

SIGNS MAGAZINE SUMMER EDITION
2025

Harvest Theme

Genesis 8:22 *NIV*

“As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease.”

Matthew 9:35-38 *NIV*

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”



From the Chair, Rev'd Hannah Lewis

Hello everyone!

This is my first letter to you all as the new chair of DAT, so I thought I'd introduce myself for those who don't know me (and update those that knew me in the past). So I am a Deaf BSL-using priest. I work in Oxford diocese as Chaplain with the Deaf community. Before I was in Oxford I was in Liverpool for 15 years. I moved to Oxford diocese in 2022.



I was DAT secretary for 10 years from 2005 to 2015, so I know DAT well. The new DAT committee had our first face-to-face committee meeting in July. We started with a verse from my bible reading from morning prayer on that day from 2 Corinthians 5:7, "We walk by faith and not by sight". None of us can see what is going to happen in the future with DAT, with the church, with our lives or with the world. The important thing is to walk by faith – faith in God who loves us and faith that God will guide us and give us what we need to do what we are called to do.

Our new committee has three returning members from the last committee: Ernest Seager, Sarah Tupling and Penny Beschizza. Our new member of the committee is Mary Bucknall who is new to being a trustee although she has been one of DAT's General Synod reps for ten years and Signs Magazine editor for the last two years. We would love to find one more trustee who can take on the role of Treasurer, so if you know anyone who might be interested, please contact me.

If we can't find someone willing to be treasurer and trustee, we are looking for a bookkeeper. A bookkeeper is someone who will help us keep the money written down but will not have the responsibilities of a treasurer. A bookkeeper would not need to come to meetings, and they don't need to know BSL. All they need is the ability to access a

computer and email and preferably be able to use Zoom. Again please let me know if you know anyone who would be good.

The DAT committee agreed that what is important to us is that DAT is a Deaf-led safe Christian community for BSL users. There are always new things to learn and new improvements that can be done to make sure our meetings are a place where all Deaf Christians (and BSL-using allies, and not just Anglicans) feel welcome, where diversity is respected and where we can learn, pray and worship together in our own language and culture and enjoy fellowship with each other.

I am excited about being chair of DAT and look forward to meeting more members and developing some new events and projects. As chair you can email me on chair@deafanglicanstogether.org.uk anytime.

Hannah Lewis



The new DAT committee meeting in London in July.
L to R: Penny Beschizza, Sarah Tupling, Mary Bucknall,
Ernest Seager and Rev'd Hannah Lewis.

Save the Date

DAT Spring Conference
Friday 15th - Sunday 17th
May 2026 at
The Hayes Conference Centre,
Swanwick, Derbyshire

Dates for your Diary

Go! Sign BSL Men's Ministry Conference

26th-28th September 2025. Cost: £260

<https://www.gosign.org.uk/events/>

Women of Wings (WoW) weekend conference

14th-16th November 2025. Cost: £220

<https://www.gosign.org.uk/events/>

IEWG Webinar (online conference)

12th November 2025. UK time 4pm.

Theme: "Encouraging and Empowering Deaf Leadership
in all areas of the Church."

See www.deaf-iewg.com for more details.

St Paul's Cathedral in London is holding the following event with BSL interpretation:

'God with us: Advent reflections in words and music' with Paula Gooder speaking and music and readings from members of the St Paul's Cathedral Consort on Tuesday 18th November. Further details of this and other events can be found on our new BSL web page at <https://www.stpauls.co.uk/bsl>

Spring Conference Report

About 30 people gathered for the Deaf Anglicans Together Spring Conference in May at Highgate House in Northamptonshire, a new conference centre run by the Christian Conference Trust.



The theme of this conference was **“The Bible in our Hands.”** The speaker was Brent Allen (D) who is involved with the BSL Bible Translation Project (BSLBTP).

He gave an interesting overview of the detailed translation work into BSL from the original Greek and Hebrew languages. The Gospel of Mark in BSL is nearly finished and is available online, while work is continuing on Genesis in BSL. However, the project needs more funding and resources and people with translation skills. See the BSLBTP website, www.bslbible.org.uk for more details.

On Saturday morning the DAT AGM was held, chaired by Rev'd Susan Myatt (outgoing Treasurer) as Pat Callaghan (outgoing Chair) was unable to attend. Rev'd Hannah Lewis was elected as the new Chair of DAT and Mary Bucknall as a new Trustee. Ernest Seager, Sarah Tupling and Penny Beschizza remain as existing Trustees of DAT.

Rosie Wallace (D), a member of the BSL Bible Translation Project, received the Janice Palmer Award, a grant of £100 towards theological books for her PhD studies at Cambridge.



