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The Coffee Hour with Andy and Sarah **Liturgy Gloss and Other Deaf Ministry Resources**

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Sarah: You are listening to the Coffee Hour. I'm Sarah Gulseth

Andy: I'm Andy Bates.

Sarah: The mics are a little hot there.

Andy: Yea-that's alright.

Sarah: It's Wednesday. I do not know the date is though.

Andy: It is Wed-nes-day.

Sarah: Wed-nes-day What was your alliteration again?

Andy: February 20th Wait til Wednesday

Sarah: Wait til Wednesday

Andy/Sarah: But it is Wednesday.

Sarah: But it is Wednesday, so it doesn't work anymore. This could take us all episode. Let's not.

Andy: Alright, let's not. But we have good stuff for today.

Sarah: We have really good stuff. A topic that I am really excited to talk about. You actually have some experience.

Andy: I do. Yes, but you can't see.

Sarah: We should have Facebook Lived this. Andy is doing sign language back here, but we are actually in the recording Studio and that's why you can't see it on Facebook Live.

Andy/Sarah: That's true, but that's OK

Sarah: Thanks to our underwriter Concordia university Wisconsin for your support of the Coffee Hour. You can find out more about them at CUW.edu/Live Uncommon. Their ad sounds really good. If you haven't listened to their ad, you should listen to their ad. But that's not what we are here to talk about today.

We have Deaconess Heidi Sias with us in the studio with Lutheran Friends of the Deaf which is a Millneck Family of organizations

Heidi: Branch [of Millneck]

Sara: Branch [of Millneck]

Welcome Deaconess Heidi. Thanks for joining us today.

Heidi: You're welcome.

Sarah: You were involved in Deaf Ministry, obviously, with Lutheran Friends of the Deaf. And this is something that I think we've only talked about once on the Coffee Hour, but it's a very important thing for more people to know about and understand that knowing sign language and doing ministry to the deaf. It's not a simple one to one translation of things. There's a lot more that goes into sign language and all of that.

Heidi: Yeah, American Sign Language (ASL) is its own language. It has its own grammatical structure. It's not a one to one to English words translation, which a lot of people don't realize.

Sarah: I didn't realize that for a long time

Heidi: Yeah.

Andy: And that's one of the reasons I really love the language, ASL. Because It is its own language. It's not just the language, but a whole culture.

Heidi: Oh yes

Andy: What was your first connection to deaf culture and how did you learn sign language and become part of Lutheran Friends of the Deaf?

Heidi: Well, boy! I had a friend that needed the language in college and I had already graduated from college so she asked if I would tag along and take a community college class with her so I said sure. So I picked it up kind of quickly and I kind of enjoyed it. And I learned about the Church Interpreter's Training institute held at Ft Wayne at the Seminary so I decided to go try to take that course. And things just evolved and I've been involved in Deaf Ministry now for 20, almost 25 years now. And so I just kind of had a passion for bringing the Gospel to Deaf people and there's such a need for that.

So, then, Lutheran Friends of the Deaf. Back when I was in CITI, I met Pastor Tom Dunseth, and so we've been working together for a long time through one of his organizations in MI. and then he started working for Lutheran friends of the Deaf, and convinced them to bring me on as a Deaconess intern. So, we're a good team. We've worked together for many years.

Andy: As you learned more about the language, learned the culture and got involved in CITI, Church Interpreter Training Institute, tell more about your first time at CITI, because you learned ASL at a Community College in a secular setting and now you're going into CITI, and we were talking about deaf culture being one thing, but now your adding to that culture, the church element as well. Was there a difference when you stepped into CITI from your language experience at the Community college?

