13.68% 13
Teach Catechism and the Bible그리스도와 성경을 가르치고 싶다	11.58% 11
Help teach sign language to hearing people to be interpreters청인들에게 수어를 가르쳐 통역사로 양성하는 데 도움이 되고 싶다	10.53% 10
Prepare to become a lay minister영신도 직무자가 될 준비를 하고 싶다	3.16% 3
Total Respondents: 95	

Ninety-five participants responded to this question. Respondents could pick more than one answer. However, how many people picked more than one is unknown. Seventy people (73.68 percent), 39 women, 30 men, and 1 person who preferred not to identify with respect to gender, expressed interest in opportunities to learn more about the Catholic faith. This interest came from across all age groups, with people in each group 31 and older registering interest ranging from 66% - 75%. Curiously the eldest group expressed the most interest. Bible study generated interest from 39 people (41.05 percent), 26 women and 13 men across all age groups,

with well over a third of people older than 31, and two-thirds of respondents under 31 expressing a desire to learn more about the Bible. Twenty-five people (26.32 percent) 19 women and 6 men, the majority (17) aged 51-70 would like opportunities to participate more actively in their parish. Twenty-five 25 people (26.32 percent), 10 women, 14 men, and 1 person who preferred not to answer the question of gender, would like opportunities to help establish new Deaf Catholic communities. Fifteen respondents 15 (15.79 percent), the majority women, and two-thirds between 51-70 would like opportunities to lead devotion and prayer groups. Thirteen people (13.68 percent), 8 women and 5 men, all but three aged 51-70, would like opportunities to become involved in ministries. Eleven people (11.58 percent) across age groups would like opportunities to teach catechism and the Bible, 6 are women and 5 are men. An equal number of men and women, 10 in total (10.53 percent), would like opportunities to help teach sign language to hearing people to be interpreters, 70% of them are 51 and older. Finally, 3 people (3.16 percent), 1 woman, 1 man and 1 person who preferred not to answer the question of gender, all between 51-70 years old, would like opportunities to prepare to become lay ministers.

Analyzing the Demographic Data (Q 12- Q 14)

Most Deaf respondents said that their experience of the Catholic Church was positive. It shows that the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Seoul has been ministering to Deaf people by providing access through sign language services in a variety of contexts. Many Deaf people prefer to participate in a Deaf parish, secondly a hearing parish with a Deaf community and thirdly a hearing parish with interpreted service. It seems to indicate that it is important that Deaf people must be provided sign language service in the Church. Most Deaf respondents would like opportunities to learn more about the Catholic faith and the Bible, this may also indicate that they do not seem to have opportunities to take religious classes. It is

important to pay attention to the number of women already involved and open to possible involvement in church leadership and ministries.

Conclusion

While limited, this survey received an impressive number of responses. This is noteworthy especially because of the difficulties for many Deaf with written Korean. The willingness of Deaf Catholics to respond provides a window into their experiences of Catholicism that will benefit efforts to improve parish and community life for the church in the Archdiocese of Seoul. Hopefully it will encourage others to pursue issues that are raised here that are beyond the scope of this thesis-project. At the same time, they demonstrate a keen interest on the part of the Deaf to be and remain active participants with an openness to learning more and exercising leadership and ministries.

Chapter 5

Dialoguing with Deaf Theology

Deaf Theology may be new for hearing theologians but it is necessary for Deaf Church. Deaf theology comes from the experience of Deaf people. Without the experience of Deaf people, there would be no Deaf theology. Like Deaf theologian Kirk VanGilder I too “am interested in what deaf people think. This would lead us closer to understand how deaf ontologies ground deaf theology.”¹

Two Deaf theologians in particular guide my explorations of Deaf theology. British Deaf Anglican theologian Hannah Lewis and American Deaf Methodist theologian Kirk VanGilder who is also a professor of religion at Gallaudet University. VanGilder’s scholarship is in the area of missiology and Lewis focuses on the relationship between theory and practice in ministry and theology, what some may consider practical theology.² Her book, *Deaf Liberation Theology*, was the “first deaf-authored publication of deaf theology.”³

This chapter is influenced by a dialogue between Lewis and VanGilder.⁴ Their insights guide my analysis of Deaf experiences accessed through the open-ended questions on my survey, and in the narrative data set from the Asian regional report of the *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries* project. *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries* is “a research

¹ Hannah Lewis and Kirk VanGilder. “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology: Deaf Ontologies Seeking Theology,” in *Innovations in Deaf Studies: The Role of Deaf Scholars*, 176.

² Lewis and VanGilder. “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 173.

³ Lewis and VanGilder. “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 173. Lewis, *Deaf Liberation Theology* grew out of her doctoral thesis.

⁴ Lewis and VanGilder. “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 169-190.

project of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Holy See. It aims at deepening the teaching of Pope Francis and promoting a renewal of theology.”⁵ The project involved theologians from six continents who were asked to “uncover the *sensus fidelium* of those often excluded from discourse within society and especially within the Church.”⁶

Filipina theologian Agnes Brazal was the Asia regional coordinator for this Vatican sponsored project. She wrote and edited the regional *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries* final report.⁷ According to the report, the Asian regional group conducted its interviews in four cities (Hong Kong, Hyderabad, Pune, and Quezon City). They interviewed a total of 35 individuals and conducted 10 focus group discussions. One of groups was comprised of four Deaf Filipinos from Quezon. These interviews were conducted by Kristine Meneses, who has long been involved in ministry with the Deaf. The report explains the committee’s outreach, “In our listening exercises, we have conversed with various groups in the peripheries of Asian church and society – migrant workers, homeless, street sweepers, victim-survivors of violence against women, Catholics in interfaith marriages/families, Dalits, indigenous peoples, catechists, the Deaf, and the LGBT.”⁸ I received permission and access to the transcript of the interviews conducted with this limited number of Deaf Asian Catholics for the *Doing Theology from The*

⁵ “About the Project,” *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries*, <https://migrants-refugees.va/theology-from-the-peripheries/>.

⁶ “About the Project,” *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries*

⁷ Agnes Brazal, PhD, Regional Coordinator Asia, *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries* Final Report Asia, October 12, 2022, <https://migrants-refugees.va/resource-center/publications/>.

⁸ Brazal, *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries*, Asia, 31.

Existential Peripheries project. These interviews were conducted in Filipino Sign Language (FSL) and translated into English.⁹ To preserve the identity of the interviewees, in this thesis-project initials will be used in place of names.

Lewis and VanGilder intentionally choose to ground their conversation in Deaf theological sources acknowledging that there are relatively few books, chapters and peer-reviewed articles because “deaf theology is a young subject in the academy.”¹⁰ Lewis, citing Deaf scholar Paddy Ladd, explains “a fundamental difference between deaf studies and other minority studies...is that because of literacy issues deaf studies has been historically instigated and run by hearing people who are of the majority.”¹¹ They make this sourcing choice because their dialogue focuses on ontology, and being Deaf informs Deaf theology.

These two Deaf theologians understand Deaf theology as a liberation theology. They claim Latin American liberation theology, Black theology and Feminist theology have greatly influenced them. Like the communities those liberation theologies arise from, Deaf people too have experienced oppression, discrimination, and marginalization but the oppression includes audism, and paternalism.¹² “All of which—however benevolent they are in intention—have had (and still have) a disempowering effect on the deaf community and deaf individuals and which, therefore, need to be resisted.”¹³ They insist that “Although our dialogue on deaf theology has

⁹ “Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries: Vatican Research Project,” interviews with PA, RD, EE, PS by Kristine Meneses, unknown interview date. Interview transcript is used with permission and was sent to me by Kristine Meneses on January 6, 2024.

¹⁰ See Lewis and VanGilder. “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 172 and 174.

¹¹ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 174.

¹² Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 170-171.

¹³ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 170-71.

affinities with the methodologies of these liberation theologians, we contend that deaf theology needs to prioritize concerns that arise from deaf experience.”¹⁴

They affirm that Deaf theology is grounded in the way Deaf people experience ourselves, and affirm that God creates Deaf people to be equal to hearing people. God created Deaf people and saw that it was good. Their chapter and Lewis’ book challenge negative attitudes toward Deaf people that are rooted in a medical view of hearing loss that suggests Deaf people need to be fixed, medically and physically, in order to be like hearing people.¹⁵ Or as Lewis explains in her book, attitudes reflected in “the first reaction of hearing parents of deaf children is to blame themselves for having done something wrong, to feel that God is punishing them for their sins by giving them a handicapped child.”¹⁶

These Deaf liberation theologians highlight, what Lewis argued in *Deaf Liberation Theology*, that “ordinary deaf people have been ‘doing theology’ for years,” in their sign languages and through their “cultural patterns of collective storytelling.”¹⁷ These two Deaf theologians conclude that Deaf theology can be ground in Deaf experiences, perspectives, questions, and Deaf ontologies. My analysis of the survey feedback and the transcripts occurs in dialogue with their insights and suggests some thematic connections. This presentation of Deaf stories also serves to broaden Deaf experiences to include perspectives from Deaf people in Asia.

Identifying Themes in Deaf Theology and Ministry

The responses to the open-ended survey questions, the transcript of the interviews with

¹⁴ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 170.

¹⁵ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 172.

¹⁶ Lewis, retelling a story by Deaf American Episcopal priest Jay Croft in *Deaf Liberation Theology*. 64.

¹⁷ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 171.

Deaf participants in the *Existential Peripheries* project, and my own experiences as a Deaf Catholic ground this chapter in lived experience. Through the process of preparing for the Synod on Synodality Pope Francis wanted to listen to all people including those who are on the margins, so the Catholic Church invited people across the world to participate through local, regional, and global consultations.¹⁸ I found that opportunities to listen to Deaf people were mostly absent. The survey that I developed for this thesis-project was one way to surface perspectives from the Deaf Catholic faithful, in this case from the Archdiocese of Seoul.¹⁹ Through SurveyMonkey I was able to carefully listen to Deaf people from my archdiocese. I identify five themes across these sources in dialogue with the scholarship of Lewis and VanGilder.

Theme 1. Empowerment for the Faith of the Deaf Comes from Sign Language

The report from Asia acknowledged that the “Deaf who were interviewed are part of a group that see themselves not as people with disabilities but as an ethnicity with a different language calling for recognition from both the society and the Church.”²⁰ Among the themes that emerged in some of the interviews with Deaf participants were experiences of exclusion in family as well as church and society. Responses to the open-ended questions in my *Deaf Church* survey pointed to the role of communication as an alienating factor. One respondent observed, “Since religious life is difficult when communication is not possible, Deaf people need help in

¹⁸ For access to the consultation process and documents begin with the link <https://www.synod.va/en/the-synodal-process/phase1-the-consultation-of-the-people-of-God.html>.

¹⁹ Min Seo Park, *Deaf Church*, San Mateo, CA: SurveyMonkey Inc, 2023, www.surveymonkey.com. Please note that this survey appears as Survey-Korean Deaf Catholics, bilingually, in Appendix A and in Korean in Appendix B.

²⁰ Brazal, *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries*, Asia, 36.

church life” (q 21). These observations indicated the importance of sign language as a source of empowerment. A survey respondent cautions, “Do not ignore Deaf people and make sure to use sign language in front of them so that language culture can coexist” (q 21). Of the 53 respondents to question 21 over 43% referenced communication and sign language as necessary for communication.

