

SIGNS MAGAZINE SUMMER *EDITION*
2026



Deaf
Anglicans
Together

Registered Charity no. 1117313

“Ephphatha”
Jesus Heals a Deaf Man
Mark 7:31-37 (NLT)

Jesus left Tyre and went up to Sidon before going back to the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Ten Towns. A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to him, and the people begged Jesus to lay his hands on the man to heal him.

Jesus led him away from the crowd so they could be alone. He put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then, spitting on his own fingers, he touched the man’s tongue. Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said, “*Ephphatha*,” which means, “Be opened!” Instantly the man could hear perfectly, and his tongue was freed so he could speak plainly!

Jesus told the crowd not to tell anyone, but the more he told them not to, the more they spread the news. They were completely amazed and said again and again, “Everything he does is wonderful. He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who cannot speak.”

This scripture passage is taken from the Gospel for the 12th Sunday after Trinity in the Book of Common Prayer, known as “Ephphatha Sunday”. This year this is on Sunday August 23rd.

From the Chair, Rev'd Hannah Lewis

I was delighted when Mary announced the theme for the Summer Signs magazine would be the 'Ephphatha' story – the healing of the Deaf man. It gives me a chance to share pictures of two beautiful stained-glass windows (on page 4) and to look at some of the different ways Deaf people relate to the story. Not all of us want to hear and speak as we are proud and happy being Deaf and using BSL. But the story can be understood in different ways, and it is good to share ideas and 'be opened' by the power of the Holy Spirit (which is the meaning of the word 'Ephphatha') to new ways of looking at an old story.

The Spring conference 2026 at Swanwick is a memory now – we had a great weekend with thought provoking presentations from Sue Whalley, as we learned to pray together in the Spirit. At Sunday morning communion when we had a time of silence to pray for the Spirit to come and then a time to share anything that came to mind it was very encouraging how many people felt inspired to share. At the Spring conference we also had our AGM, and the annual reports and accounts are available on our website for any DAT members to look at. In future we hope to record the AGM presentations, so everything is available in BSL as well, watch this space!

We have exciting events coming up later this year and in 2027. At the end of September, a group of 11 Deaf reps from the UK will be going to Norway for an international IEWG conference with deaf and hearing people from Deaf churches in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany and other countries too. It is also General Synod election year. We are currently accepting nominations for DAT general synod reps – information was sent out recently. We will let you know if there are more than 3 reps nominated and if there are there will be an online election in September.

In 2027 Deaf Anglicans Together (formerly NDCC) will be marking its 60th Anniversary. We have just started planning the Spring conference at High Leigh in May and the grand thanksgiving for and celebration of BSL service to be held at Southwark Cathedral on Saturday 11th September 2027. Watch this space for more information.

I hope you enjoy the rest of the summer and autumn when it comes.
God bless, *Hannah*.

Save the Date!
DAT Spring Conference 14th - 16th May 2027.
High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Herts

Deaf Anglicans Together
60th Anniversary Service of Thanksgiving
at Southwark Cathedral
on Saturday 11th September 2027 at 2pm

Southwark is where Deaf education, BSL and Deaf Community started 235 years ago (Nov 14th 1792). It is hoped to make this an ecumenical service and celebration of BSL, with lots of groups involved.
So please save the date, and share with others in due course.

Dates for your Diary

IEWG Conference, Oslo, Norway
28th September – 2nd October 2026

For more details see
<https://deaf-iewg.com/conference>

Go! Sign Bible Conference Weekend
16th- 18th October 2026

Cliff College, Hope Valley, Derbyshire
Contact: admin@gosign.org

Signs of God Summer School 2027
16th - 22nd August 2027

The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire
Contact: summerschool@signsofgod.org.uk
www.signsofgod.org.uk

“Ephphatha” stained glass windows – Rev’d Hannah Lewis

I have been lucky enough to serve in Deaf centre chapels with purpose-built stained-glass windows. A popular subject in these windows is the story of Jesus healing of the Deaf man in Mark’s gospel. This is often known as the “Ephphatha” story – Ephphatha is the word in Aramaic language that Jesus spoke to the Deaf man. It means ‘be opened’.