Heidi: (laughs) Oh yeah! It's a huge difference! In interpreter programs they never teach anything about church signs. They may teach you "God" and that's about it. And there's even such unique signs for the Lutheran church. From other Christian denominations. And to learn all those and to learn how it all worked, to interpret as a team in a church setting, or all kinds of stuff. It was very intimidating, especially because it was a 4 week program when I attended. And so you're just immersed in it and it was pretty awesome. And the advanced students would help the beginner students. In fact, one of the advance students at that time when I was a beginner. She's one of the teachers for CITI now, so we're working together again. And, she was a good mentor for me back then and she is still now. She's a nationally certified interpreter, so she's really good.

Sarah: Talking about being immersed in Church culture, when you're interpreting a church service or a lecture, when you'd have to use theological language or theological words and phrases, what is that like; or do you have a story or something from a time when it was really a great experience; seeing people really understand what you were sharing with them?

Heidi: Yeah, there's a couple different interesting stories from interpreting in front of the congregation. I remember when I first started interpreting in front of the congregation, my legs would just shake. I was so scared. And so I learned before I would interpret to just sit in the pew and say a prayer and remind myself why I'm doing this. I'm doing this to bring God's Gospel to deaf people and that really settled me down. And then you just get a lot of people who would come talk to you afterwards. It's kind of funny. You have to take some of it with a grain of salt. Because you'll have hearing people come up and tell you what a great job you did and they have no idea what you did. You know, they don't know sign language.

Andy: That was so beautiful!

Sarah: That was wonderful!

Heidi: so you just thanks them, you know of course, and but you know, the deaf people, they're so patient, they just so thankful when people want to learn their language and want to be a part of their language and they're also very honest with critique. If you did something wrong, they will be happy to tell you what you did wrong so that you can do it right next time and they're very kind about it, but, the culture is just a very blunt culture, so they'll tell you if did something. (all laugh)

Andy: But there's no guessing about whether I did something right or wrong. I appreciate the honesty in deaf culture. I appreciate the honesty in deaf culture.

Heidi: Yeah, me too. I like it a lot. And they are so helpful. And that's why now the projects were working on, it's so important that we have deaf involvement. So the meeting we just had in January, in Austin, the whole meeting was completely in sign language because they were all deaf with the exception of Pastor Dunseth and I and so the whole meeting is in sign language. It's important to get the deaf people involved and to be leaders. Why should the hearing people be translating all this stuff into sign language? It's their language and so, we work together because we have the theological training and they have the linguistic and so it's just a good match. And so that's why we're trying to do some of these liturgical texts that are static texts trying to translate them into ASL, into the language in ASL.

Andy: what are some obstacles to the deaf being a part of our congregations or for ministry, reaching the deaf? What are the obstacles? I know the statistics, back in the 90's were pretty terrifying.

Heidi: They still kind of use some of those same statistics. 95%-98% of deaf people are unchurched and so it's a huge mission field. And you know they can't just go walk into a church and go worship. You know, we take that for granted. They can't do that. A lot churches really try to help them in terms of, someone can point along in the hymnal what's going on, they can hand them a copy of the sermon. But it's not the same. If they can't participate in the worship. It's just not the same. If they can't have a pastor speaking the words of Absolution, speaking the words of Institution to them, then they're not receiving God's gifts the same way we are as hearing people. So it's important to bring that to them.

Sarah; Yeah. As someone who hasn't been into a church before and hasn't seen, heard, our Theology, I think it might have been another time we were talking about deaf ministry, just the concept of grace and the concept of, I don't know, baptism or something, that these are such foreign concepts to people. Even hearing people. (Yeah, Andy's signing it). It's something that can be very hard for a deaf person to understand. Is that a common thing?

Heidi: Yeah, and when you teach them signs, like Andy just signed, "grace", they don't even know what that sign is. If they've come from outside of the church world. There has to be Bible studies to even explain what the sign is. And so there are religious signs but you kind of have to be careful. You have to know your audience, your deaf audience. Do they even know what these signs are? Do I need to expound on that concept a little bit and maybe miss the next thing so that they understand what this word means? It's kind of a tricky thing, because it's hard to get every single thing in when there are these huge theological concepts and words that you're trying to express.