Since many Deaf are often born to hearing families, alienation is felt at home too. RD is only deaf person in his family. He said, “My family knows sign language but I still experience what most Deaf call the ‘Dinner Table Syndrome.’ This is a common experience among Deaf people, when around the table, all family members [usually the hearing] are talking, laughing, and I, a Deaf, cannot understand what they are talking about; I feel out of place. Outside the home, the same thing happens. The mainstream society of course are hearing and speaking.”²¹

Like RD, I am the only Deaf person in my family. When I had dinner with them, I felt lonely because I could not understand what they said. I saw that Deaf family, including Deaf parents and Deaf children, chatting with each other in sign language when they had dinner. I wished that I could have Deaf parents, Deaf brothers and Deaf sisters. Not only me, but also, other Deaf people felt the same experience. When I was a seminarian, a Deaf man asked if I could pray for his Deaf wife who was pregnant. He hoped that she would give birth soon and that their new baby would be Deaf. When I met them and before I prayed for them, I asked them why they wanted to have a Deaf son or daughter. They replied that they did because they wanted to communicate with them in sign language throughout their life. The baby was born Deaf and they were happy.

²¹ Brazal, *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries*, Asia, 23. RD “Doing Theology,” transcript, 2.

These stories give me insights into how Deaf people feel when they attend Mass in a hearing-dominant church and how Deaf people feel when they attend Mass in Deaf Church. Exclusion, because of communication, impacts participation in the life of a family or a community. A Deaf Filipino explained,

As for the Jehovah's Witness, they are a good example of how to relate with Deaf people. The services are all in sign language. Once, they held a congregation meeting where there was no interpreter; all of them used sign language including the hearing attendees. They allow the Deaf to preach. But here in the Catholic Church I feel that Deaf are being controlled. This is the reason why; other denominations tend to entice Deaf to transfer to their church/congregation.²²

Some Deaf Catholic Koreans quit the Catholic Church and joined Protestant churches for the Deaf. I remember when I was a high school student, my Deaf classmates introduced me to their Christian Deaf churches. I saw Deaf pastors preach and was impressed with their sign language because I understood their sign language clearly.

Responses to the open-ended survey questions also indicated the importance of using sign language, considered to be the native language of Deaf people, in Church. One respondent noted, "I am always grateful for the consideration that Deaf people receive from hearing volunteers and hearing people. However, it is a bit disappointing that there are sometimes limitations in communication" (q 21). Some respondents were broad in their request, "I hope that language rights will be given priority to all Deaf Catholic believers. I hope that priests and the religious who can (*use*) sign language will be close to Deaf people and show consideration and respect" (q 19). Others offered specific suggestions: "Please create conditions for hearing mass with Deaf people, even if it is a Catholic church. For example, it would be good to intentionally place seats for the Deaf and sign language interpreters in each church" (q 19); "I hope that they will

²² Brazal, *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries*, Asia, 4. "Doing Theology," transcript, 8.

designate at least one parish for the Deaf in each district across the country to provide sign language interpretation” (q 18).

Across the questions, Deaf people articulated a need for signing priests and sign language interpreters however, respondents seemed to prefer signing priests, including Deaf priests. One respondent observed, “There is a shortage of priests who can speak sign language. I wish there were more priests who know how to use sign language” (q 17). This desire was repeated by several others. The ability to understand the Mass or the homily was a factor for some²³ though one person felt it would also be helpful as well for sharing information on Catholic doctrine (q 21).

Transcripts from Deaf interviewees in the Philippines reveal concerns consistent with Deaf respondents in the Archdiocese of Seoul. One of the interviewees, EE said, “The church must provide regular Sign Language interpreters in all the scheduled masses, not just for one mass, because not all Deaf would prefer a morning or afternoon mass. It matters to us to have full access to the mass when there is an interpreter present in every mass schedule.”²⁴ Another interviewee, PS explained, “For me, it was difficult to enter the church because there are many things I cannot understand, especially in the Catholic Church where regular interpreters are not provided. It is difficult for me to understand what is happening without an interpreter.”²⁵

For most Deaf people, faith comes from what is seen by sign language, and what is seen

²³ For example: “It is good to go to a church for the Deaf because it is homily” (q17); “As a Deaf person, I really like it when Mass is offered in sign language because it is easier to understand the words” (q 17).

²⁴ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 6.

²⁵ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 6.

by sign language through the word of Christ. Sign language is helpful in understanding the Word of God and in sustaining and expressing faith, “The use of sign language and deaf experience makes clear that speech is not the sum total of language and that the tongue and hands are two equal modalities for expressing language.”²⁶

Theme 2. Affirming that God creates Deaf People Equal to Hearing People

When I was pastor of Ephphatha Deaf parish, I had an opportunity to talk with Deaf parishioners in sign language. I asked them, “If you were born again, do you want to be a Deaf person or hearing person?” Surprisingly, all of them replied the same answer, “I WANT to be DEAF.” I asked, “Don’t you want to be hearing?” They replied, “No, if I were hearing, for what?” One of them said, “I believe that God created me a Deaf person and has the reason why I became Deaf. I do not think that God punished me, so I became Deaf.” They did not regret and were not sad that they were Deaf; however, they were proud of being Deaf themselves. These Deaf people do not look for pity; they want to serve the Church with their deafness as God’s gift.

The survey respondents of the Archdiocese of Seoul Deaf community often reflected similar sentiments. Deaf people do not want to be considered inferior to hearing and do not want to be controlled by hearing people. Deaf people want to be regarded as equal to hearing people so that Deaf people and hearing people can participate together in praising God. This perspective came through especially in several responses to question 21 which asked: “What would you like hearing Catholics to know about what being Deaf means to you in the Church?”

There were affirmations of shared humanity: “Deaf people have the same faith as hearing

²⁶ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology: Deaf Ontologies Seeking Theology,” 181.

people and are brothers and sisters in the Lord” (q 21). This came with expectations: “Since Deaf and hearing people are children of God, they live an equal life without neglect and indifference” (q 21). These expectations included a desire to get along: “We are all the same people. It is no different. I want to get along with hearing people” (q 21).

This desire extended to hopes for a shared life of faith, “I hope that Deaf and hearing people can live a life of faith together” (q 21). Deaf respondents wanted hearing Catholics to know “that Deaf people want to live a life of faith as deeply as hearing people and have a spiritual desire” (q 21) and that deafness “does not mean that you have weak faith” (q 21). Ultimately Deaf respondents sought “A life of complete communion in the religious life of all Catholic believers, whether Deaf people or hearing people (q 20); and this included participating “equally in Mass” (q 20).

Deaf people must have experienced that they have been oppressed and dominated for many years. They do not seem to share their negative experience through the survey; however, instead they seem to say that they are hopeful that hearing people will recognize them as equals. Deaf people seem to think that hearing people may understand Deaf people as those who have weak faith, so they want to share with hearing people that Deaf people also have strong faith as hearing people. Hearing people and Deaf people are all the same baptized people. All of them are brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, a claim rooted in the First Letter to Corinthians, “For in one spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

In their theological dialogue Deaf theologians Lewis and VanGilder reflect on Genesis 1:31, God’s affirmation of the goodness of all creation.²⁷ Lewis proposes that “Just as enhanced

²⁷ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 178-179.

sensory skills can be celebrated as an example of the wonderful diversity of human beings, so we can also celebrate deaf (and disabled people) as truly made in the image of God who created humankind in all its wonderful diversity and sees all people as good—very good.”²⁸ VanGilder pushes even further, claiming “that all creation is declared ‘very good’ and thus Deaf people—including our experience, culture, and languages—carry this imprimatur of divine goodness and value, not just for us, but for the wholeness of creation.”²⁹ He points out that this verse from Genesis is also cited “as a justification for deaf liberation by deaf people not seeking to make explicitly religious claims.”³⁰

As Creator, God created the whole creation including hearing people and Deaf people; therefore, God saw both hearing people and Deaf people as good. To consider Deaf people as inferior and worthy of being oppressed and dominated contradicts God’s view of Deaf people as good. Therefore, Deaf people have to be liberated from oppression and domination. Lewis explains, “This theological claim that we are deaf because God made us that way has been used as the foundation upon which deaf people have declared they are equal to hearing people.”³¹

The transcript illustrates that interviewees also strongly support the concept that Deaf people and hearing people are equal in the Catholic Church and the society and should be able to participate fully. RD told of how a priest affirmed this for him at a time when his experience indicated otherwise. RD said, “In the past, there was an interpreter during mass, but I feel it is not inclusive because it seems that the Deaf is a different and separated group. I feel that the

²⁸ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 178.

²⁹ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 179.

³⁰ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 179.

³¹ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology: Deaf Ontologies Seeking Theology,” 177.

Deaf is not part of the church family. But a priest...corrected me and told me that God loves me because for God all are equal.”³² While theologically this may be true, RD points to how the realities of life for Deaf people communicate a different message.

My opinion, which is based on my experience, justice for the Deaf is never a reality. There is more injustice that happens to us Deaf. Even though we have passed the Filipino Sign Language (FSL) as law, even in the Catholic Church, justice is zero. If there is justice, I want to see Deaf people happy in their lives just like hearing people. I want a society where communication barrier does not exist, where there is access for Deaf people and Deaf community are free, and no need to worry.³³

Another Deaf interviewee, PA expressed how things should be: “Hearing people, ‘normal’ people live harmoniously with the Deaf and other Persons with Disabilities. It would be a society with no discrimination and no communication barrier; we can understand each other. There are equal job opportunities and there is respect for each other. No one is superior or inferior.”³⁴ A continued by underscoring the connection between mutual knowledge and cultivating community, “The church must be open and let other people [hearing people] know about the Deaf so that the Deaf and hearing can have harmonious and good relationships.”³⁵

If hearing people accepted and supported that God created hearing people and Deaf people equally, RD asked a question, “Do you think a Deaf priest can become a pope? Or could there be a Deaf pope?”³⁶ The question may be dilemma for hearing people; however, since God created Deaf people and hearing people equally, Deaf people also have the right to participate

³² “Doing Theology,” transcript, 5.

³³ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 10.

³⁴ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 10.

³⁵ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 4.

³⁶ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 9.

fully in the Church as well as hearing people. The history of the Catholic Church and Deaf people has been marred by exclusion. Deaf people were not allowed to receive most Sacraments, beyond baptism, because of deafness. The sense of hearing was considered necessary to “hear” and respond to the Word of God. The affirmation of equality is connected to participation at every level of the Church.

Theme 3: A Longing of Belonging

In their dialogue focused on deriving theology from Deaf experiences, Lewis and VanGilder consider deafness and belonging. Lewis tells the story about a bible study where two hearing priests invite Deaf participants

to get into groups to talk about their experiences of homesickness as a prelude to exploring a biblical text. Each group fed back to the whole room afterward-and group after group said that they never really got homesick-what they had experienced was being ‘schoolsick’ for the communication and community of their Deaf boarding schools during the school holidays at home with their families.³⁷

Lewis explains that this is an example of what Steven Emery has described as “‘deaf diaspora’—the longing of deaf people to be together because most of them are born into hearing families.”³⁸ Van Gilder identifies with the “schoolsick” sensation of longing in terms of positive experiences of belonging nurtured in a Deaf Church in the USA where he once ministered. “The way that deaf parishioners spoke of the value of the church in their lives and how they practiced

³⁷ Lewis and VanGilder. “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology: Deaf Ontologies Seeking Theology,” 179.

³⁸ Lewis and VanGilder. “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology: Deaf Ontologies Seeking Theology,” 179. Lewis draws on the work of Steven D. Emery, “A Deaf Diaspora? Imagining Deaf Worlds Across and Beyond Nations,” in *It's a Small World: International Deaf Spaces and Encounters*, Michele Friedner, and Annelies Kusters, eds. (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2015), 187-198.

being the church for one another was done with an air of ‘homecoming’ each week.’³⁹ These weekly encounters included worship, socials, sometimes meals, and care for those who struggled financially.