Mark 1:1-3 in New Testament Greek

In the afternoon there was free time, followed by a choice of 3 workshops:

- 1) BSL Bible Translation Project focus group – Gill Behenna
- 2) Prayer/craft – Penny Beschizza
- 3) Bible Study/drama – Brent Allen

The participants presented the creative results of the workshops after dinner on Saturday evening. Susan Myatt organised a late night quiz in the bar which everyone enjoyed.

On Sunday morning, Canon Gill Behenna led the Communion service and Brent Allen gave a fascinating talk on Bible History with a timeline on Powerpoint.

After a group photo followed by lunch, we departed all to our own homes. The next DAT Spring Conference will be held at The Hayes, Swanwick, in May 2026.

Thank you to Susan Myatt and others who organised the Spring Conference and worked hard behind the scenes to make it a success.

Mary Bucknall.



DAT group photo at Highgate House

Thank you to Susan Myatt

DAT members gave a Thank you card and a gift voucher to Rev'd Susan Myatt, who stepped down as Treasurer and Trustee of Deaf Anglicans Together at the Spring Conference after 15 years, in recognition of her hard work and dedication. She was also one of three DAT representatives on General Synod from 2010-2015.

Susan is continuing in her roles as a Deaf Baptist Minister for the Heart of England Baptist Association (HEBA) for three days a week, and as a Minister for Open Hands Signing Church in Stafford & Penkridge Deaf Church for two days a week. She is also working for the Diocese of Lichfield one day a week, as Deaf Chaplain and Adviser for Deaf Ministry. She will remain a member of DAT and so we all hope to see her at future DAT Spring Conferences.

My Life as a Chaplain with the Deaf Community by Canon Gill Behenna

This year, I retired from ministry with the Deaf Community after 43 years. I would like to thank all the people who came to my last service in June and also contributed so generously to my leaving present.

But I also want to thank those who have guided and supported me along the way. I would like to share some of my memories with you.

How it all began:

After leaving school at 18, I trained as a teacher. I had known from the age of 9 that I wanted to teach and I couldn't imagine anything else I wanted to do. I managed to get a job teaching history and RE in a girls' boarding school and was very happy.



Towards the end of my 3rd year, I started to feel restless. Eventually, I felt strongly that I should give up teaching and do something else.

I handed in my resignation and moved to Salisbury in 1982 where I had trained as a teacher and still had friends. One of my friends worked as Chaplain with Deaf people and had told me of a temporary post as a community worker with the Deaf. When I went to the job centre, that was the only thing they could offer me – and it was only for one year! I decided to go for it – even though I couldn't sign!

My first 6 months were very hard. I had to learn the language and go to visit people I couldn't understand. I used to pray that the people would be out so I could leave a card to say I had called but there was no reply!!

I quickly learnt to sign the things I needed for church so I could lead a service and even preach, but I still couldn't have a conversation with a Deaf person! The Deaf people in Salisbury were very patient with me. They repeated things again, and again – probably because they assumed I didn't understand! (They were right!)

Thankfully, signing skills improved – they would have to because I was using BSL every single day. CACDP (now Signature) introduced special exams and so I passed my Stage 1 in 1986 and Stages 2 and 3 in 1987.

Exeter

In 1990, I moved to Exeter as Chaplain to the Deaf. By this time I had been ordained a deacon (women weren't yet allowed to be priests in the Church of England). I was pretty much settled in my chosen ministry and felt that I was doing OK.

I thought Stage 3 BSL was good enough. It was better than many Chaplains achieved, but I still kept meeting Deaf people I couldn't understand, especially in pastoral situations where they were upset. At that time there was nothing beyond Stage 3 and so I decided to train as a Sign Language Interpreter because it was the only way I knew to improve my BSL.

I qualified in 1994 (the same year I was also ordained a priest). I've enjoyed having a second career and I've always found the interpreting community very supportive and encouraging.

Called to teach

Also in 1997, I came to a realisation. It had always bothered me that I had had such a clear calling to teach and yet I had not continued in teaching. Now here I was: qualified teacher, qualified Sign Language Interpreter, and ordained priest and I realised that Signs of God was the organisation that could use all these skills. Signs of God was originally set up by me and Ros Hunt simply as a 24 hour workshop. It has grown over the years and provided training to people using BSL in Christian settings.

If you have seen interpreters at New Wine, Spring Harvest, or Greenbelt then they are probably provided by Signs of God. We also run a Summer School every two years. I have been delighted to be able to continue to teach through this organisation!