The first window (left) is from the chapel upstairs at Southport Deaf Club near Liverpool. The Deaf centre is 100 years old and as far as we know the chapel windows are about the same age. You can see Jesus putting his fingers on the Deaf man’s mouth and ear and the words

underneath say “He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.”

The second window (right) is much more modern in style. It has an interesting history. It was made for the chapel of the Ernest Ayliffe Home for Deaf people in Leeds around 1958. When the home closed in 1978, the window was moved to Oxford Deaf Centre chapel. In 2020 the Oxford Deaf Centre closed, and eventually the window was moved to Reading



Deaf Centre chapel which is where it is now. The window shows Jesus standing up with the deaf man kneeling in front of him. The deaf man is holding his hands up and Jesus has put his hands over the deaf man's head.

How do deaf people feel when they look at these windows? Some deaf people think Jesus was kind and helpful and communicated with the man through touch and the man needed to be able to hear and speak. Others see the 'healing' that happened was that the man was given the confidence to go out and share the good news of Jesus in his own way. Some deaf people see the story in a different way, the man before he met Jesus didn't know any sign language and couldn't communicate with anyone. After he met Jesus, his mind was opened, and he saw the deaf community and learned sign language from them.

What do you think of this story?

Please e-mail Hannah on chair@deafanglicanstogether.org.uk

IEWG News

A group of Deaf people representing Deaf Anglicans Together will be travelling to Oslo, Norway at the end of September for the IEWG (International Ecumenical Working Group for Deaf Ministry) Conference, with two BSL interpreters.

There will be a report in the next issue of Signs.



Obituary News

Rev'd Canon David Bliss, who was Chaplain among Deaf People in Sheffield from 1997 to 2008, Rector of Todwick and Vicar of Rotherham Minster before his retirement in 2017, passed away on 15th May 2026.

We thank God for his ministry and service. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

DAT Spring Conference, 15th-17th May 2026
The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire
Theme: “Pray in the Spirit at all times for everything”.

Welcoming the Stranger: A First-Timer’s Experience at DAT
Report by Ana

I arrived at the DAT weekend panicking at not finding anyone who could sign. I wanted to flee, but then who should stand in front of me but Hannah Lewis herself? Hannah who had responded quickly and kindly to my inquiries about the conference, whether I would be welcome, whether there would truly be full BSL access, and whether my disabilities could be accommodated.

Hearing people were in the minority, and they were not in positions of leadership. They were given respect and affection, but they were not the stars of the show.

I loved it when Sue Whalley, the presenter, told us that her first problem in becoming a minister was her inability to sign. It was lovely to see someone who learned BSL at a later age but now gives polished, professional presentations.

To see people like Mary and Vivienne, who didn’t have the benefit of deaf school but are still accepted at DAT, gave me peace. It wasn’t the stereotypical split of old versus young generation. Mary wasn’t just accepted, but she had a leadership role and served as a representative for the Church of England General Synod, with the assistance of an interpreter. I had the privilege of witnessing Bhuppy award Vivienne her sign name (two Vs, like “hippie”) and later nod in satisfaction as she used it in conversation.

I laughed as Penny Beschizza gave her trademark stand-up comedy disguised as a Saturday night DAT quiz that disregarded any time

constraints. “Sisters,” she told me, as we exchanged commiserations about the annoyances of using a walking aid.

I loved the size of the group. It was small enough to be cozy but big enough not to be cliquey. The ice breaker on the first evening was a brilliant way to make new people feel welcome and even important because we had people lining up to introduce themselves.

We were deaf, some were disabled, and all were from a variety of backgrounds. I wasn’t the only Asian or even the only East Asian person in the room. Vicky Mackaprang, one of the other East Asian women, was enthusiastic and involved in the group, expressing interest in travelling to Norway for an international conference later in the year. Others nodded in encouragement and approval.