As one who has served as a Deaf pastor and chaplain of Deaf churches, I resonate with this longing for belonging that Lewis and VanGilder describe. I propose, from my experience, that “churchsickness” can also be a type of longing for community. Like VanGilder, I have witnessed and have carefully listened to many stories that illustrate this concept. Deaf people who come from hearing families where members preferred to speak orally rather than use sign language. Sign language dominant, they work in hearing environments and feel isolated at home and on the job. Feeling lonely, they wait for Sunday Mass and community socializing at the Deaf parish or the Deaf community within a parish. One person shared that this weekly experience was a source of joy that energized them spiritually; the Deaf parish was like a spiritual oasis. Others travel great distances to attend Mass in sign language and to spend hours chatting in the company of other Deaf people. Some Deaf people describe situations at hearing parishes without Deaf communities where social time often leaves them feeling alone and limited in their ability to communicate—no matter how hard they try. They share that being in worship communities with Deaf people and signing hearing people is joyful and refreshing for them.

In South Korea, there are two traditional holidays, *Seollal* and *Chuseok*. *Seollal* means Lunar New Year’s Day.⁴⁰ *Chuseok* means Lunar August fifteenth or Korean Thanksgiving Day.⁴¹

³⁹ Lewis and VanGilder. “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology: Deaf Ontologies Seeking Theology,” 179.

⁴⁰ “Korean New Year,” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, accessed March 18, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_New_Year.

⁴¹ “Chuseok,” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, accessed March 18, 2024,

During the traditional holidays, most Koreans visit their families and stay with them for a few days. Most of them spend their time hanging out with each other. For many Deaf people these have been occasions of negative experiences. They met their grand families including great grandparents, grandparents, parents, relatives, brothers and sisters-in-law and sisters and brothers-in-law, nieces and nephews. Typically, their families were all hearing people. Conversations, because they are in spoken Korean, not sign language, challenge Deaf people's ability to interact and some are left feeling frustrated and lonely. During these times of traditional holidays some long for the company of Deaf parishioners rather than their hearing family members because they feel so alone. These kinds of stories shared with me over the years convince me that "churchsickness" is real, and that it seems possible for Deaf people to feel as if they are not in diaspora anymore if they are actively involved in Deaf Church, connected to a Deaf parish or a parish with sign language access and Deaf communities.

The intentional listening sessions recorded in the transcripts reveal that some Deaf people in Asia experience the Catholic Church as uncomfortable and unwelcoming. One interviewee, EE responded "I feel bullied here. I feel more welcomed in other religious groups than in the Catholic church."⁴² Why do Deaf people feel uncomfortable with the Catholic Church and not welcomed? The Deaf Catholic Filipinos, who were interviewed, responded to that question. RD explained how something hearing people may perceive as a unifying source in worship maybe alienating for Deaf worshippers.

Today, we have songs, but we only copy the sign, without us truly feeling it. The songs or even responses do not make sense to us. I have asked the Deaf if they

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuseok>.

⁴² Brazal, *Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries*, Asia, 24. "Doing Theology," transcript, 8.

feel any connection with the songs during the mass or even to the responses, and they said, there is no connection because they were only trained to copy and follow the interpreter. In the hearing mass, we don't sense inclusion, we feel alienated and marginalized.⁴³

Some hearing priests of local hearing parishes have welcomed Deaf people, so the interviewees also told of experiences of feeling involved. Again, RD said, "While in the Deaf church, when it's time for the priest to give the homily, this is not monopolized by the priest, rather, the priest welcomes and encourages discussion, and questions, and shares the feelings and thoughts of the Deaf attendees in relation to the readings."⁴⁴ Another interviewee also responded to the question. PA said,

Before the year 2017, I don't feel comfortable whenever I enter a church. I don't know how to pray, even if my family were firm Catholic believers, they never included me during prayer time. I only join my grandmother when she prays. My other relatives would pray the rosary, and I felt excluded. There seems to be a set of groups within the family during religious activities. They never called me to join them in prayer. In 2017 when I began to attend the Feast at PICC, I felt the inclusion of the Deaf. After the celebration of the mass, there is preaching and synthesis. After which, there will be a meeting of heads, and they always call the Deaf to join the meeting. There were also some games where the Deaf can join."⁴⁵

He continued to say, "At Feast, they matched the culture of the Deaf in their activities, so we feel the inclusion. Before, it was a struggle to enter the Church, but because they made us feel welcomed and activities were Deaf sensitive, I enjoyed going to the church."⁴⁶

Moreover, another interviewee, EE responded, "Here I feel ignored, while in Jehovah's Witnesses (JW), they have regular interpreters and food for all. I feel very welcome in JW. I feel

⁴³ "Doing Theology," transcript, 6.

⁴⁴ "Doing Theology," transcript, 6.

⁴⁵ "Doing Theology," transcript, 4-5.

⁴⁶ "Doing Theology," transcript, 5.

happier because I can freely express myself.”⁴⁷ Such input may help the Catholic Church to wake up, pay more attention, and carefully listen to Deaf people so that efforts can be made to help Deaf Catholics feel welcomed and at home. Then perhaps more Deaf people will become actively involved in Deaf Church.

Deaf survey respondents expressed concerns about losing their community spaces and Deaf Church. These concerns grew out of an awareness of decreasing numbers. There were hopes that the “number of churches for the Deaf will increase” (q 18); “that the number of Deaf people will increase” (q.20); that “the Deaf community does not disappear” (q 16). In particular, some respondents were intentional about their Deaf parish continuing into the future, “I am very happy and grateful after the establishment of Ephphatha Parish. I am concerned that the number of Deaf believers will decrease in the future. A lot of attention and publicity is needed” (q 20). One respondent noted that “The Deaf community will grow if we make a space where all Deaf people are invited and welcomed warmly” (q 18). Such spaces are necessary because as another respondent indicated “I want to build friendships with Deaf people with an unchanging and consistent heart” (q 20).

Deaf people do not want to lose their Deaf communities. It is important for Deaf people to feel Deaf Church as their own church and to keep Deaf Church and Deaf spaces open because these are places of connection and belonging.

Theme 4. Thirsting for the Word of God

I studied Catholic theology in the United States of America and South Korea for 11 years and learned all the courses from all hearing professors. I never had any Catholic theological

⁴⁷ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 8.

courses from Deaf professors because there were none that I knew existed. While I took all theological courses, sign language interpreters interpreted for me. All the interpreters were good at sign language; however, all of them were hearing. Theology has been developed by all hearing scholars. The Bible was translated to many languages by hearing people. Catholic doctrine, Canon Law, and the Catechism were also developed and written by all hearing people. As a Deaf person, I was brainwashed yet did not become hearing; however, I became like-hearing.

When I was ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood, many hearing Korean people were surprised because they thought that the Roman Catholic priesthood belonged only to hearing people. “Making history ordained Deaf priest is a significance that breaks the prejudices of Korean dominant society as a whole and shows the image of an open church that goes forward and embraces the marginalized.”⁴⁸ Hearing people’s experience is that local parishes are run by hearing pastors. There are presently very few parishes in the world for the Deaf, and even those often are pastored by hearing priests.

Before the Second Vatican Council, many hearing people did not understand Latin when they attended Mass. In a similar way, Deaf do not understand hearing languages, spoken and sometimes written, used in all things in the Catholic Church. Deaf people have struggled with the Bible, Catechism, Doctrine, Canon Law and Theology that were written but not communicated in Deaf languages. Deaf people feel that they have been oppressed by hearing language and hearing-centric ideas.

Responses to the survey questions demonstrate that Deaf people do want to learn the Bible, Catechism Catholic Doctrine in Deaf language, sign language. This was particularly

⁴⁸ Seunghwan Lee, “Making a History of Ordained Deaf Priest, Father Min Seo Park: Significance and Hope,” *The Catholic Times*, July 15, 2007, 이승환, “박민서 신부 탄생 의미와 전망,” *가톨릭신문*, 2007년 7월 15일, <https://www.catholictimes.org/160816>.

evident in responses to Q 16 which asked, “What do you need from the Deaf Catholic community in the Archdiocese of Seoul?” and Q 17 “If your parish priest/pastor was sitting with you now, what would you want him to know about your experience of the church?”⁴⁹

These questions partly show how much Deaf people thirst for the Word of God, “I need faith guidance so I can go to heaven” (q 16). If Deaf people understand the Word of God clearly, then what would they do? “By understanding the Word of God, you can develop spiritual faith and participate in volunteer work” (q 16). Another said, “Thank you for telling me the Word of God (q 17).” However, Catholic doctrine may sometimes challenge Deaf people to understand. “There is a need for many Deaf people who not only use sign language but also understand the meaning of sentences. Catholic doctrine has more difficult terminology than Protestant” (q 16). Catholic teaching explained clearly in sign language resources for the Deaf are needed.

At least three respondents across the open-ended questions mentioned wanting to know more about the Bible, “I want to learn the Bible at a Bible group” (q 16). One of them pointed to a challenge, namely a “Lack of teachers to help with Bible study” (q 16). Others indicated a need for catechist training, and formation in the basics of the faith, “We need education on church knowledge that Catholic believers should know” (q 16). One respondent noted the necessity for such education in the faith, “I would like you to tell us about Catholic doctrine and the Word of God, which are lacking and many people do not know” (q 17).

Respondents want to learn them from Deaf priests, Deaf catechists, Deaf teachers and Deaf theologians. A need for Deaf priests came up a number of times, “The presence of a Deaf

⁴⁹ Min Seo Park, *Deaf Church*, San Mateo, CA: SurveyMonkey Inc, 2023, www.surveymonkey.com.

priest is most important. As a Deaf person, I really like it when Mass is offered in sign language because it is easier to understand words” (q 17). Another wrote, “I want to learn the Old and New Testament directly from the priest and teach them to Deaf believers” (q 17). An issue that arose, related to both clergy and interpreters was preaching. “I will tell you in detail about the difficulties, such as the fact that there have been very few times when I have properly understood homilies” (q 17). The role of preaching plays a role in communicating the faith, “I want to listen carefully to the Word of God spoken by the priest through homily” (q 17).

Deaf people want that the Bible, Catechism, Catholic Doctrine are developed and translated by Deaf scholars and ministers. Some Christian denominations have actively created the Bible in sign language. According to Daniel Silliman, a reporter for *Christianity Today*, a recently released “translation was led by Deaf people trained in the biblical languages.”⁵⁰ The Deaf Presbyterian church in South Korea has been creating the Bible in Korean Sign Language and they released the Bible in KSL on the website that is called, “Korean Sign Language Bible Institute,”⁵¹ so that Deaf people can have access to sign language Bible. Deaf people, in the Deaf Catholic community in the Archdiocese of Seoul, rely on the Bible that was translated by hearing people because there is no Korean Sign Language Bible for the Deaf in South Korea. That is the main reason why many Deaf people are frustrated with the Bible in hearing language. Deaf people, who are thirsting for the Word of God, need a Bible translation in Korean Sign Language in the Catholic Church so that they can understand clearly the Word of God, in their faith

⁵⁰ Daniel Silliman, “Sign Language Bible Complete after 39 Years,” *Christianity Today*, September 21, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/october/deaf-bible-american-sign-language-version-translation.html>.

⁵¹ Korean Sign Language Bible Institute, “Old Testament and New Testament in Korean Sign Language,” <http://kslbible.com/>. 한국수어성서원, “구약성경과 신약성경,” <http://kslbible.com/>.

tradition, and participate more fully in the life of their church. One of the Deaf respondents said, “Need to produce a sign language Bible” (q 16). Another spoke of their own initiatives to address these gaps in resources, “I make sign language names for Mass, Readings, and the Bible and hope for the unification of Catholic sign language” (q 16).

