

Introducing the Revd Susan Myatt, Baptist Minister & BSL User

Always being asked, 'Am I allow to drive?' 'What it's like being Deaf?' So I now gently respond, 'What is it like to be hearing?' I am created in God's image ...normal!

I was born Deaf, and had a Deaf family. Attended an oral school, where signing wasn't allowed. Found God at age of 12, didn't fully understand, but something was there. Was always being told what deaf people couldn't do. Left school, and tried to find a church, but it was too hard and I gave up.

The job I really wanted was to work with accounts but was told no because I have to learn shorthand, or you can't work in office because you can't hear the phone. Always it was a case of you can't do this because you are deaf. In the end you start to believe it and accept that you can't do it!

I ended up working for a men's tailors doing alterations and measuring hire suits for weddings. Not my dream job but it was better than nothing. It wasn't until I was 35 years old that I understood myself and worked out who I am. My deaf identity and my journey began, and it's very hard in the hearing world.

In the year 2000 I finally got my dream job working in an accountancy firm and loved it. Until God called me into ministry. I attended a hearing church, it was really hard but I want to know our Lord Jesus. At that time I really thought that I wasn't good enough because of the word CAN'T.

Around 2007 for the first time in my life I attended a Deaf Church, with a Deaf Priest and Deaf Christians! Because of visual language and BSL, I learnt so much in a very short time than previously in my whole life! And here I am today! So what happened?

I attended a course. "What's the course at Chester called Gill?" She was my tutor! My life changed, and now I realise that we can have a relationship with God! We all have a calling! We are all part of God image!

Now I am the first ordained Deaf Baptist Minister for the Baptist Union. I work for HEBA, RB, Penkrigde [Lichfield Diocesan Advisor for Deaf People]

So, Why a Ministry with Deaf People?

It's about us working together with the Hearing Church. They don't know the difference between hearing and Deaf culture. I have a huge pastoral role – Deaf people have been spoon fed and treated as a charitable case. Recently a deaf person, asked a hearing person to check what he wanted to say about Jesus, and what happened? The hearing person took over and shared it for him, which was very hurtful and disappointing.

My experiences over the years of what people say, and believe me, it's still happening right up to this day.

They will say things like:

- I have sinned
- I don't pray enough
- I don't have enough faith
- You are cursed
- Pray for healing – ears!

Deaf people suppress their emotions but if we set up a Deaf café this will become a safe place for people to tell their stories and develop their own life journey.

What am I, and what can we do about it?

In my job role I'm starting from scratch, and have just 3 days per week to do it!

HEBA / Baptist Union

Regional / National Role – pilot study to find out what is going on in Baptist Churches now with accessible services, Deaf members, outreach etc. I plan to visit interested churches all over the country to deliver Deaf Awareness training – this is the first event!

I am setting up guidelines, policies, procedures re Deaf Awareness training, developing Deaf pastoral teams, Deaf leadership teams, advising on BU website elements re Deaf work eg clips about Deaf work, activities etc. I'm doing work on the Baptist Union website and ensuring all resources have subtitles, or are delivered in BSL, etc.

Rising Brook Baptist Church in Stafford

It's interesting to look back and see how far we have come compared to when I first arrived there. Now we have Deaf people involved in the Welcome teams, and coffee teams. We also have:

- Deaf awareness training
- Basic signing course
- Alpha Course in BSL
- Interpreter rota for Sunday services
- Tech support – lighting – monitor – fold back speaker – speech to text note taker displayed on large monitor at front
- Deaf choir – involved in annual Carol service
- Interpreted panto events
- The church now uses an online website Planning Centre for their Sunday services – access limited to people involved [eg songs, community news, sermon notes etc]
- Deaf Café
- New projects
- Men allotments
- Deaf Cafe
- Ladies craft group in bsl
- Set up leadership team and pastoral due large area
- BSL Course – 20 weeks – learning to sign