DAT group photo outside The Hayes, Swanwick

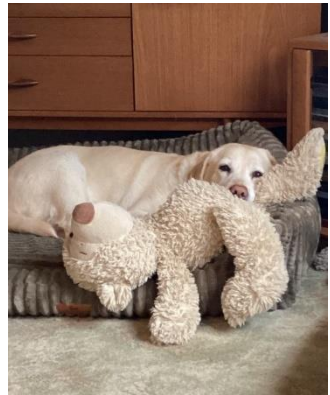
Best of all? The assistance dogs! One pawed at his mom to be held like a baby. When another got up to shake all over and ask for a fuss, I wasn’t the only one laughing at the cuteness. Have a look at some of the dogs on the next page.

Assistance Dog Hall of Fame



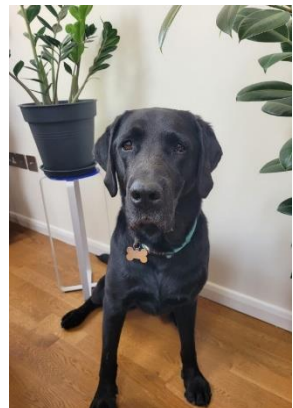
From Janet: Danny is a 12 year old black working cocker spaniel and I've had him as a Hearing Dog for 10 years. He loves human food! He also loves playing with tennis balls and is very affectionate.

From Jill: Kit is a Labrador, age 10. Her favourite off duty activity is sniffing - she's a real scent-hound and loves sniffing things in the woods and on our walks round the block.



From Ana: Kimchi is a 9 year old border collie and drama queen! Her favourite activity is supervising everyone and giving judgmental looks when things are not up to her standards.

From Jane: Jay is a 7 year old Lab whose off-duty hobbies include searching for food, asking for food, and alerting in the hopes of receiving food.



News from the Diocese of Bristol

Rev'd Esther Rose was licensed as the new part-time Chaplain with the Deaf Community in the Diocese of Bristol by the Rt Revd Neil Warwick, Acting Bishop of Bristol and Bishop of Swindon. The special licensing service took place at Christ the King Church, Bradley Stoke, Bristol on Sunday 29th March. Rev'd Hannah Lewis, Chaplain among Deaf People, Oxford Diocese, preached the sermon.



From L to R: Canon Alice Kemp (Diocesan Disability Adviser), Rev'd Esther Rose, Bishop Neil Warwick, Rev'd Hannah Lewis

Rev'd Esther Rose introduces herself as follows:

"I grew up in Australia, and my Deaf family communicated with Australian Sign Language (Auslan). We attended Deaf church (DCF) and I became a follower of Jesus at 13. I moved to England in my 20's and I worked as a BSL interpreter.

"I love meeting people and learning from their experiences. We never stop learning, and that gives me joy! When I began studying theology, I learned more about our God who is nurturing, loving, forgiving, kind, generous, and beautiful. I believe that everyone has

been lovingly created by God, and each person is unique. I believe that God created Deaf people to bring life and richness to all of humanity, and the Church.

“I was ordained in Rochester Cathedral in 2021, and worked in a hearing church in Dartford. In March 2026, my dog Pixie and I left our home and church in Kent to move to Yate, in the Bristol Diocese. I am pulling together my love for Jesus and the Deaf Community in one role. This job is part-time, so I am still working as an interpreter. Please do pray for me and this post.”



Rev'd Esther Rose (with Pixie) and
Clark and Carolyn Denmark,
members of Swindon Deaf Church

Bishop Neil said:

“Esther knows, loves and has been part of the Deaf Community for a long time and she brings that wealth of knowledge and experience to our diocese. I am delighted that she is here. We want to have church in every community, that people can belong to, and Esther will help make this a reality.”

General Synod, York University
Friday 10th – Tuesday 14th July 2026
by Mary Bucknall, Elaine Heath, Sarah Tupling (DAT Synod reps)

Mary: The final group of sessions of this quinquennium (5 years) was held at Central Hall, York University before elections for a new General Synod this autumn. The Archbishop of York gave a Presidential Address on Friday afternoon, which included a review of the past 5 years. The Ecumenical Guest, The Most Rev'd Luc Terlinden, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels and Primate of Belgium also addressed Synod.