Sarah: Right

Heidi: That's what CITI is supposed to try to help, the students, is to try to help them understand how to do that.

Sarah: sure, sure. What are some the unique challenges creating some of these resources that you're creating with Lutheran Friends of the Deaf?

Heidi: There's not a lot of people in the Synod that are theologically trained that also have the sign language background. I mean, there are some but not a lot and then same with the deaf community, there are not a lot who have some theological training as well as the linguistic training. The people that we have used for this are all Lutherans. One of them is a Deaconess. She's deaf and she is a Deaconess in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. One of them is a daughter of a pastor. She grew up with Lutheran theology. Her Dad is a Pastor for the deaf. And, so that's why it's important to get those people involved. There's not a lot of us. And just the logistics of having a meeting all in sign language. Who's talking? You have to be looking at the person talking. So, somebody's signing over here; I'm not going to see them if I'm concentrating on this person. You can only watch one person at a time and it takes a lot of energy, those meetings.

All laugh

But it's a lot of fun.

Andy: Good, Good! What are some of the materials that are currently available to individuals or congregations if they're starting or supporting deaf ministry in their local congregation?

Heidi: We have on our website some of these resources. We have Bible story books for children and for schools. People use them for Sunday school, that sort of thing. And the book has a drawn figure of somebody signing, it has the English word and then the book comes with the DVD that has somebody signing the whole story. And that person is a deaf person. And then there's also vocabulary within the DVD and also a hymn at the end of the DVD in sign language. So, that's one of the resources that we have.

Then we're working on this Liturgy gloss which is going to gloss the text of the entire Lutheran Service Book liturgy, the beginning of the Hymnal. We have essentially a first draft of the whole thing done, but now, we're having these meetings to check the ASL and to eventually record all of this. And so, we're kind of in process. We have some of the services done, some recorded, and some of them haven't even really been touched yet, beyond the first draft. We're kind of in the midst of that.

There's a directory of deaf missions on our web site where people can go to find where there are churches that have deaf ministry, that either a signed service, where its completely in sign language or an interpreted service of a hearing congregation. So those are on our web site.

We have different videos on our web site. We have the Catechism and devotions, the Apostles Creed is on there, the Lord's Prayer in on there.

I've just started doing some scripture videos to post on FB recently. I try to do those as much as I can as kind of a solo project. To try to get those out. Usually Social media is where we try to post those kind of things.

So those are the kind of things that are currently on our web site.

Andy: Well, you just opened a whole can of worms! We're going to have to dig into that when we come back.

(Commercial Break)

Andy: Welcome back to The Coffee Hour. I'm Andy Bates.

Sarah: And I'm Sarah Gulseth

Andy: We are talking with our friend Deaconess Heidi Sias of Lutheran Friends of the Deaf and just a little bit ago, Heidi, you mentioned a plethora of resources available from Lutheran Friends of the Deaf. One of those them you mentioned was a gloss of the Liturgy. Now for most of us, gloss is like, semi-gloss or high gloss paint is what we think of. But those with a linguistics background may have a bit more of an understanding of what you were talking about. So what is a gloss of the Liturgy?

Heidi: Yeah, I take these things for granted, what they mean because I've been working with it for so long.

So, a gloss is a written form of what you are going to sign. So, you have the English text there and then you have English words for the most part, although there are also different, what they call classifiers that are symbols that show you what you should be signing. They might use arrows, they might use things about facial expressions, there's different things you put on the gloss to show what your face should be doing, because that's a very important part of the language. So, it's a written form. So, because of that it makes it kind of difficult to just take that and know exactly what you need to sign; because you're not seeing it. It's just words. A gloss is kind of a personal thing. Everybody makes notes differently, just like you'd takes notes in a class differently. That's why we're also working on recordings, so people can actually see what that means. But, we use the gloss at CITI in the classes and then we show them what this means and then they can make their own notes. It makes it easier way to distribute it to people. So, it's a written form, basically, of the translation

Andy: So when you were talking about facial expressions...