The survey responses and the transcript interviews reveal that both Deaf South Korean Catholics and Deaf Filipino Catholics have struggled to understand theology that was written in hearing language and with homilies spoken by hearing priests rooted in concepts developed by hearing people. One interviewee, PS, told of his struggle to understand theology at his hearing school. He entered a college-level-program for the Deaf that was run by DLS-College of St. Benilde in Manila and “it was only then that somehow, I understand the Church and Christian faith.”⁵² Another interviewee, EE points to the need for different resources, from interpreters to images, to facilitate comprehension. “It was when I became an adult that led me to ask many questions. I began to be curious about Church matters, hence we need an interpreter or priests to assist us by explaining the meaning of certain faith matters. Also, in teaching the faith, it matters for us Deaf to have pictures/images. This is especially true for Deaf children who like pictures. The priest will speak but we do not understand.”⁵³ As EE’s insights demonstrate, Deaf people are visual people. Deaf experiences, as revealed through these interviews, survey responses, and my own life indicate that Deaf people can preach, teach, explain, discuss, and communicate the Word of God. More resources need to be directed to assist Deaf people to develop and create for themselves Bible translations, theology, and catechetical resources in sign language, and in visual, pictorial, digital, and performative media.

⁵² “Doing Theology,” transcript, 6-7.

⁵³ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 6.

Theme 5. Active Participation in the Life and Ministries of Church

After the Second Vatican Council, the Deaf faithful came to realize and accept God's call to minister in the church in ways not possible before. However, acceptance means that hearing Catholics need to see Deaf Catholics in new ways as well, not as supplicants but as full participants in all aspects of the church's life. Besides looking at responses to the open-ended survey questions, it is important for this theme to also look at Q 11 which asked participants who had identified themselves as active in ministry (in Q 10) to specify which ministries. In Q 10 a total of 91 respondents indicated that they either strongly or somewhat agreed that they were involved in parish ministries.

Survey responses and the interview transcript revealed interest in varying ways of participating in the life and ministries of the Church. Several respondents indicated an inclination to service in general. One respondent in the survey said, "Community is important. As people of the same faith, we must cooperate with each other and do volunteer work to visit the apathetical and knock on their doors so that their hearts will open and they will come back" (q 16). Another one said, "Working hard at church I want to become a good believer who is good at serving" (q 20). Another said, "Listening and learning from God's teaching, I want to do volunteer work for the socially underprivileged" (q 20). One wrote, "Love each other, help each other, be considerate of each other, be friendly with each other, I pray hard and do volunteer work" (q 15).

There was attention in particular to involvement in social ministries. Two respondents said in the survey, "For senior citizens with limited mobility, I want to continue volunteering with vehicles" (q 20) and "I want to actively visit and pray for the sick" (q 20). This was often expressed in language of volunteerism. Deaf senior citizens wanted to go to Ephphatha Parish; however, some could not walk even though public transportation was easily accessible. Deaf

faithful helped pick them up at their homes and brought them to the parish on Sundays. Sick Deaf people were at hospital or in residence. Hearing family members and hearing friends visited the sick Deaf people; however, the sick sometimes felt lonely because they felt that the communication was limited. Deaf people visited the sick and chatted with them in sign language. Deaf people, as disciples of Jesus, do apostolic work for their Deaf neighbors.

Active participation in liturgical ministries is a more complicated issue, depending on the context. In a Deaf parish or at Deaf liturgies in hearing dominant communities, there are more opportunities for Deaf people to be involved. In situations where sign language interpretation is provided at Masses in local hearing parishes, Deaf attendants tend not to have opportunities to assume liturgical roles like lector for example. Two Deaf respondents said in the survey, “Deaf people often find it difficult because much of what happens in church is provided only in the hearing language” (q 21) and “Deaf people do not enjoy various religious advantages compared to hearing people” (q 21). Relevant to liturgical ministries, out of 88 respondents who responded to Q 11, 10 respondents participated in liturgical ministries and 20 respondents specifically identified their role as lector. In Q 11, 76 people were parishioners of Ephphatha Deaf parish. Out of 76 parishioners, 64 people responded and 12 people skipped the question. Out of 64 respondents, 16 respondents were lectors and 7 respondents were liturgical ministers. It can be seen that lectors and liturgical ministries attract active involvement in the Deaf parish because there are opportunities.

Participation in liturgical ministries also came up in transcript interviews. EE suggested, “Allow the Deaf to participate in certain organizations of the church, such as letting the Deaf be a Eucharistic minister or altar server.”⁵⁴ PS said, “The Church should have activities or volunteer

⁵⁴ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 6.

work that benefit the Deaf or have a Deaf ministry. There should be gospel sharing, explaining words that may be difficult for the Deaf to understand.”⁵⁵ EE proposed a similar initiative, “There is also a need for Bible study classes with/for the Deaf. Provide a room where the Deaf can share their understanding about the Bible.”⁵⁶ These responses invite a ministerial consideration, if Deaf people can understand the Word of God through gospel sharing class or bible studies groups might that may help them feel more comfortable to become potential lectors?

The open-ended survey responses showed an in interest in catechesis and in teaching. These arose as needs: to study, to learn, and to be formed in the faith. Two respondents said in the survey, “I hope that you will study your faith diligently and gain a new spirit for the community” (q 18) and “Spiritual and faith education suitable for older believers is needed” (q 18). There may be a lot of religious education programs for hearing people in the Church; however, Deaf people may not have access to sign language for the programs. Deaf people do not have a lot of opportunities to learn and study catechism, Bible and liturgy; therefore, these need to be priorities in Deaf Church to setup religious education and formation programs in sign language. These areas also were identified by some respondents as ministries they were either involved in or wanted to pursue. Catechesis was named several times. Two respondents said in the survey, “Open a doctrine and catechism class for missionary activities” (q 20) and “It would be good to improve related programs such as catechism, liturgy. etc” (q 18). Three respondents said in the survey, “I want to learn the faith” (q 17), and another wanted “to attend a Bible

⁵⁵ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 7.

⁵⁶ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 6.

meeting to increase my faith” (q 16).

Teaching took on many forms. Some wanted to teach catechism, liturgy, spirituality, faith and Bible. In Q 11, 13 respondents indicated they were involved as catechists. One wanted to learn in order to teach, “I want to learn the Old and New Testaments directly from the priest and teach them to Deaf believers” (q 17). Others wanted to educate hearing people sign language. Two respondents said in the survey, “I want to teach sign language for conversation” (q 21) and “I want to teach you sign language” (q 21). For some respondents, they wanted to learn not just for themselves, and their personal growth in the faith, but they wanted to be trained to help teach other Deaf people catechism, liturgy, spirituality, faith, and Bible so that they would minister to the Deaf Church. Deaf people also wanted teach sign language to hearing people so that they could communicate and be comfortable as sign language interpreters and volunteers for the Deaf Church.

Prayer emerged as a means through which people participated in the life of the church. Several respondents in the survey emphasize prayer: “A gathering for Deaf people to pray together” (q 16); “Prayer group activities” (q 16). One person explained, “I will always pray for the Pope, who sacrifices himself for the church around the world despite his age and illness. Cheer up and I’ll see you in heaven someday” (q 19).

In addressing increased opportunities for meaningful involvement by the Deaf in society through employment, RD commented, “There is hope when there is a change of attitude from both the Deaf and hearing.”⁵⁷ The same can be said for increasing participation of the Deaf in the Church. There is hope for increased participation and active involvement when the attitudes of both the Deaf and hearing are transformed. Reading Deaf experiences of church in dialogue with

⁵⁷ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 3.

Deaf theologies that privilege being Deaf as source for theology opens up new directions for ministry and ecclesiology in the Catholic Church.

Chapter 6

Toward Inclusion and Deaf Church

The Second Vatican Council was a great gift for the Deaf faithful. The Mass could be celebrated in the vernacular and this opened possibilities for the Deaf Catholics.¹ “After the Second Vatican Council, a priest could celebrate in sign language during Mass and face the Deaf faithful. The Deaf faithful better understood the proclamation of the Word of God. The Deaf church became stronger after the Second Vatican. The Deaf faithful had new possibilities to serve actively God and the church. This had implications for the success of Catholic Deaf ministry.”²

The Synod on Synodality provides another key opportunity to move more intentionally to inclusion. This thesis-project provided opportunities for encounter, storytelling, deep listening, and dialogue in ways that impact the church. Hopefully, it will contribute to a growing understanding of Deaf Church, of what inclusion can look like for Deaf people in hearing parishes, and what does it mean to be a Church for and of all. I ask a similar question as Deaf theologians Hannah Lewis and Kirk VanGilder,³ how will the universal church learn and benefit from listening to experiences, stories, and theologies of Deaf Catholics?

In the conclusion of their dialogue, Lewis and VanGilder express hope that “In ‘talking back’ to the larger church in theological terms grounded in our own deaf ontologies we contribute to our own liberation as deaf people by providing our theologically grounded

¹ Park, “Consideration for Pastoral Ministry,” 27.

² Park, “Consideration for Pastoral Ministry,” 27.

³ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 188.

perspectives on the positive value of being deaf.”⁴ This concluding chapter will point to directions, suggested by this research, that may arise from Deaf people signing back “*Ephphatha*, be open!” to our own Catholic Church in this time of synodality.

Directions for Further Research

The survey was conducted between November 4 and December 4, 2023. One hundred and five (105) Deaf and Hard of Hearing respondents consented to participate. Of this number approximately 60% responded to the open-ended questions. I learned that the survey challenged some respondents because Korean was not their first language, KSL was their dominant language. They could not write well so some wrote only one word or two-word responses. From the lengthy responses provided in the transcripts of signed interviews from the Philippines, it is reasonable to expect that Deaf people prefer to engage in sign language. While the survey response was significant and illuminating, I recommend that follow-up research be conducted in Korean Sign Language through interviews and focus groups. The transcripts from the Philippines were very helpful in bringing Deaf Asian Catholic perspectives, however the pool of interviewees was very small. For the purposes of this thesis-project, the survey and the transcript of interviews worked together to provide access to the perspectives of Deaf Catholics from Asia. Perhaps technology can be used to create surveys where questions and response options are signed and respondents can reply electronically in real time.

After XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held its First Session in Rome, the Synthesis Report was published. I read the document and unfortunately, I could not

⁴ Lewis and VanGilder, “A Dialogue on Deaf Theology,” 187.

find any mentions about the Deaf from the session or even as a question to consider moving into the second session scheduled for October 2024. One thing I learned from the survey is that more Deaf people responded than I expected, and there were many valuable insights in the open-ended questions too. The open-ended question that received the most engagement was Q 19 inviting Deaf Catholics to communicate what they would say to the Pope if they had the opportunity. This level of response, 68% of the respondents with all age groups represented, seems to indicate a desire on the part of Deaf Catholics to communicate and be listened to by their Church and pastoral leaders. My survey was not perfect but it can show synod organizers what is possible when people from the margins are included in the process.

There is a need for more study on Deaf Catholics and their religious lives, especially the young. Only 3 survey respondents were between ages 18 and 30, and only one, of those three young people, a Deaf self-identified female with cochlear implants responded to Q 15 – Q 21. There were however respondents who expressed concern about youth and young adults as the “youth population is decreasing due to the declining birth rate” (q 18). Therefore, another wrote that “attention to young people is absolutely necessary” (q 18). This is a priority shared by Pope Francis and articulated in the synod process. For Deaf Church these population changes may signal different ways of being Church in the future. What will inclusion look like if there are less Deaf people for whom sign language is not their native language, especially if there are less students in Deaf schools where sign typically is learned and shared among peers? How will those who identify as Deaf Plus, or who have cochlear implants, or those who were originally hearing and later became deaf when they were adults, find spaces to belong? What about CODA, mixed Deaf-Hearing families, and hearing people who are interested in sign language, will they be invited and find welcome in Deaf Church in the future? As one respondent admitted, “I don’t

know if it will decrease further in the future, but I will pray with earnest effort, believing that if I leave it to God and pray consistently, it will increase further” (q 19).

