

**PRESS RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

**CONTACT**

Mary McKenna  
Marketing Comm. Coordinator  
(516) 922-4100, ext. 204

18 February 2010

**Rev. S.R.S. Sends an S.O.S. on Deaf Ministry**  
***Lutheran Friends of the Deaf Advocates for a Lost Congregation***

*“Do not worry if you have built your castles in the air. They are where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.” - Henry David Thoreau*

Rev. S. R. Schumacher, Mill Neck Foundation’s Director of Deaf Ministry and advocate for its Lutheran Friends of the Deaf (LFD) mission, quotes Thoreau as he recounts his experiences traveling around the world in an effort to increase awareness and accessibility of Deaf ministry. As he plans itineraries for subsequent trips, he refers to LFD’s long-standing goals for Deaf ministry and education. “Through time, planning and preparation, we want to build the foundations needed to bring these hopes and dreams into reality,” said Rev. Schumacher.

The hopes and dreams include reviving an ostensibly lowered interest in Deaf ministry. With 364 million Deaf people worldwide, one would think large numbers of Deaf people practice religion, especially in the United States. But the reality is, according to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), an estimated 98% of Deaf people in the US do not attend church. Why? Rev. Schumacher says a lack of communication and congregational accessibility largely contributes to the plight of Deaf ministry.

“Successful communication in this sense requires that hearing individuals learn sign language, which has its own grammar and syntax. An individual may be very interested in working with the Deaf; however, many often finish sign language classes without continuing on in Deaf ministry. Add to that the fact that sign language is not universal, and communication then becomes an obstacle in working with the Deaf,” explained Rev. Schumacher.

As LFD strives to lower the communication barrier by meeting the ever-increasing needs of availability and awareness in Deaf ministry, hopes and dreams are continuously formulated along the way. “We hope to enable churches and individuals to develop and grow ministries that enhance the spiritual and social lives of the Deaf. Our dream is to increase the availability of programs and materials that will help lead hearing congregations, and their church workers, into this vital ministry - not only in the parish, but also the community,” said Rev. Schumacher.

One way of increasing availability is to help others become more aware of possibilities in assisting the Deaf in developing ministries within existing congregations. “An outreach ministry will enable a hearing congregation to bring the Gospel to the Deaf, provide related services such as sign language interpreting and allow more access to the church and congregational life. Worship, Bible studies and fellowship activities that are designed for the individual needs of the Deaf, as well as for combined hearing and Deaf congregations, will bring the two groups closer together and encourage communication,” clarified Rev. Schumacher.

Realistically, added Rev. Schumacher, “I believe that we will be most active in the training and support of church workers and laity as they serve in ministry. The changes that will occur, in time, are not limited to the increase in awareness, but in the actual participation of hearing congregations in Deaf ministry - whether it be within their own congregations or in joint efforts with others. Whatever the advancements are in Deaf ministry, we know that as long as we focus on going with the Gospel of Jesus, God will bless our work in His time and in His way.”

While addressing the plight of Deaf ministry will continue to be a work in progress, traveling extensively has afforded Rev. Schumacher an overview of what’s occurring worldwide. He shares, “It doesn’t matter what country you are in - Deaf ministry still needs to be accomplished. In the more remote areas, there are many Deaf children whose parents have died, where relatives or friends have taken them into their homes. These Deaf children often develop minimal language capabilities, only to communicate life’s basic needs with those they live with.”

In the US and other developed countries, the Deaf often have opportunities to take advantage of educational and vocational resources provided by governmental agencies and non-profits, and many religious denominations have a variety of ministries for the Deaf. “But even with all of these opportunities and resources,” observes Rev. Schumacher, “we have not reached all the Deaf in the world with the Saving Grace of the Gospel.”

On the flip side, some encouraging news is that the LCMS says there are Deaf pastors and leaders working in more than 10 countries around the world. Optimistic, Rev. Schumacher poses this question: “Would we like to be in more countries – YES! But the reality of funding is sometimes the biggest blockade. Developing Deaf ministries in foreign countries is not only a desire, but also a process that takes time and commitment from the sending and partnering organizations.”

In general, Rev. Schumacher is heartened by the fact that religious outreach to the Deaf is taking place. “But,” he says, “This means even more outreach is required. Believing that the primary concern for the Christian church is to care for people’s souls, we will not want to ignore the needs of the Deaf around the world, and their greatest religious need, which is to hear the Gospel. As Christians, we do desire to live out our name sake - followers of Christ - and follow the example that He set for us in His earthly ministry of caring for the spiritual and physical needs of people.”

In addition to the aforementioned goals of LFD, increasing Deaf-friendly church experiences for parishioners is a top priority. “Currently, we are developing a Deaf Awareness program that reaches out to a variety of entities within the church. We aspire to reach the congregations, which include members and church workers. We are also developing a support program that will aid congregations and church workers in a variety of ways as they continue in their ministries,” shared Rev. Schumacher.

On both an international and more local basis, Mill Neck Foundation, Inc. has contributed \$10,000 this year to the International Lutheran Deaf Association (ILDA) to assist them in their mission efforts to bring the Gospel to the Deaf to various parts of the world. Mill Neck is also partnering with Camp SonRise, a Lutheran camp in northeastern New York, in developing a summer camp program for both Deaf and hearing youth that will encourage communication through Christian growth and fellowship opportunities. “Additionally, in conjunction with Mill Neck Services (one of the Mill Neck Family of Organizations), we are also partnering with

Camp SonRise to provide a camping opportunity for Deaf and developmentally disabled adults. This particular camp will give them a variety of outdoor experiences with devotional time and spiritual growth.”

Furthermore, “we continue our work with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK), as we have partnered with Bethesda in the building of a hospital and assessment facility for developmentally disabled children in Kisumu.” said Rev. Schumacher. “Our future plans include continuing work with the ELCK in developing ministry and materials for the Deaf.” LFD will also have a role in the production of upcoming Bible story books that will be translated into various international sign languages.

A mission of Mill Neck Foundation, Inc., Lutheran Friends of the Deaf provides support for educational and evangelistic outreach to Deaf people of all ages throughout the United States and world. To date, over \$7,000,000 has been granted to a variety of church-related ministries here and abroad. Mill Neck Foundation, Inc., a recognized service organization of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, and Lutheran Friends of the Deaf, are part of the Mill Neck Family of Organizations, a not-for-profit group dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people who are Deaf, or who have other special needs, through excellence in individually designed educational, vocational or spiritual programs and services. For more information, please call 1-800-264-0662 or visit <http://www.millneck.org>.

*Photo Caption:*

Working with the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCK) in Kenya, Lutheran Friends of the Deaf partnered with Bethesda in the building of a hospital and assessment facility for developmentally disabled children. Here, Rev. Schumacher (right) is shown with Rev. Chuchu (left) from ELCK.

###