Sarah: You keep signing, Andy! (All laugh)

Andy: Let's use an example from the Liturgy where facial expression is going to make a difference. What about the Lord's Supper? Eyebrows up, eyebrows down. It's going to change what it means, right?

Heidi: Yeah, eyebrows up, eyebrows down, yeah. Eyebrows up is like a "yes" or "no" question. Eyebrows down is a "Wh" question. Eyebrows up can also tell you what the topic is, and then you're now going to comment on that topic. There's rhetorical questions, there's all kinds of facial expression that are very important for the language.

Andy: So that can change the whole meaning of something; just facial expression alone.

Heidi: Yeah, and having a blank facial expression is not good either. And that's why a gloss can be kind of a hindrance, because you are so focused on the gloss that you're not thinking about what you should be doing. You're just reading the gloss and trying to get the signs out. So, we try to encourage people, you know, the gloss is good for training, but especially for the Liturgy, when it's a static text; you should be learning this from memory, and eventually you get rid of the gloss, so that you don't need it anymore. Eye contact is also very important in that language, so you should be having eye contact with the people in the congregation. So, we're trying to establish a consistency in the Liturgy. Hearing people get that right; you go into a church and you can just say things from memory. Deaf people, they go into a church and it's kind of done a little bit differently every place they go. Even the Lord's Prayer. There's just little slight nuances in how people do it. And that tends to be a habit, so they stick to it. So, we're not looking to change the way everyone is doing that, they've been doing that forever, but we do want some of the other Liturgies to have some consistent text, so that they can know what they're going to expect.

Sarah: This is so fascinating. You guys are like signing to each other and I'm just sitting here learning stuff. Great! So when, I don't know, when I was at Concordia and there was someone signing during a worship service and they had a music stand, would they have had a gloss next to them?

Heidi: Probably. Most students when they get a scripture verse, or a hymn or whatever was assigned to the, they're going to write it out, what they're wanting to sign. Some people just go from the English, but, it's really hard to do straight from the English. There's no passive voice in ASL, so you need to think in your head, "How am I going to switch this around to make sense?" Otherwise, the wrong person is doing the acting. So, there's a lot to this language.

Sarah: So, doing the translation when someone is just doing an extemporaneous [speech], that's really challenging.

Heidi: Cold interpreting is challenging. I don't even do a lot of cold interpreting anymore. You have to train your brain. I was out of it for so long when my husband was a pastor in Montana that my brain stopped kind of working that way. I would like to get back into that if I could, if I'm not too old. But,

yeah, it's hard! Your brain has to work in a certain way. You're always behind. You have to wait to see what the pastor is going to say next. You have to know the whole context before you sign something.

Sarah: So, a shout out to all of you ASL translators, right? That is awesome.

So you have the gloss? The gloss is done for the Liturgy for Divine Service III?

Heidi: Divine Service III is done. That's the one we were working on the recordings for when we were down in Austin, TX. And it was kind of a neat set up, because we had monitors that we were watching. The person signing is the Deaconess that is deaf, and so we were watching the monitor where she was signing. We had the camera man. He is also deaf. He is president of the deaf church down there. And then she was signing and she was watching two monitors because she didn't want to be looking at a gloss. She wanted to be having eye contact with the camera. So, she signed, she recorded herself signing. They put that up on monitors so she could watch herself signing and copy it. Because you can't possibly memorize as much stuff as we had her signing.

So, it was really a cool set up. I was really impressed. They've done it in the past. They've done it with cue cards with gloss. But she didn't want to try to focus on that. She wanted to focus on the signs. So, it worked out really well. But, it took a lot of monitors.

(All Laugh)

Andy: Lots of screens everywhere!

So you're working on the Liturgy and you mentioned a whole plethora of other resources. What was the web-site you mentioned earlier?