Directions for Ministry

Importance of Language—for a Linguistic Minority

The Deaf Catholic community in the Archdiocese of Seoul has changed; it is not the same as before. Deaf Church is important for Deaf people; it is more important for Deaf people to participate actively in the Church no matter where they go. Deaf church is not separated from hearing church because Deaf church and hearing church are one Church. The purpose of the Deaf church is the same as the hearing church. The Catholic Church is called to listen to Deaf people and minister with them in ways that recognize they are a linguistic minority with particular needs, much like immigrant communities. As the synod synthesis reminds us, we are a Church “out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation,” therefore the report proposes “We must pay renewed attention to the question of the languages we use to speak to people's minds and hearts in a wide variety of contexts, in a way that is accessible and beautiful.”⁵

Ministry of Sign Language Interpretation

In South Korea, many hearing people have been interested in learning Korean Sign Language (KSL) and being professional KSL interpreters. There are a lot of sign language classes in NGO Deaf Associations, colleges, religious institutions and private institutes. The Ministry of Health and Welfare, as part of the Korean national government, is in charge of the

⁵ XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, “A Synodal Church in Mission,” Synthesis Report of the First Session (4-29 October 2023), #5, Proposal (I), <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf>.

Korean Sign Language Interpreter's License and examination through the management of the Korean National Association of the Deaf.⁶ The number of the KSL interpreters who are nationally recognized license holders has been increasing. The interpreters have been hired or called to interpret at colleges, hospitals, police stations, courts, community services and public agencies. They have been paid by the government mostly and private agencies occasionally.

However, the Ministry of Health and Welfare does not take care of sign language interpreters for Deaf people in the Catholic Church. In the Archdiocese of Seoul, sign language interpreters at local hearing dominant parishes which have Deaf communities have not been paid for interpretation by their parish. They have interpreted as volunteers. Sign language interpreters at Ephphatha Deaf parish are volunteers as well. Deaf communities in the Archdiocese of Seoul have provided sign language classes to hearing people.

The main purpose of the sign language class is to train hearing people to be voluntary interpreters for the Deaf Catholic community. Some voluntary interpreters interpreted for a while but some could not do it anymore for personal reasons. The number of the voluntary interpreters has been decreasing and this worries Deaf people. Two Deaf respondents were concerned that the number of sign language interpreters is decreasing. One respondent said in the survey, "Number of Deaf believers is decreasing due to a lack of quality interpretation and a lack of interest in faith" (q 18). The other said, "As the number of Deaf believers decreases, the number of interpreters is expected to decrease accordingly" (q 18). Three respondents need sign language interpreters for them at Mass. One of them said, "I hope that the number of people who can communicate and interpret smoothly in sign language will increase" (q 20), while others hoped

⁶ "Nationally Recognized Sign Language Interpreter's License Examination," Korea National Association of the Deaf, accessed March 23, 2024, http://www.deafkorea.com/sub_business/signlanguage.php.

that the number of sign language interpreted services would increase (q 21).

A Deaf respondent in the survey explained, “During Mass, the interpreter must be good at sign language to be understood” (q 21). When hearing volunteers interpreted in sign language during Mass, some Deaf people did not clearly understand what they said because the interpreters had learned sign language for a short time and sign language was not their native or primary language. One Deaf respondent expressed well the dilemma, “I am always grateful for the consideration that Deaf people receive from hearing volunteers and hearing people. However, it is a bit disappointing that there are sometimes limitations in communication” (q 21). Therefore, another Deaf respondent wrote, “I want to teach you sign language” (q 21)

If Catholic parishes pay Sunday Mass interpreters a fee or stipend just as the Korean government has paid it to sign language interpreters, then will interpreters be more actively involved in the Deaf community? Will the number of the sign language interpreters in Deaf Church increase? It can be seen that promoting sign language to the hearing faithful is important for Deaf Catholic community. Can sign language interpretation be understood in terms of ministry?

Some Deaf people go to nearby local hearing dominant parishes where sign language interpretation is provided. Two respondents in the survey said, “Ephphatha Church is the only church for the Deaf, so there are many Deaf people who want to go to the church, but it is too far away to go” (q 18) and “Sign language interpretation is needed at a hearing parish because my house is far away” (q 21). Not only is distance a factor, but also scheduling conflicts. Some Deaf people are not available on Sunday morning; however, they are available in the afternoon. Therefore, they need access to sign language at local parishes so that they can attend Mass at a time they are available. Two respondents said in the survey, “Please create conditions for hearing

Mass with Deaf people in a Catholic church. For example, it would be a good intention to place seats for the Deaf and sign language interpreters in each church” (q 19) and “I hope that they will designate at least one parish for the Deaf in each district across the country to provide sign language interpretation” (q 18). It is important that local pastors listen to Deaf people, to what they need, and provide sign language interpreters to help Deaf people become involved and open wider their hearts to God.

Digital Ministries and Deaf Catholics

COVID 19 greatly impacted the Deaf Catholic community. The number of Deaf people who attended Mass through live streams increased rapidly. Deaf people could look at a signing priest’s Mass and homily through social media (SM) including YouTube, Facebook and websites. It is good for Deaf people to have easy access to social media (SM) to hear the Word of God. Digital technology is helpful for Deaf people to participate fully in the Catholic Church.

When they are not physically able to go to a Deaf parish or a hearing parish which has a Deaf community, but instead they attend Mass through SM only, Deaf people are limited from participating fully in the Church. They do not get to receive the Eucharist and they are deprived of the in-person experience of communion that occurs among Deaf people when they are in each other’s company. In other words, they do not have opportunities to receive the Body of Christ and socialize with each other as the Body of Christ. Besides providing digital opportunities like streamed liturgies, might there be ministries of outreach where Deaf Eucharistic ministers and others bring the experience of Deaf Church into the home of those on the margins?

Among the reasons Deaf Catholics are not able to attend in person is distance and a lack of Catholic sites that are language accessible. This impacts the Sacrament of Reconciliation too. Some Deaf people have asked me if they could confess their sins to me via videocall apps for

cellphones because they reside in the countryside some 100-200 miles away from Ephphatha Deaf parish and they preferred a Deaf priest rather than hearing priests for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. A Deaf respondent in the survey said, “It is uncomfortable because it is difficult to communicate with the priest during confession” (q 17). The lack of access to signing priests raises a question that is both pastoral and theological, namely is it possible for Deaf people to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation through digital technologies?

The use of social media and digital technologies would also be helpful in providing catechetical, faith formation, ministry training, and evangelization material for wider audiences of Deaf Catholics.

The Need for Deaf People in Ministry

In February 2024, I went to Paris, France to visit the Deaf Catholic community. I was told that in the past, two hearing priests celebrated Mass with Deaf people in sign language in Paris for many years; they became old and sick, so they could no longer minister. Today, there are only two local parishes where sign language interpretation is available for Deaf people in Paris. I went to one of them, a local hearing parish called St. Daniel Parish, and was asked to give a homily during Sunday Mass. I said that I could not give it because I did not know *la langue des signes française* (LSF) or French—written or spoken. Deaf French people said that they would interpret American Sign Language to LSF and then a hearing interpreter would interpret vocally LSF to French for hearing parishioners.

When a hearing priest and I celebrated Mass, Deaf people and hearing people attended it together. When I was giving a homily in both ASL and body language, one of Deaf people became angry and got up. He came toward the interpreters and shouted to them, “No sign language interpretation! Sit down and see Deaf priest’s signs.” The interpreters did not listen to

him and ignored him. The Deaf person left the church. After Mass, he came back and met me. I asked him why he left during Mass. He said that he got tired with interpreted Mass for years and became happy because he could understand my sign language clearly. He wanted hearing people to experience how Deaf people feel and got frustrated and struggled without interpretation or interpreted Mass. That is why he said to the interpreters to stop interpreting. He wanted hearing people to understand how Deaf people feel and to listen carefully to them. At the same time, it underscored the need for signing Deaf people to be active as ministers, preachers, and teachers of the faith.

In my travels earlier this year, while I was also writing this thesis-project, I met Deaf people in Brazil, Spain, and France. They looked at my preaching in basic gestures, body language, and facial expression and understood. They said to me, “Do not leave and please stay here.” I realized even more deeply that Deaf priests would be important in Deaf Catholic communities. My own story, narrated throughout the pages of this thesis-project, attest to how difficult it is for Deaf men to become Catholic priests. As I finish this writing, and before graduation, I will travel to India to bear witness to the ordination of the first Deaf man ordained there. Altogether, counting Joseph Thermadom, CSC, there are only three of us Deaf priests in the continent of Asia. The need and desire for Deaf priests comes through in some of the survey responses and in the transcript of interviews from the Philippines. For example, two respondents in the survey noted, “I wish there were more Deaf priests” (q 20) and “We need the training of Deaf priests” (q 20). In his interview, PS was asked, “What question from the Pope would you like to be asked that I haven’t asked you yet?” He responded he would like the Pope to ask him, “Do you want in the Philippines that the Deaf must study theology in the future? Do

you want to become a priest in the future?”⁷ This shows that the interviewee, a male under 30, may be interested himself in being a priest.

But it is not only about ordination, Deaf Church needs Deaf people involved in ministry, lay people and men and women from religious communities too. Deaf people want to become more active pastoral leaders, and learn more but they also want to teach their own as well as educate hearing people. The responses cited in the fifth theme of Chapter 5 indicate that involvement in a range of ministries interest Deaf Catholics, from Bible study instructor (q 17, q 20) to evangelization (q 16) and more. The pastoral issue is how do we prepare, train, and form Deaf lay ministers and leaders? While Deaf parishes like Ephphatha have the potential and facilities to do this work, there are very few such churches in the world, and most Deaf people find themselves in hearing communities, often without ministers who sign or in situations without interpreters. Where are Deaf Catholics, if according to the synthesis report of the first session of the Synod on Synodality,

The lay faithful are also increasingly present and active in service within Christian communities. Many of them organize and animate pastoral communities, serve as religious educators, theologians and formators, spiritual animators and catechists, and participate in various parish and diocesan bodies.⁸

⁷ “Doing Theology,” transcript, 8-9.

⁸ XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, “A Synodal Church in Mission,” Synthesis Report of the First Session (4-29 October 2023), #8, Convergences (e), <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf>.

Directions in Deaf Theology

Fundamental Questions and Theological Agony

The question of God's existence is a fundamental question in theology. Not only hearing people, but also Deaf people have wondered if there is a God. Eight people responded to the survey by asking "Is there a God?" or "Is God visible?" Only one respondent who inquired was between 18-30 years old: "There is definitely a God, right?" (q 19). The majority were older than 51 years old. Two respondents were male and six respondents were female. I was surprised that the number of the women, who have wondered if there is a God, was significantly higher than the number of the men because I thought that women were more actively involved in the Church than men.

Deaf Catholics can experience theological agony in part because of a history of exclusion and marginalization in the Church and in society. In South Korea, older Deaf people either lived through the Japanese colonial era and the Korean War or were raised by parents who did. Some missed their opportunities to learn how to read and write, so they could not read and write. Not only older Deaf women, but also older hearing women did not attend school because their parents thought that women did not need to study at school; however, they needed to learn how to do housework in order to get married. Grace Kim explains how Korean women, especially from the generations of her grandmother and mother were expected to "endure pain silently and privately."⁹ The fact that they address these painful questions to Pope Francis in Q 19 suggests that there is more to pursue in synodal conversations.

