

Confirming Our Deaf Teen

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Two years ago, I had a WELS family—all of whom were deaf—move into our area. Their daughter was confirmation age, had already taken some confirmation classes in her previous church, and was interested in finishing those classes at our church.

In my communication with the family—mainly through email—I learned they wanted her mainstreamed as much as possible. While it would have been nice to have her in my regular confirmation classes, her school schedule prevented her from attending our day school classes. The lack of an interpreter prevented her from attending the once a week evening confirmation classes. I asked if the parents would like to serve as the interpreter, but they did not feel comfortable doing so.

After some consultation on what to do, I met with the deaf confirmand every other Sunday afternoon. I put a condensed version of my confirmation class on PowerPoint. From the introductory questions, to the passages, to the probing questions, to the answers, to the applications, to the illustrations—as much as I was able—I put them on my computer and we walked through the lessons.

The student was good at reading lips, which helped, but there were plenty of times we needed paper and pencil to communicate. She asked questions. I answered them. We seemed to communicate quite well. She was a very bright student.

Another thing I tried was to look up key words for each lesson in *Sign a New Song for the Lord* and use them as a supplement to what I was teaching. I still gave her the usual homework and quizzes. Memory work was challenging. She did not have to say the memory work, but then again all of my students have to write it. Out of everything, memory work and vocabulary were probably the most difficult areas.

Although we did not have a sign language interpreter in the congregation, we found someone in the community willing to do it for a small fee. We could not afford an interpreter for the confirmation classes, but we did make the investment for signed services once a month, for the examination service and for confirmation. There was an interesting reaction by the congregation, seeing the whole service and rite signed. Many found it an exclamation point to the service.

Working with our deaf confirmand took a strong investment in time—about 8 hours of preparation for each 2-hour session we had—but it was well worth it. I was reassured by seeing a number of the things I tried in the “Helpful Hints” article posted on the WELS Mission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing webpage. They really were helpful.

Thank you for your continued ministry to this often neglected segment of our population and community!

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