Elaine: The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dame Sarah Mullally, gave a speech in the debate about neurodiversity, as she is a former nurse and has experience about this. Neurodiversity is the concept that there is natural, healthy variation in how human brains function. It promotes the idea that cognitive differences, such as differences in thinking, learning and processing information, are normal variations of the human experience, rather than defects that need to be “cured”. Neurodivergent people who have this condition include those who are autistic, those with ADHD, and people with dyslexia or dysplasia, who are a blessing to the church and wider society and their experiences adds to the richness of experience of all, but they face discrimination and barriers that prevent them from flourishing. The General Synod motion, “All Kinds of Minds: Affirming Neurodiversity in the Life of the Church” was passed.

Mary: Legislation during this group of sessions included the National Church Governance Measure and various Rules and Regulations for approval, for example the new Clergy Conduct Rules and Abuse (Redress) Rules. Finance included the Archbishops’ Council Annual

Report and Budget for 2027, and the Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report. There were also two sessions of Formal Questions.

Sarah: Promoting Unity in our Nation was a key session on Saturday afternoon – a presentation was given which was followed by group work. After this, everyone came back together to share thoughts with the whole Synod to reflect on political and social divisions and to promote unity in a time of division in our nation. The latest Gaza war has made people of different faiths become very fragile and the Church has a “duty” to hold a space for people of different faiths as well as our Christians in this country.

Mary: Officers and members of the General Synod attended the Sung Eucharist at York Minster on Sunday morning, officiated by the Archbishop of York, with the Archbishop of Canterbury preaching. The interpreters were Rev’d Esther Rose and Sarah Hides.

Afterwards we visited a new photographic touring exhibition, “Called As We Are: Disability, Ministry and the Kingdom of God” featuring twelve disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent people who minister and work in the Church of England, including Rev’d Neil Robinson, Chaplain to the Deaf Community in the Diocese of Salisbury.

Elaine: At the heart of the discussions on Sunday afternoon was “Hope for All Creation: a theological response to the environmental crises”. This document argues that care for Creation is not an optional concern but a core part of Christian discipleship and mission. The General Synod gave final approval for a new annual Festival of Creation in Christ, to be celebrated in Church of England churches on the first Sunday in September. The Commemoration of the Twenty-one Martyrs of Libya is to be fixed on February 15th every year to match the day of remembrance of twenty Coptic Christians from Egypt and one worker from Ghana who were executed in Libya in 2015.



Mary: On Sunday afternoon there was an address by the Anglican Communion Guest, The Rt Rev'd Jorge Cabral, Bishop of the Lusitanian Church in Portugal.

Sarah: Routemap to Net Zero was one of the business items. The Church of England is still aiming for net zero carbon by 2030 – that was the target set back in 2020. To put it simply, all were told that this was still the target and shared a revised, more practical route map to help every part of the Church to get there. An emphasis was put on caring for creation is part of Christian discipleship.

In the evening there was a debate about how the Church of England relates to Christians in the Holy Land. 'Kairos Palestine' is a document written by Palestinian Christians which asked for Churches around the world to stand with them and speak up for justice and peace. On Monday, the debate continued. The outcome was that the Church agreed to listen to and support Palestinian Christians, but also said it wants to maintain friendship with Jewish communities too.

On Monday morning there was a big debate on same-sex relationships compatibility with Christian discipleship. It is part of the five year Living in Love and Faith (LLF) process where the Church has been listening, praying and talking. This mattered as LLF has been about listening to LGBT + people, theologians and bishops across the Church. This debate was one of the last major pieces of that work before the new Synod is elected in the autumn. The outcome is Synod did not agree to change church teaching. The debate showed how divided views still are. The current position remains – Synod agreed that the conversation and pastoral care needs to keep going.

"Trust and Trustworthiness" was an important 5-year review on why people do or do not trust the Church. Synod admitted trust has been broken, and agreed the Church must prove itself trustworthy through better listening, honesty, and action. The Archbishop of York summed it up in his address: trust is built "not by the words we say, but by our deeds and actions". The report asked every church to become safer, more honest, and easier to hold to account - so people can trust what

the Church says and does. This was meant as a starting point for the next 5 years, and not a one-off fix.