While the survey responses are a limited sample, it is worth noting that the fact that the

⁹ Kim, *Invisible*, 21.

majority who named this question were women raises important directions for future investigation. Grace Kim wrote:

Theology is an experience of God in a culture from one's personal and contextual point of view. In our comprehension of God, we reflect on our experiences, our praxis, and our cultural context to come to a deeper understanding of how God's presence is felt on earth.¹⁰

Reading these responses invites reflection on what provokes Deaf people to ask such questions. Deaf people wondering if there is a God may come from their experiences with difficult situations, in part related to living with deafness. Why do we need to live as Deaf people? Why are Deaf people oppressed? If being Deaf is God's gift then why did the Church exclude Deaf people from the sacraments for so long?

Perhaps a move from theological agony to theological agency is present in the words of two respondents who affirmed God's existence, each proclaiming "I want to let you know that God exists." Two female respondents, who are older than 51 years old, believe that there is a God, so they want to let people know that God exists. One response was directed to the pastor (q 17), the other to hearing people (q 21). Like Kim has observed, belonging to God's kingdom and being welcome in the church means having agency, being visible, and exercising "voice."¹¹

A Deaf Ecclesiology of Inclusion

Like Pope Francis, Deaf Catholics too dream of a Church characterized by encounter, listening, dialogue, and inclusion. Question 20 specifically asked survey participants "As a member of the Deaf Catholic Community, what is your dream for the Church?" Some responses raised up what could be powerful images of Church. One person wrote, "I want to talk in sign

¹⁰ Kim, *Invisible*, 126.

¹¹ Kim, *Invisible*, 158.

language in a cafe like a large, spacious garden” (q 20). Another proposed “A place full of believers, caring for each other, and full of happiness” (q 20). One respondent hoped that “we can continue to grow and develop without leaving anyone behind” (q 20).

Respondents reflected an appreciation for Church as relationship in community. Any person cannot live alone, so we must live together. This came through in several response across questions. One observed, “The Deaf community will grow if we make a space where all Deaf people are invited and welcomed warmly” (q 18). Another wrote, “I want to build friendships with Deaf people with an unchanging and consistent heart” (q 20). The importance of cultivating communication and dialogue for inclusion came through too: “I hope we can communicate well with each other and develop into one community (q 20); “I want to grow through dialogue with my neighbors” (q 16).

At the same time, respondents recognized that it is not always easy for people to live together, to “Love each other and be in harmony” (q 20). In the survey, one said, “Since religious life is difficult when communication is not possible, Deaf people need help in church life” (q 21). Others wanted to be part of the solution or offered advice on what would promote “Communion and unity” (q 20). One wrote, “I want to resolve the conflict between believers (q 17); another commented on the importance of “Strengthening community solidarity by helping each other in difficult times (q 20). One person recommended “A group where apathetic friends are invited to help or talk with each other if they have any concerns” (q 18). In general, these responses indicated hope that as individual and communities “we can show love and share peace with each other” (q 19).

The acknowledgment of difference called for a Church that was inclusive of Deaf and hearing people, “A life of complete communion in the religious life of all Catholic believers,

whether Deaf people or hearing people” (q 20). However, this first brought out a need for hearing people to encounter and realize that Deaf people too were Catholics of faith. This concern was especially addressed in Q 21 which asked, “What would you like hearing Catholics to know about what being Deaf means to you in the Church?” Several respondents to Q 21 explained that the faith of Deaf people is “the same faith as hearing people,” “as strong a faith as hearing people. Having a disability does not mean you have weak faith.” One person proclaimed, “I want to let people know that Deaf people want to live a life of faith as deeply as hearing people and have a spiritual desire.” Several affirmed sameness, and therefore the hope of getting along, and living “a life of faith together.” One added that “In faith and prayer...there is no discrimination.” Others pointed to equalness, “Since Deaf and hearing people are children of God, they live an equal life without neglect or indifference.” One response can be interpreted a number of ways but still contains a necessary caution. The respondent wrote, “I want to let you know that the faith felt by Deaf people is different from the faith felt by hearing people.” While probably not a challenge to equal dignity of the Deaf, it is a necessary reminder of the contextuality and particularity of experiences of faith. Being Deaf and being part of historical, social, and ecclesial exclusions do impact how the Deaf experience Church and live faith.

An inclusive Church requires access and an investment in pastoral resources that insures all can participate actively in every aspect of Church life. As one respondent noted “I wish I could freely attend mass at any parish, rather than just thinking about parishes that have sign language interpretation” (q 20). This response may reflect more than convenience. Many Deaf people live in mixed families or have hearing friends in their neighborhood and would like to attend the same local parish. Sharing in Eucharist with hearing loved ones and neighbors can be difficult because not all parishes offer sign language interpretation. This was a concern

expressed by others who requested “text interpreters and sign language interpreters at all churches” (q 16). One comment demonstrated how some accommodations for one group of people could benefit others beyond that group: “Regardless of whether the parish is large or small, or whether there are Deaf people or not, I would like you to prepare screens and subtitles (captions) for Deaf believers” (q 17). There are others whose participation and understanding would be aided by screens and captions, for example some elders, children, those who learn better visually.

The Church does not belong to hearing people only; however, the Church needs to invite Deaf people to be involved in the Church, not just “watch” interpreters. An inclusive ecclesiology does not come at the expense of Deaf Church. Instead, it calls for the existence of Deaf Church and Deaf theologies arising from Deaf lived experiences of faith.

Words of Korean Deaf Catholics to Pope Francis

It is interesting to note that the open-ended survey question that received the most response was Q 19, “If Pope Francis was sitting with you now, what would you want to ask/tell him?” Out of the 105 survey participants, 71 people replied with every age level represented. Responses ranged from desires for the world, to personal greetings, to issues specific to Deaf Church, to what could be called theological questions.

Of the three participants under age 30, one responded and expressed hope that “we can show love and share peace with each other.” The low number of survey respondents from this age group may reflect that many Deaf young people do not seem to practice their Catholic faith or are not in the Catholic Church. During his pontificate, Francis has actively been involved in World Youth Day events around the world and often reached out to the young in his international

travels,¹² teachings, and through synodal concerns.¹³ Hopefully Pope Francis will specifically be able to invite Deaf young people to assume their place in the Church as well.

Of the twenty-one survey participants who were between 31 and 50 years old, thirteen

¹² Meeting with youth on trips to Asia. Francis, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Republic of Korea on the Occasion of the 6th Asian Youth Day” (13-18 August 2014): Closing Mass for the Sixth Asian Youth Day, Homily of Pope Francis, (Haemi Castle: August 17, 2014), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140817_corea-omelia-gioventu-asiatica.html; Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Sri Lanka and the Philippines (12-19 January 2015): Meeting with Youth People: Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, (Sports Field of Santo Thomas University, Manila: January 18, 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco_20150118_srilanka-filippine-incontro-giovani.html; Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Thailand and Japan (19-26 November 2019): Holy Mass with Youth People: Homily of His Holiness, (Cathedral of the Assumption, Bangkok: November 21, 2019), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20191122_messa-giovani-thailandia-omelia.html; Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Thailand and Japan (19-26 November, 2019): Meeting with Youth People: Address of His Holiness (Cathedral of Holy Mary, Tokyo: November 25, 2019), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco_20191125_giovani-tokyo.html.

¹³ For Pope Francis at the time of the 2018 Synod of Bishops on Young People see for example, Francis, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia: Meeting with Young People: Address of the Holy Father, (Square in Front of the Cathedral (Vilnius, Lithuania): September 22, 2018), <http://secretariat.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/pope---young/pope-speaks-to-the-youth/pope-francis-speaks-to-young-people-from-lithuania.html>; Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia: Ecumenical Meeting with Young People: Address of the Holy Father, (Kaarli Lutheran Church (Tallinn, Estonia): September 25, 2018, <http://secretariat.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/pope---young/pope-speaks-to-the-youth/pope-francis-speaks-to-young-people-from-lithuania.html>; Address by His Holiness Pope Francis at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith And Vocational Discernment, October 3, 2018, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/october/documents/papa-francesco_20181003_apertura-sinodo.html; *Christus Vivit*: Post-Synodal Exhortation to Young People and to the Entire People of God, March 25, 2019, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html.

responded with words for the pope. Three people brought up sign language, and this response best articulated their concern: “I hope that language rights will be given priority for all Deaf Catholic believers. I hope that priests and the religious who can use sign language will be close to Deaf people and show consideration and respect.” Two others also expressed interest in the prospects of training clergy for the Deaf, one of them even suggested the “establishment of World Mission for the Deaf, training Deaf priests in developing countries.” This recommendation reflected an understanding of how Deaf people feel excluded and marginalized in the Church in developing countries and explicitly called for Deaf priests.

One touching response asked Francis, “How do you help Deaf believers who have dreams?” The pope too has a tendency to reference dreams and dreaming in his teachings, especially when speaking of the young and elders.¹⁴ Deaf people seemed to hope that the pope would be able to help make Deaf people equal to hearing people in the Church by addressing needs like language and the training of clergy. If the pope willingly listens to Deaf peoples’ stories, dreams, and hopes, and he supports whatever they need, then perhaps Deaf Church will be more active and productive in this particular age group (31-50) so necessary for church stability and growth.

The largest collection of responses came from the largest demographic who responded to the survey, people between 51 and 70 years old. Of the sixty-one people in this category, forty-two responded to Q 19. Four expressed global concerns that encompassed peace, reconciliation, social justice. Between several requests for blessings, the responses included theological

¹⁴ For example, see Pope Francis on dreams and dreaming in Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández, “Querido Francisco: A theological response to your four sueños,” *National Catholic Reporter*, February 24, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/theology-en-la-plaza/querido-francisco>.

questions about the existence and visibility of God and eschatological questions about whether one can “really go to heaven if you work hard in your faith” or if “salvation is possible for sinners.”

More than any other age grouping, a number of respondents focused on ministry. They invited the pope to their own Ephphatha Deaf parish so that he could see that Deaf people can fully participate in the Church as well as hearing people. They requested services, pastoral care, Deaf priests, and what could best be described as formation and catechetical programs especially in sign language. One respondent wrote: “I would like to ask you to consider various programs, such as doctrinal study for Deaf believers, lectures on faith, etc.”

Others called for evangelization, urging the pope to support “global missions for the Deaf and official recognition of sign language by the Vatican.” This respondent went on to explain that these were “desperately needed. Protestant missions to the Deaf are active, but Catholic churches are not.” Another connected the social mission of the Church to Deaf outreach, “Just as we help the poor, please help us translate the Word to Deaf believers.” There was a practical request to “provide support for the cost so that Deaf people can participate in their activities.”

Deaf respondents wanted Pope Francis to “pay a lot of attention” to them, as a community who longed for the Word of God. One person called on him to setup a global event “exclusively for the Deaf,” while another asked him to “please create conditions for celebrating Mass with Deaf people in a Catholic Church. For example, it would be a good intention to place seats for the Deaf and sign language interpreters in each church.” Deaf respondents yearned to feel renewed by the Word of God through sign language and hoped that Deaf people will have “the opportunity and interest to participate in the Catholic Church.” There were expressions of

affection, concerns for his health, and desires to meet him in person. In Francis, some saw a possibility that “you can at least give a message of hope to Deaf people around the world,”

Seventy-five percent of survey participants 71 and older responded to Q 19. There were five who requested from the pope either blessings, prayers, help, or a desire to meet. Three elders wondered if there was a God. One wanted Francis to know that they wished to teach sign language while another asked “Please let me be a hearing person.” I sensed painful emotion in some of these requests and questions about God’s existence. Perhaps it was an indication of hurtful experiences in the Church throughout some of their lives or signs of oppression and discrimination that might cause a Deaf person to feel that they wanted to be hearing. At the same time one elder dreamed, “If there are many Deaf priests, it is my hope that they will be sent to the spiritually hungry Korean Deaf people.” One response conveyed a greeting of one elder to another: “교황님! 건강하십시오” “Pope! Be healthy!”

