Interpreting in Church, Religious Settings and Beyond

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Church Interpreters: Who Are They and What's Their Motivation?

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Background

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (2007) recognizes that some among the interpreting community enter the field by way of religious or church interpreting. For 20 years the following is the story about Church Interpreters among the ASL/English interpreting communities:

- "Church interpreters" often have a negative stigma (James, 1998) and a bad reputation (Grindrod, 1998) among professionally certified interpreters.
- They are assumed to be people, who primarily interpret in church and are most often unskilled, untrained, and non-certified (James, 1998).

Although, according to Warford (2000) "interpreting in religious settings is a continual and dynamic mix of art of humanity and technical expertise; generous interpreters who continually give their service, without thought of payment, should be appreciated and applauded" (p.13), that is not the case. These interpreters continue to...

- Balance roles of professional, friend, and spiritual person
- Volunteer for little to no compensation

Method

A survey was emailed across the US and the UK inquiring about current and past work and demographic information. Qualifications:
- 18 years of age or older
- Have previous experience or are currently interpreting in a church or religious setting

Who?

112 Participants (92% Female, 8% Male) (Age Range 18-70+)
65% have earned a Bachelors Degree or Higher
94% Receive little to no compensation for church work
75% Personally affiliated with the church in which they interpret
53% Interpret weekly at church
63% Regularly team with other certified interpreters or ITP students in church settings

Results

Certification Status

Beginning Church Interpreting

- Began Certified: 55%
- Began Non-Certified: 40%
- Began While Training: 15%

Current Certification Status

- Currently Certified: 30%
- Currently Non-Certified: 5%
- Non-Responsive: 65%

Motivation Findings

Frequency & Motivation for Continuous Religious Work

Open Coded Reason For Church Interpreting

Conclusion

- 70% of church interpreters who began non-certified or while training have since obtained credentials.
- Among the 8% who began non-certified, 3/4 pursued professional training and obtained certification.
- The view of church interpreters from two-decades ago does not align with the current sampling. The majority are now more educated, professionally trained and certified.
- While the motivations are numerous, a sense of calling and connections individuals have inspire these interpreters to continue their church work despite receiving little or no compensation and potentially being stereotyped as inferior or unskilled.

References