Heidi: It's really easy. It's Lutheran Friends of the Deaf. Org

We have information about Church Interpreter Training Institute there, which will be this summer, June 13-16 in Ft Wayne. We're also trying to start doing those regionally.

The Bible story books are there, the directory is there, there are videos there; which we are trying to add more and more videos. Eventually, we would like to get a Religious sign dictionary, because so many of the Lutheran signs are unique. We're also trying to do a weekly devotion, a video. The deaf people that we work with. Boy, they are passionate! They have all kinds of ideas. It's the staff. We don't have a lot of staff. And so we're trying to do as many projects as we can. We have a new Bible story book that's coming out very soon. I just did one more edit on it and it's getting really close. That's going to be a children's prayer book. So are continually coming out. I think we have 7 of them on the web site right now and there's two in the pipe line right now. So we're trying to get more resources out.

Andy: You mentioned Church Interpreter Training Institute coming up this summer at Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft Wayne and maybe some regional ones as well. Who could attend CITI? Who's a good candidate for that?

Heidi: Anyone can attend CITI. We take anywhere from somebody who is a beginner, that doesn't really know sign language at all. We actually have a deaf teacher for that class. My first teacher in ASL was deaf and he was excellent! It's the best person to learn from. And then we had all the way up to a certified interpreter last year. So we really try to gauge and make it for each person, what their needs are. Someone who is a certified interpreter really needs help with, "How do you translate theology? How do you translate scripture? How do you translate worship?" Those kinds of things. So we really try to tailor it to the unique needs.

Sarah: What do people come out of the CITI knowing? Or what are some of the things people can learn?

Heidi: We do religious signs, we teach a lot of Lutheran signs. We teach signing the Liturgy. We teach interpreting Scripture, interpreting sermons. We even do some linguistic things to really see, "Are you doing signed English or are you doing ASL? They will do stories where they have to interpret stories and really try to work on their body language and facial expressions. We also have a class just on that, taught by a professor at Concordia, Ann Arbor, where he teaches facial expression and body language, to really get those parts. It's so important to the language. You can't just use your hands. I'm trying to think what other classes...

We always have a Bible study. We start the day with a Bible study, so that they can... Because they are theologians. They have to be theologians in order to interpret it right. So each year we have a professor from the seminary teach a Bible Study. This year it's going to be Dr. Fickenscher.

Sarah: Man! I want to go now! Another thing I want to touch on is the printed materials. This is something that I just hadn't realize as being necessary, because it's a book, but you still have to have the translation in it to understand what's actually happening.

Heidi: Are you talking about the gloss? Or?

Sarah: No, the Bible story books.

Heidi: Oh, the Bible story books. This is really good for kids and we also have the pictures in there. The pictures in there were drawn just for our books. So, yeah you have a lot of different things in there and you can use it for someone who doesn't really understand English. English is their second language, to kids. It covers the whole gamut. And we have all different kinds of stories: Christmas, Easter, Noah, Moses. You can go look on the website, but there are 7 of them there.

Heidi: Yeah, that's really cool.

Andy: Do you find yourself, as you've learned to interpret, just really being more of a story teller, even when just reading children's book and things like that? Do you find yourself doing facial expressions even when just reading aloud in English?

Heidi: Yeah, a little bit! And the sign language, especially when coming off a meeting like we just had in Austin; I'll come home and I'll be signing to John and he's like, "OK, I don't get that, but OK." He's starting to understand more. I keep trying to convince him how important it would be to sign together, because you can talk across the room, you know?

Andy: There are some fantastic sign language programs here in St Louis to study.

Well, we are out of time. Deaconess Heidi Sias with Lutheran Friends of the Deaf, a Millneck organization, and the website again, Lutheran Friends of the Deaf .org.

Very good! Lots of resources there. Thanks for being our guest.

Heidi: Thanks for having me here!

Transcription provided by Gwen Zagore, LCMS Volunteer Connection.