Rt Rev'd Robert Springett, Bishop of Tewkesbury, the new lead bishop for safeguarding, gave an update on new safeguarding work. Synod agreed the priority must be protecting people – with clearer reporting, more accountability, and listening to those who have been hurt.

Mary: On Tuesday morning there was a Private Members' Motion (PMM) on Support for looked after children and those in care. Mary made a speech highlighting the communication needs of Deaf and Deafblind looked after children and young people in care.

This was followed by another PMM on Protecting Nature on Church Commissioners' Land, a proposal for more rewilding of their land according to the 30 x 30 rule i.e. 30% of land by 2030. This motion was amended in favour of the Bishop of Norwich's motion.

Sarah: This was followed by closing worship, farewells and dissolution as this was the last meeting of the current 5-year Synod. The Archbishop of York said farewells to the retiring Bishops of Lichfield and Southwark, and after the final prayers and blessing Synod was formally dissolved – ready for new elections in the autumn.



The DAT Synod reps with the interpreting team on the final day of General Synod.

Questionnaire for Summer Signs – Elaine Heath (retiring DAT Synod rep)

Elaine, who nominated you as DAT Synod rep?
Rev Anne Richardson. There are three General Synod reps who are all Deaf or hard of hearing.

Which Diocese do you belong to?

Diocese of Ely, I live in South West Norfolk near the border of Cambridgeshire 14 miles away. Norwich Cathedral is 51 miles away on the other side of Norfolk.



When did you become a Christian?

When I was a little child, my grandmother who was a Catholic gave me a book in pictures about Jesus. She supported me when I was confirmed by the Bishop of Southwark at St Matthew's Church in Redhill, Surrey.

The first time I went to a church for the Deaf was in Bermondsey, South London. Eugene McNamara took me there. When living in Surrey, I attended the DCF. Now I go to Cambs Deaf Church.

Which Deaf Churches do you attend regularly?

Sometimes at Huntingdon run by Canon Jan Smith. I go regularly to my Methodist church which has good communication support where hymns and prayers are screened on the wall next to the altar.

What was your most memorable experience of General Synod during the last 5 years?

Having the opportunity to attend the General Synod in London based not far from Westminster Abbey, and York at the University Campus every summer. Always on the Sunday, there is a service at York Minster where other deaf people attend, they may be members of the local Deaf Community or other towns in Yorkshire. It is a nice opportunity to meet them usually after the service.

Can you describe the inauguration of General Synod in November 2021?

The inauguration of the 11th session of the Church of England General Synod took place in November 2021, and a royal address read by HRH Prince Edward who attended on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II as she was advised by doctors to rest. I remember that after his speech when he saw one of our interpreters signing, he looked surprised as if it was the first time he had seen one.

Can you describe your experiences of visiting Lambeth Palace in February?

Some participants were invited to a reception at Lambeth Palace, in the Great Hall which was actually an annexe. We walked past Lambeth Palace in the evening, the venue looked pretty twinkling with lights. We had a casserole followed by a fruit crumble and lots of wine.

What would you say to a newly elected DAT Synod rep?

Whilst the General Synod can be interesting but it is usually a long day from 9am till 5pm sometimes till 7pm. Make sure you have a rest and arrange a rota to leave assembly.

What are your hobbies and interests?

My main interest is travel abroad meeting other foreign participants who are hard of hearing or deaf. Keeping active playing table tennis regularly and taking the dog for a walk.

And finally as you retire – which country would you like to visit next time?

I have visited 34 different countries in Europe. Not been to Australia or the Americas. I have been to China twice where my son studied Mandarin. I think I would like to visit China again!

Report from Ely Cathedral - Elaine Heath

The Installation of the Rt Rev'd Sarah Clark as the 70th Bishop of Ely took place on the Feast of St Etheldreda on Sunday 21st June at 3pm.

The signed service in Ely Cathedral was attended by three people from Cambs Deaf Church, Elaine Heath, Rosie Wallace and Julie Fall. The two BSL interpreters were Mary Tibbett and Lucy Dunhill.



Ely Cathedral



Julie Fall, Rosie Wallace, Elaine Heath

Canon Jan Smith, Minister working with Deaf and Deafblind People in Ely Diocese, has now returned from a mission trip to Fiji with Deaf Ministries International (DMI).