Pope Francis, through his focus on synodality, calls for a church of inclusion that begins with encounter and the deep listening necessary for dialogue. Removing obstacles to inclusion requires encounters where Deaf Catholics get to own and tell their/our stories and others need to listen in ways that shape inclusive ecclesiologies. These include paying attention to stories about Deaf agency in creating Deaf Church.

According to *Lumen Gentium*, "All [women and] men are called to belong to the new people of God."¹⁵ This invitation extends to the Deaf faithful. The changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council influenced the Deaf Church to see itself as equal to the hearing church and to affirm that the Deaf faithful are also God's People. Historically, the Deaf resided on the

¹⁵ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, #13, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

margins of the church's life, excluded at times from catechetical instruction, from some sacraments, and from most ministries, including priesthood.¹⁶ While this situation has improved, the absence or limited participation of the Deaf in the global, regional, and local synodal conversations provides new opportunities to press for inclusion in ways that take seriously the obligation to encounter and listen deeply.

¹⁶ See Park, “Consideration for Pastoral Ministry,” 27-28.

Appendix A: Survey-Korean Deaf Catholics
한국 천주교 서울대교구 농인 신자들을 대상으로 설문조사 실시

Information and Consent 정보 처리와 동의

1. I consent to participate in this survey.

귀하의 응답

- Yes 네
 No 아니오

Part 1: Describe Yourself

1부: 귀하에 관한 기본 정보를 알려 주십시오.

2. Age 나이

- 18-30 years old
18-30세
- 31-50 years old
31-50세
- 51-70 years old
51-70세
- Older than 71 years old
71세 이상
- I prefer no to answer this question
이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

3. Gender 성별

- Male 남성
- Female 여성
- I prefer not to answer this question
이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

Other 기타:

4. What term best describes how you identify yourself?

귀하는 어디에 해당합니까? 가장 가까운 항목을 선택해 주십시오.

- Deaf 농인
- Hard of Hearing 난청인
- Deaf with Cochlear Implants
인공와우 기기를 착용한 농인
- Hard of Hearing with Cochlear Implants
인공와우 기기를 착용한 난청인
- Deaf Plus 중복장애 농인
- Deaf Plus with Cochlear Implants
중복장애 농인 (인공와우 기기 착용)
- I lost my sense of hearing, but I believe that I am hearing because I can speak as well as hearing
청력을 잃었지만, 청인처럼 말을 잘하기 때문에 스스로 청인이라고 생각함
- I am Deaf but I prefer to speak orally
농인이지만 구화를 선호함
- I am Hard of Hearing but I can use sign language
난청인이지만 수어를 할 수 있음
- Hearing member of mixed Deaf and Hearing family
농인과 청인이 섞인 가정에 속한 청인
- Hearing 청인
- I prefer not to answer this question
이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

Other 기타:

5. What best describes your preferred means of communication?

귀하가 가장 선호하는 소통 방식은 무엇입니까?

- Korean Sign Language 한국수어
- Signed Korean 수지한국어
- Lip Reading 독순법
- Oral 구화
- Korean (Spoken) 한국어 (말하기)
- Korean (Written) 한국어 (쓰기)
- I prefer not to answer this question
이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

Other (please specify)

기타 (구체적으로 밝혀 주십시오):

Part II: Describe Your Relationship to the Catholic Church

2부: 귀하와 가톨릭 교회의 관계를 알려 주십시오.

6. Please check the expression that best describes your experience with the Catholic faith.

가톨릭 신앙에 대한 귀하의 경험에 가장 가까운 설명을 선택해 주십시오.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Practicing Catholic
성당에 꾸준히 다니는 가톨릭 신자 | <input type="radio"/> No longer Catholic
이제는 가톨릭이 아님 |
| <input type="radio"/> Raised Catholic but not practicing
어릴 때 가톨릭 세례를 받았지만 성당에 다니지 않음 | <input type="radio"/> Never Catholic
가톨릭 신자인 적이 없음 |
| <input type="radio"/> Converted to Catholicism
다른 종교나 교파에서 가톨릭으로 개종함 | <input type="radio"/> I prefer not to answer this question
이 질문에 답하지 않겠음 |

Other (please specify)

기타 (구체적으로 밝혀 주십시오):

7. What kind of church do you attend most frequently?

귀하는 주로 어떤 성당에 다닙니까?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> A Catholic hearing parish with a Deaf community
농인 모임이 있는 청인 성당 | <input type="radio"/> A Catholic Deaf parish
농인 성당 (에파타 성당) |
| <input type="radio"/> A Catholic hearing parish with interpreted service
수어통역이 있는 청인 성당 | <input type="radio"/> I do not regularly attend a Catholic parish
성당에 정기적으로 나가지 않음 |
| <input type="radio"/> A Catholic hearing parish with no interpreters or Deaf ministers
수어통역도 없고 농인 사목자도 없는 청인 성당 | <input type="radio"/> I prefer not to answer this question
이 질문에 답하지 않겠음 |

Other:

기타:

8. How long have you been involved in your parish/church?

지금 다니는 성당에 몇 년 동안 다녔습니까?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> 1-7 years
1-7년 | <input type="radio"/> 36-70 years
36-70년 이상 |
| <input type="radio"/> 8-20 years
8-20년 | <input type="radio"/> I am not involved in any parish
아무 성당에도 나가지 않음 |
| <input type="radio"/> 21-35 years
21-35년 | <input type="radio"/> I prefer not to answer this question
이 질문에 답하지 않겠음 |

9. Are you a registered member of the Catholic parish/church you most frequently attend?

귀하가 가장 자주 나가는 성당에 교적이 있습니까?

Yes

네, 교적이 있습니다.

No

아니오, 교적이 없습니다.

If you answered "No," please can you explain why not

"아니오"라면, 이유를 설명해 주십시오:

10. The following question asks about the level of your participation in your parish/church?

Check the box that is closest to your experience.

다음은 귀하가 본당 생활에 얼마나 참여하는지 묻는 질문들입니다. 귀하의 경험에 가장 가까운 칸에 표시해 주십시오.

	Strongly Agree 매우 그렇다	Somewhat Agree 대체로 그렇다	Neither agree or disagree 그저 그렇다	Somewhat disagree 대체로 그렇지 않다	Strongly disagree 전혀 그렇지 않다
I attend Mass every week at the same church 나는 매주 같은 성당에서 미사에 참석한다	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I participate in parish events. 나는 본당 행사에 참여한다	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I participate in my parish because it is easy to communicate 우리 본당에서는 소통하기 쉽기 때문에 본당 생활에 참여한다	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am an active leader in my parish 나는 우리 본당에서 적극적으로 활동하는 리더(지도자)이다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am involved in parish ministries 나는 본당 사목활동들에 참여한다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to be more involved in my parish 나는 본당 활동에 지금보다 더 참여하고 싶다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable in my parish 나는 우리 본당에서 편안함을 느낀다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comment:

더 하고 싶은 이야기가 있다면 써 주십시오:

11. If you responded that you were involved in parish ministries, please check all that apply.

본당 사목 활동들에 참여한다고 응답했다면, 귀하에게 해당하는 활동을 모두 선택해 주십시오.

Catechist
교리교사

Parish Employee
본당 직원

Lector
독서자

Parish Council Staff
본당 사목위원

Liturgical Ministries
전례담당자

Legion of Mary Member
레지오 단원

Lay Ecclesial Minister
평신도 교회 직무자

I prefer not to answer this question
이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

Other:

기타:

12. My experience of the Catholic Church is

가톨릭 교회에 대한 귀하의 경험은

Positive
긍정적이다

Negative
부정적이다

A mix of positive and negative
긍정과 부정이 섞여 있다

I prefer not to answer this question
이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

Please explain your response:

왜 그렇게 답했는지 설명해 주십시오:

Part III: Describe What Would You Like Catholic Church Leadership to Pay Attention to Regarding Deaf

3부: 농인 가톨릭 신자들에 관하여 교회 지도자들이 무엇에 관심을 가지면 좋겠습니까? 귀하의 생각을 알려 주십시오.

13. What type of Church community would you prefer to participate in on a regular basis?

Rank your preferences with 1 being the option you most want.

귀하가 꾸준히 참여하고 싶은 교회 공동체는 무엇입니까? 가장 원하는 공동체 순서대로 1부터 번호를 매겨 주십시오.

- A hearing parish with a Deaf community
농인 모임이 있는 청인 성당
- A hearing parish with interpreted service
수어통역이 있는 청인 성당
- A hearing parish with no interpreters or and no Deaf ministers
수어통역도 없고 농인 사목자도 없는 청인 성당
- A Deaf parish
농인 성당 (에파타 성당)
- Any parish where the priest/pastor and/or pastoral staff can communicate in Sign Language
사제/주임신부/사목자가 수어로 소통할 수 있는 성당이라면 어디든지

14. I would like opportunities to... Check all that apply.

귀하에게 어떤 기회가 있기를 바랍니다? 해당하는 항목에 모두 표시해 주십시오.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learn more about the Catholic faith
가톨릭 신앙을 더 많이 배우고 싶다 | <input type="checkbox"/> Learn more about the Bible
성경을 더 많이 배우고 싶다 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Participate more actively in my parish
본당 생활에 더 능동적으로 참여하고 싶다 | <input type="checkbox"/> Help teach sign language to hearing people to be interpreters
청인들에게 수어를 가르쳐 통역사로 양성하는 데 도움이 되고 싶다 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Become involved in ministries
사목활동에 참여하고 싶다 | <input type="checkbox"/> Teach Catechism and the Bible
교리와 성경을 가르치고 싶다 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare to become a lay minister
평신도 직무자가 될 준비를 하고 싶다 | <input type="checkbox"/> Help establish new Deaf Catholic communities
새로운 가톨릭 농인 공동체를 만드는 데 도움이 되고 싶다 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Study to become a priest
사제가 되기 위해 공부하고 싶다 | <input type="checkbox"/> Lead devotion and prayer group
신심 단체, 기도 모임을 이끌고 싶다 |

Other:

기타:

15. What obstacles prevent your fuller participation in the Catholic Church?

귀하가 가톨릭 교회에 더 온전히 참여하는 데 방해가 되는 것은 무엇입니까?

16. What do you need from the Deaf Catholic community in the Archdiocese of Seoul?

귀하가 서울대교구의 가톨릭 농인 공동체로부터 필요한 것은 무엇입니까?

17. If your parish priest/pastor was sitting with you now, what would you want him to know about your experience of the church?

지금 귀하의 앞에 사제/주임신부가 있다면, 당신의 교회 경험에 관해 신부님에게 무엇을 알려 주고 싶습니까?

18. What challenges does Deaf Catholic community face for the future?

앞으로 어떤 도전이 가톨릭 농인 공동체에 예상됩니까?

19. If Pope Francis was sitting with you now, what would you want to ask/tell him?

지금 귀하의 앞에 교황 프란치스코가 계시다면, 그분에게 무엇을 묻고 싶습니까? 무엇을 말씀드리고 싶습니까?

20. As a member of the Deaf Catholic Community what is your dream for the Church?

가톨릭 농인 공동체의 일원으로서 귀하는 교회에 대해 어떤 꿈을 갖고 있습니까?

21. What would you like hearing Catholics to know about what being Deaf means to you in the Church?

농인으로서 교회 생활을 한다는 것의 의미에 대해 청인에게 무엇을 알려 주고 싶습니까?