I am also a Trustee of the BSL Bible Translation Project which has been set up to translate the Scriptures into BSL.

Bristol

In 2005 I moved to Bristol to take up the post of Chaplain with the Deaf Community. Bristol brought its own challenges. I met Deaf people who were true native signers and held high level professional jobs, quite unlike many of the Deaf people I had met in the past. My signing skills had to go up a gear if I was to survive. I enjoyed the challenge of seminars at the Centre for Deaf Studies, now sadly closed, and was thrilled to obtain an MSc in Deafhood studies where I was tutored by Dr Paddy Ladd and Prof Jim Kyle. It was an exciting time and I still find Bristol an exciting and interesting place to live. (And many of those "scary" Deaf people are my friends!)

But my heart is still with Deaf people, and others who simply never had opportunities to access church in their own language and to discover the God who loves them. My heart is with those who are dying in hospital with no one to pray with them in their own language. My heart is with the many Deaf people who find it

hard to do some of the simplest tasks simply because the world is set up for hearing people! My heart is with those Deaf people living in areas where hospitals are refusing to provide face-to-face interpreters except for end-of-life care. It's with those who dread Christmas celebrations with their hearing families because they know they will be left out.

**God sees them! God knows!
It's time for the Church to see them and to know them too!**

Nikki Hostein 1968-2025
Obituary by Canon Gill Behenna

Nikki Hostein from Bristol Deaf Church passed away on 3rd June 2025 in Southmead hospital, Bristol. Nikki was Deafblind and always keen to make sure that Deafblind people were treated well and had access to what was going on.

Nikki used to love coming to DAT Spring conferences and meeting so many people. Sadly, in recent years, she was not well enough to come but she used to receive "Signs" Magazine in very large print and always kept up with what was going on. She also enjoyed watching BSL Church Worship services on YouTube. They provided her with a way to keep worshipping.



Nikki on a Deaf Church trip

In Bristol, Nikki was an active member of Bristol Deaf Church until she could no longer attend due to health problems. She acted as church warden and book-keeper, always paying attention to details. She was 100% reliable. She was also incredibly generous, both to her own family, especially her nieces and nephews, and to the wider community including Deaf Church members.

Nikki discovered that she could write poetry and used to enjoy finding different topics to write about. She printed and sold 3 poetry books, raising money for DAT. Many of her poems were about her faith. Here is one that was read at her funeral:

*Looking through the valley into the sea
I sense a calm peace within me
The silence around me is so peaceful
The gentle hand on my shoulder
Is a simple reminder
That you are with me Lord
GOD tells me
To see myself
To free myself
To be myself at last,
PEACE*



My Journey to Ordination as Priest
on Saturday 28th June 2025
by Rev'd Sara Head

“But we have this treasure in **jars of clay** to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” (2 Cor 4:7 NIV)

This was the main message I took from the ordination retreat, which spoke about the paradoxes of ministry for the gospel. So it was, on Saturday 28th June, very aware of my weakness but also of God's calling over several years, that I found myself in St Albans Cathedral.

I knelt before the Bishop of Bedford, the Rt Rev'd Richard Atkinson, surrounded by praying clergy as he asked God to “send down your Holy Spirit on Sara for the office and work of priest.” The weight of promises we made was only possible due to saying, “With the help of God I will.” Without his grace and his spirit this calling is impossible.

The most moving moment was when the Bishop anointed my hands, something I hadn't realised would happen until the rehearsal. “Yes, Lord, use my hands.”

I was privileged to be supported in the Abbey by friends from my hearing Curacy church and my sending church, deaf Christians, work colleagues and my family, including my brother who sings in the Cathedral choir. There was also a wonderful team of 4 interpreters who were kept busy ensuring everyone could see what was happening, even with various events (such as the gospel reading) moving round the cathedral.





Sara with friends
and DAT supporters

The following day was humbling as I took my first communion at my curacy church and we welcomed some Deaf visitors in the hearing congregation. I signed and spoke the liturgy. Most of my ministry is within the hearing church for now, though I have started helping Rev'd Brenda Tipping with the 5th Saturday BSL service in St Albans Abbey.

However last Sunday I had the privilege of being 'loaned' to a different church to take a baptism for a Deaf family in BSL. One of the guests was a pupil from my school (where I still work, being a self supporting curate, part time). As she stepped through the door she did a double take and said "Miss Head, are you pretending to be a vicar?"

Indeed I am still at the stage following ordination where I am working out what it means to be a priest, very aware of the brokenness of my clay vessel and wonder if I am 'pretending' and somehow got it all wrong! But I am also in awe at the huge privilege of serving God in this way and pray and trust "with the help of God, I will."