The new
Bishop of Ely

Spotlight on the Regions

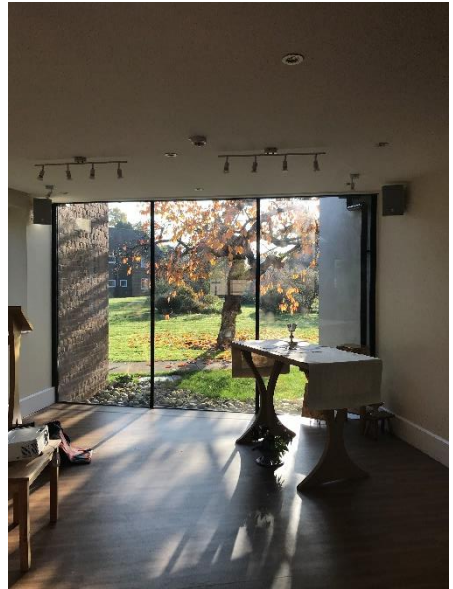
Oxford Diocese by Ken Dyson (Lay Reader)

Oxford Diocese is the largest Diocese in the Church of England. It actually comprises Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. It consists of 800 churches and 600 parishes, a large area and the largest worshipping population.

It is not surprising that we have six or seven Deaf churches in the diocese, which keeps our chaplain Rev Dr Hannah Lewis busy. One of them is in Gerrards Cross, the convent of St Michael which sits just outside the Diocese of London. I believe that the late Rev Vera Hunt established the Deaf church in the convent, with the support of Sister Catherine CSC.

Deaf people from London Diocese attended Gerrards Cross during Vera's active ministry, but very few now attend. We have Deaf services in the lovely modern chapel every three months. Sister Catherine can sign and she attends our services. The convent provides tea and coffee and a selection of lovely cakes.

We have a new member who is deafblind and has other disabilities so we have to adapt our services for his needs. We hope to welcome more people from the area to our friendly relaxed worship and fellowship.



The Chapel at Gerrards Cross

Reading Deaf Club 25th Anniversary by Ken Dyson

Our Reading Deaf Club celebrated a long planned 25th anniversary on June 27th this year. It was actually a celebration of the Centre as the Club was founded long before that, well before 1895. We have a brass plaque in the chapel commemorating a Deaf man, J.S. Salmon in 1892. We are funding research by a professional Deaf researcher to establish the full records. We do know that the Church of England founded a worship group for Deaf people in a local church in Reading, and the Centre has moved several times since then.

The Oxford Diocesan Council for the Deaf (ODCD) owned the premises in London Road and they sold it and gave the proceeds to the Deaf. We also received a lottery grant and so, after some years of searching, we at last found a suitable property at Cardiff Road. We moved to the new Centre in 2001, the Deaf doing the work themselves, removing the many partitions of the previous small business and fitting a new concrete floor to create a large utility space with bar. Also modifying the upstairs rooms to create a chapel, rooms for the interpreting firm TC to rent, offices and a conference room. Lots of improvements have been done over the years, funded by a generous donation from the will of a former member and the support of Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils.



Rev'd Hannah Lewis officiating at the service of
Thanksgiving in Reading Deaf Chapel

The 25th anniversary celebrations were very successful, with local dignitaries like the mayor of Reading attending. We provided free refreshments with wine and talks about our history. Rev Dr Hannah Lewis arranged a church service in the upstairs chapel to give thanks for the Centre and for all those who worked hard to create it, some of whom have since passed away. As several of the church members were unable to attend, I was pleased that 17 attended, many of whom did not normally attend church but they appreciated the long support from the church. The Area Dean of Reading, Rev Mike Smith, attended probably his first Deaf service.

Reading Social committee worked hard planning the day and decorating the hall. We are lucky to have a well supported Club in an excellent Centre, considering how many Deaf clubs have closed.

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Is it YOU? by Irene Seager

Everybody needs Someone
Someone to Care
Someone to Listen
To just Be There

Someone to Love Them
And Understand Them Too
Someone to Encourage
Could that Someone Be YOU?

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