Appendix B: 한국 천주교 서울대교구 농인 신자들을 대상으로 설문조사 실시 Survey-Korean Deaf Catholics

정보 처리와 동의

한국 가톨릭 농인에 관한 연구에 참여하는 데 귀하를 초대합니다. 프란치스코 교황님은 지금보다 더욱 포괄적인 가톨릭 교회, 즉, 소외되거나 주변부에 있는 이들에게 관심을 기울이는 가톨릭 교회가 되어야 한다고 촉구하고 계십니다. 그러나 농인 가톨릭 신자들이 필요로 하는 요구와 그들의 교회에 대한 관점은 존중받지 못하고 있는 실정입니다. 시노달리타스에 관한 시노드를 위한 아시아 대륙 의견서에 농인 신자들의 의견이 담기지 않은 것이 그 한 가지 예입니다. 이 설문지의 목적은 농인 신자들의 가톨릭 교회 경험에 관한 시각을 표현할 기회를 제공하는 것입니다. 설문 응답에는 **15-20**분이 소요됩니다.

위험

이 설문에 참여할 때 예상되는 위험은 없습니다.

이익

설문에 응답함으로써 귀하가 직접 이익은 없습니다. 그러나 귀하가 제공하는 정보가 농인가톨릭 신자들, 교회에 대한 그들의 요구와 희망을 교회 지도자들에게 알리는 데 도움이 될 수 있습니다.

보상

이 설문에 참여할 때 받는 보상은 없습니다.

기밀 보장

귀하는 자발적으로 응답하며, 응답은 익명으로 처리됩니다. 이 설문에서 수집된 데이터는 연구 완료 후 1년 이내에 삭제됩니다.

동의

귀하는 아래 "네, 동의합니다"를 클릭함으로써 연구에 참여하겠다는 동의를 표시하게 됩니다.

귀하의 성명 및 귀하를 식별할 수 있는 여타 정보들은 본 온라인 설문 또는 그 외 연구 데이터에 드러나지 않습니다.

귀하가 원하시는 경우, 설문에 응답하는 중 언제라도 중단할 수 있습니다. 또한 특정 질문에 응답하지 않고 건너뛸 수 있습니다.

참여

귀하는 자발적으로 참여할 수 있습니다. 설문에 참여하기를 원하시면 아래 "네, 동의합니다"를 클릭하십시오. 설문 참여를 원하지 않으시면 아래 "아니오, 동의하지 않습니다"를 클릭하시기 바랍니다.

"네, 동의합니다"를 클릭하시면 질문의 첫 번째 세트로 이동합니다.

연락

본 조사는 미국 일리노이주 시카고 가톨릭연합 신학대학원 박사과정 학생 박민서 신부에 의해 진행됩니다. 궁금하신 점이 있거나 연구와 관련된 문제를 알리기 원하시는 경우에 mpark1@student.ctu.edu로 박민서 신부에게 연락하실 수 있습니다.

본 연구는 귀하의 연구 참여를 관리하는 시카고 가톨릭연합 신학대학원의 절차에 따라 검토되었습니다.

본 설문에는 **2023년** 까지 응답 완료해 주시기 바랍니다.

"네, 동의합니다"를 클릭하시면 귀하는 이 설문에 대답하는 데 동의하게 됩니다.

1. 귀하의 응답

- 네, 동의합니다.
- 아니오, 동의하지 않습니다.

1부: 귀하에 관한 기본 정보를 알려 주십시오.

2. 나이

- 18-30세
- 31-50세
- 51-70세
- 71세 이상
- 이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

3. 성별

- 남성
- 여성
- 이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

기타:

4. 귀하는 어디에 해당합니까? 가장 가까운 항목을 선택해 주십시오.

- 농인
- 난청인
- 인공와우 기기를 착용한 농인
- 인공와우 기기를 착용한 난청인
- 중복장애 농인
- 중복장애 농인 (인공와우 기기 착용)
- 청력을 잃었지만, 청인처럼 말을 잘하기 때문에 스스로 청인이라고 생각함
- 농인이지만 구화를 선호함
- 난청인이지만 수어를 할 수 있음
- 농인과 청인이 섞인 가정에 속한 청인
- 청인
- 이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

기타:

5. 귀하가 가장 선호하는 소통 방식은 무엇입니까?

- 한국수어
- 수지한국어
- 독순법
- 구화
- 한국어 (말하기)
- 한국어 (쓰기)
- 이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

기타 (구체적으로 밝혀 주십시오):

2부: 귀하와 가톨릭 교회의 관계를 알려 주십시오.

6. 가톨릭 신앙에 대한 귀하의 경험에 가장 가까운 설명을 선택해 주십시오.

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 성당에 꾸준히 다니는 가톨릭 신자 | <input type="radio"/> 이제는 가톨릭이 아님 |
| <input type="radio"/> 어릴 때 가톨릭 세례를 받았지만 성당에 다니지 않음 | <input type="radio"/> 가톨릭 신자인 적이 없음 |
| <input type="radio"/> 다른 종교나 교파에서 가톨릭으로 개종함 | <input type="radio"/> 이 질문에 답하지 않겠음 |

기타 (구체적으로 밝혀 주십시오):

7. 귀하는 주로 어떤 성당에 다닙니까?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> 농인 모임이 있는 청인 성당 | <input type="radio"/> 농인 성당 (에파타 성당) |
| <input type="radio"/> 수어통역이 있는 청인 성당 | <input type="radio"/> 성당에 정기적으로 나가지 않음 |
| <input type="radio"/> 수어통역도 없고 농인 사목자도 없는 청인 성당 | <input type="radio"/> 이 질문에 답하지 않겠음 |

기타:

8. 지금 다니는 성당에 몇 년 동안 다녔습니까?

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 1-7년 | <input type="radio"/> 36-70년 이상 |
| <input type="radio"/> 8-20년 | <input type="radio"/> 아무 성당에도 나가지 않음 |
| <input type="radio"/> 21-35년 | <input type="radio"/> 이 질문에 답하지 않겠음 |

9. 귀하가 가장 자주 나가는 성당에 교적이 있습니까?

- 네, 교적이 있습니다.
- 아니오, 교적이 없습니다.

"아니오"라면, 이유를 설명해 주십시오:

10. 다음은 귀하가 본당 생활에 얼마나 참여하는지 묻는 질문들입니다. 귀하의 경험에 가장 가까운 칸에 표시해 주십시오.

	매우 그렇다	대체로 그렇다	그저 그렇다	대체로 그렇지 않다	전혀 그렇지 않다
나는 매주 같은 성당에서 미사에 참석한다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
나는 본당 행사에 참여한다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
우리 본당에서는 소통하기 쉽기 때문에 본당 생활에 참여한다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
나는 우리 본당에서 적극적으로 활동하는 리더(지도자)이다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
나는 본당 사목활동들에 참여한다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
나는 본당 활동에 지금보다 더 참여하고 싶다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
나는 우리 본당에서 편안함을 느낀다.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

더 하고 싶은 이야기가 있다면 써 주십시오:

11. 본당 사목 활동들에 참여한다고 응답했다면, 귀하에게 해당하는 활동을 모두 선택해 주십시오.

- 교리교사
- 독서자
- 전례 담당자
- 평신도 교회 직무자
- 기타:
- 본당 직원
- 본당 사목위원
- 레지오 단원
- 이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

12. 가톨릭 교회에 대한 귀하의 경험은

- 긍정적이다
- 부정적이다
- 긍정과 부정이 섞여 있다
- 이 질문에 답하지 않겠음

왜 그렇게 답했는지 설명해 주십시오:

3부: 농인 가톨릭 신자들에 관하여 교회 지도자들이 무엇에 관심을 가지면 좋겠습니까? 귀하의 생각을 알려 주십시오.

13. 귀하가 꾸준히 참여하고 싶은 교회 공동체는 무엇입니까? 가장 원하는 공동체 순서대로 1부터 번호를 매겨 주십시오.

- 농인 모임이 있는 청인 성당
- 수어통역이 있는 청인 성당
- 수어통역도 없고 농인 사목자도 없는 청인 성당
- 농인 성당 (에파타 성당)
- 사제/주임신부/사목자가 수어로 소통할 수 있는 성당이라면 어디든지

14. 귀하에게 어떤 기회가 있기를 바랍니다? 해당하는 항목에 모두 표시해 주십시오.

- 가톨릭 신앙을 더 많이 배우고 싶다
- 성경을 더 많이 배우고 싶다
- 본당 생활에 더 능통적으로 참여하고 싶다
- 청인들에게 수어를 가르쳐 통역자로 양성하는 데 도움이 되고 싶다
- 사목활동에 참여하고 싶다
- 교리와 성경을 가르치고 싶다
- 평신도 직무자가 될 준비를 하고 싶다
- 새로운 가톨릭 농인 공동체들을 만드는 데 도움이 되고 싶다
- 사제가 되기 위해 공부하고 싶다
- 신심 단체, 기도 모임을 이끌고 싶다

기타:

15. 귀하가 가톨릭 교회에 더 온전히 참여하는 데 방해가 되는 것은 무엇입니까?

16. 귀하가 서울대교구의 가톨릭 농인 공동체로부터 필요한 것은 무엇입니까?

17. 지금 귀하의 앞에 사제/주임신부가 있다면, 당신의 교회 경험에 관해 신부님에게 무엇을 알려 주고 싶습니까?

18. 앞으로 어떤 도전이 가톨릭 농민 공동체에 예상됩니까?

19. 지금 귀하의 앞에 교황 프란치스코가 계시다면, 그분에게 무엇을 묻고 싶습니까? 무엇을 말씀드리고 싶습니까?

20. 가톨릭 농민 공동체의 일원으로서 귀하는 교회에 대해 어떤 꿈을 갖고 있습니까?

21. 농민으로서 교회 생활을 한다는 것의 의미에 대해 청인에게 무엇을 알려 주고 싶습니까?

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VITA

Fr. Min Seo Park, DMin

I was born in Seoul, South Korea in 1968. I graduated from the National Seoul School for the Deaf in 1987. I studied Industrial Design at Kyeongwon Community College from 1987 to 1989 earning an Associate of Arts degree. I attended Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C. from 1994 to 1999 and obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mathematics and Philosophy in May, 1999. From 1999 to 2000 I began studies in theology at St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, New York. I transferred to St. John's University, Queens, New York and from 2000-2004 I pursued a Master of Divinity degree graduating in May, 2004. I returned to South Korea and completed further studies at the Seoul Major Seminary, the Catholic University of Korea in Seoul, from 2005-2007 in preparation for ordination to the priesthood. In May 2024 I earned the Doctor of Ministry degree from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, IL.

I was ordained a Roman Catholic priest for the Archdiocese of Seoul on July 6, 2007 and became the first Deaf priest in Asia. I ministered to Deaf people as chaplain at the Seoul Catholic Deaf Association from 2007 to 2019. I was responsible for building a new church from 2010 to 2019 that would serve as the parish for the Deaf. In August 2019, Ephphatha Catholic Church was dedicated and I ministered as pastor to Deaf people at the parish from 2019 to 2020. From 2021 to 2024, I was chaplain in Campus Ministry at Gallaudet University and at St. Francis of Assisi Deaf Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Washington. During that time, I also studied practical theology for the Doctor of Ministry degree from the Catholic Theological Union at Chicago.

I received a national Industrial Designer's License from the Human Resources Development Services of Korea in 1989. In 2009, I was a recipient of the Disabled Person of

the Year Award, a national honor recognizing outstanding achievement granted by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs and awarded by the President of South Korea on April 20, 2009. My publications include “Deaf Culture and Deaf Church: Considerations for Pastoral Ministry” in *New Theology Review*, November, 2009. Since its founding in 2015, I serve as spiritual adviser to the Asia Deaf Catholic Conference.