The day of Sara's ordination was wonderful. The cathedral was packed with family and friends of those being ordained as priests, and a small group of interpreters.

It was an honour to have been asked by Sara (as a deaf priest myself) to robe and take part in the laying on of hands as the Holy Spirit is called down to rest on Sara.

I know how hard Sara has worked for this. And I pray that she will be a blessing to those people that she will be serving, and that they will bless her in her ministry.

Rev'd Michelle Frost (Diocese of Peterborough)

General Synod Report
Friday 11th - Tuesday 15th July 2025
York University

by Elaine Heath, Mary Bucknall, Sarah Tupling (DAT Synod reps)

Elaine: We all arrived at York University when the heatwave was still on but fortunately, in the Central Hall it was cool.

The Synod started in the afternoon after the welcome speech by the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell. There was an interesting speech about the Armed Forces.

The first item in the agenda was about Funding and Economy. It was given by the Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally and a debate followed. Afterwards there were speeches of thanks for the invitation as Guest speakers from the Anglican Communion to join the General Synod, by the Most Rev'd Andrew Chan, the Archbishop of Hong Kong, and Canon Chuck Robertson from the Episcopal Church in America.

On Saturday 12th July there was a debate on Redistribution of Funds. Rev'd Andrew Hargreaves spoke about decision making within the church. **Sarah Tupling in response said there was a need to train more deaf people to join the clergy.** [Sarah also highlighted an article in *The Church Times* dated 11th July 2025, which featured a double page spread about only three Deaf clergy in the Church.]

The Right Reverend Hugh Nelson (Armed Forces) gave a speech on practical changes and it was agreed on legislation to simplify the licensing of Armed Forces chaplains, making it easier for them to serve with their units.



Sarah speaking at Synod on Saturday

Mary: Other agenda items included debates on the National Church Governance Measure, Spending Plans, Clergy Pensions, and a Governance Review of the House of Bishops.

On a lighter note, there was an Open Synod Quiz in the evening. The DAT Synod reps and the BSL interpreters joined together as a team.

Elaine: On Sunday we boarded a coach to York Minster for the special Eucharist service by the Archbishop of York, some members from the Deaf community in York also attended. It was a lovely service with the parade of young children with their mothers from the Sunday school connected with York Minster. The Sermon was read by the Archbishop of Hong Kong. Whilst we were waiting for the coach to the Minster, I had the opportunity to speak to the Archbishop of Hong Kong together with the interpreter, Hannah Robinson. I told him about my son's connections with China and Hong Kong after gaining a degree in Mandarin. Andrew Chan talked a lot about Hong Kong, the Anglican church and asked me about the Deaf people's involvement with the churches for the Deaf in England. He was very nice and interesting to talk to.



Elaine with Archbishop Andrew Chan

On Sunday afternoon the Synod also heard presentations on church growth, and the "Thy Kingdom Come" prayer initiative.

Mary: Sunday afternoon also included a rare item of Liturgical Business. Synod voted to add two events to the Common Worship Calendar, "Festival of God the Creator" and "Commemoration of the Twenty-one Martyrs of Libya," to bring the Church of England in line with Roman Catholic and Coptic Orthodox liturgy. An Ecumenical Guest, Rt. Rev'd Jan Otto Myrseth, Bishop of Tunsberg in Norway was invited to speak to the Synod. Other agenda items included a debate on the Archbishops' Council Annual Report.

Sarah: After the opening worship on Monday the first item on the Agenda was to agree the dates for Synod 2027 – 2029. This was followed by going through the Final Drafting Stage and final approval of the Abuse (Redress) Measure. This was a very sensitive item as there were survivors of abuse in attendance in the Central Hall. There were many members standing to contribute to the debate. The above Measure was finally approved.

The afternoon session focused on considering the Abuse (Redress) Rules 2025, going through several amendments after which it was finally approved. The next legislation was to approve the Archbishops' Council

Budget, 2026 and their proposals for apportionment for 2026. The final part of legislation which was approved were the Election Rules 2025 for the House of Bishops, Clergy and Laity.

Mary: On Tuesday morning, an Anglican Communion Guest, the Most Rev'd Hosam Naoum from Jerusalem was invited to address Synod. This was followed by some legislative business including the final approval of the Armed Forces Chaplains (Licensing) Measure.

The next item in the agenda related to Living in Love and Faith (LLF), where Synod voted to remove *Issues in Human Sexuality* from the Vocations (Shared Discernment) process. The Bishop of London then introduced a debate on the Response to the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill passing through Parliament.

The Archbishop of York gave farewells to the retiring Bishop of Leeds and Bishop of Bristol. Synod was prorogued until next February, 2026 at Church House, Westminster.

BSL Worship led by Deaf Anglicans Together at 7.15 pm on Monday evening

First Sarah taught the signs for 'Amen' and 'Lord' to the members of General Synod and asked them to sign throughout the worship whenever these words came up, joining in with Sarah, Mary, and Esther, one of the BSL interpreters.

Sarah signed the scripture reading – Matthew Chapter 6 v 2 – 14. This was followed by signing the Collect for the evening. Esther then signed a hymn, accompanied by the piano and the members joined in with the singing.

This was followed by short intercession prayers which were signed by Sarah and the responses were signed by Mary.

Mary then signed "The Lord's Prayer" and the Bishop of London (Sarah Mullally) ended the worship with a blessing. (Bishop Sarah signed "Amen" and "Lord" throughout giving her blessing!)

Sarah Tupling

Spotlight on the Regions

Rev'd Mark Smith asks for prayer for St Giles' Church in Derby and the Deaf families from Ukraine that worship there. They particularly need more interpreters and people to support generally so please do pray for that situation. (See report in Easter Signs Magazine for more information.)



St Giles' Church congregation all signing in BSL.

Yvonne Selby interpreting.



Photos by Graham Kirsch

Elaine Heath sent in this brief photo report by Canon Jan Smith, Chaplain of Cambridgeshire Deaf Church (in the Diocese of Ely):

On Pentecost Sunday, 8th June, Cambs Deaf Church met by the sea at Hunstanton. Windy, but we all enjoyed worship, and social time.

There was a service led in BSL with Holy Communion in Ely Cathedral in the Lady Chapel, on 29th June, with Deaf people from Cambs Deaf Church

and Norwich Deaf Church taking part. 30 people enjoyed Sunday dinner before the service too. It was a very hot day too!



Signs of Hope Conference: 40th Anniversary of the Claggett Statement (March 28-29, 2025)

Rev'd Dr Hannah Lewis gave a presentation at this conference in March at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts in the USA. **"Signs of Hope: The Claggett Statement and Deaf Theology Today"** commemorated the 40th anniversary of the groundbreaking Claggett Statement, a pioneering document in Deaf Liberation theology.

The Claggett Statement (in English and ASL), penned in 1984 by an ecumenical group of deaf and hearing individuals from North America, represented a crucial moment in Deaf theological discourse and cultural awakening.

The conference brought together scholars and practitioners from the United States and beyond to explore the Statement's lasting impact and future implications for Deaf Christians worldwide.

[A full report with photos will be included in the next edition of Signs.]

“AUTUMN MEANS HARVEST”

Autumn means harvest,
And grain in the bin.
Autumn means farmers
Are bringing fruit in.
It means summer’s blooming
Has given its yield.
Autumn means high tide in orchard and field.
(By Lenore Hetrick)

HARVEST TIME

Having lots of lovely food
As we thank God for the delicious food we eat
Really tasty meat, fish, cheese we have and milk to drink
Vegetables and fruit we have
Eating and enjoying the lovely food
Some people are starving in God’s world – we must remember
Thankful for the farmers and fishermen who work hard every day

(Sarah Tupling)

New Wine 2025 - Report by Janice Silo

I have been coming to New Wine for some years now, why? I love their preaching, teaching of particularly bible studies and practical sessions too. Deaf people are welcome and we had a good team of qualified BSL interpreters and learners (some not yet fully qualified) too.

For 3 days we had a one hour BSL stream in the afternoon led mainly by deaf people and our great hearing allies. We had short sessions of acting, teaching choruses to the hearing audience. From their reaction they enjoyed it very much. Rev'd Sara Head was the main preacher and she focused on Moses, Elijah and the woman at the well and what we could learn from their lives.

In both morning and evening meetings we had some wonderful worshipping time. Then there was what I call bible studies! Preaching, yes and a bit more. The main aim was to challenge us to become more like Jesus. We know we can pray for example for healing, for wisdom, for the gift of knowledge and be filled with the Holy Spirit but do we USE such wonderful gifts with love? 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 says the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for the common good of the Church.

Some of us camped at Royal Bath and West Show Ground outside Shepton Mallet and some of us have campervans or caravans. Some of us book into inns or Airbnbs. This year we booked an apartment! So there is a variety of accommodations but don't leave book outside the ground too late!!

The people at the Deaf camp site ate together and had fellowship with each other.

Everyone helped and our cook for the week was Rev'd Mark Smith. (And a good one!)

