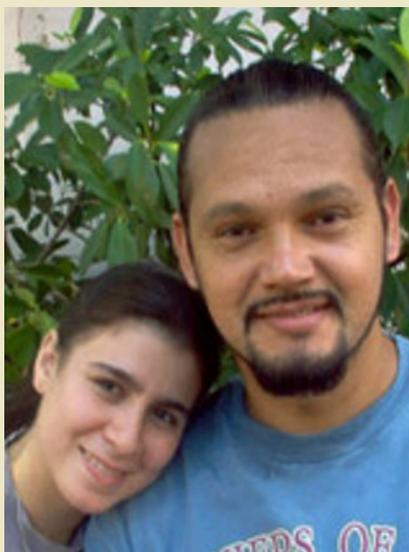


## The Deaf Of Paraguay The Paraguayan Sign Language Community



Paraguayan deaf people are located throughout the country of Paraguay, with most concentrated in the capital city of Asunción and the second largest city, Ciudad del Este. Very few deaf people live in the Chaco region of northern Paraguay. Deaf population estimates vary, but a local deaf association indicated that there are approximately 15 thousand signing deaf people in Paraguay.

There are seven deaf schools, only two of which offer secondary education. Paraguayan deaf education has traditionally used oral communication where students learn speech and lip-reading instead of sign language, but has recently begun to incorporate more sign language into classrooms. Some deaf students are integrated into special education or regular hearing classrooms with or without interpreters.

Deaf Paraguayans typically gather at deaf associations or religious meetings where their indigenous sign language, Lengua de Señas del Paraguay (LSPY), is used. There are seven deaf associations located throughout Paraguay. Five signed religious services are available in the country, all in Asunción. Because deaf Paraguayans indicate that they struggle accessing written Spanish materials, a translation team was formed in 2008 through Letra Paraguay to begin translating Scripture into LSPY.

Most Paraguayan deaf people typically work in manual labor jobs and receive lower than minimum wage. They are struggling for equality with hearing society and identify with each other as a unique Deaf Paraguayan culture. They indicate that their greatest community development needs include better and increased availability of interpreters, official recognition of LSPY and use of LSPY materials in Paraguay, and better educational and employment opportunities.

**Primary Religion:**

Christianity

**Disciples (Matt 28:19):**

Fewer than 5%

**Churches:**

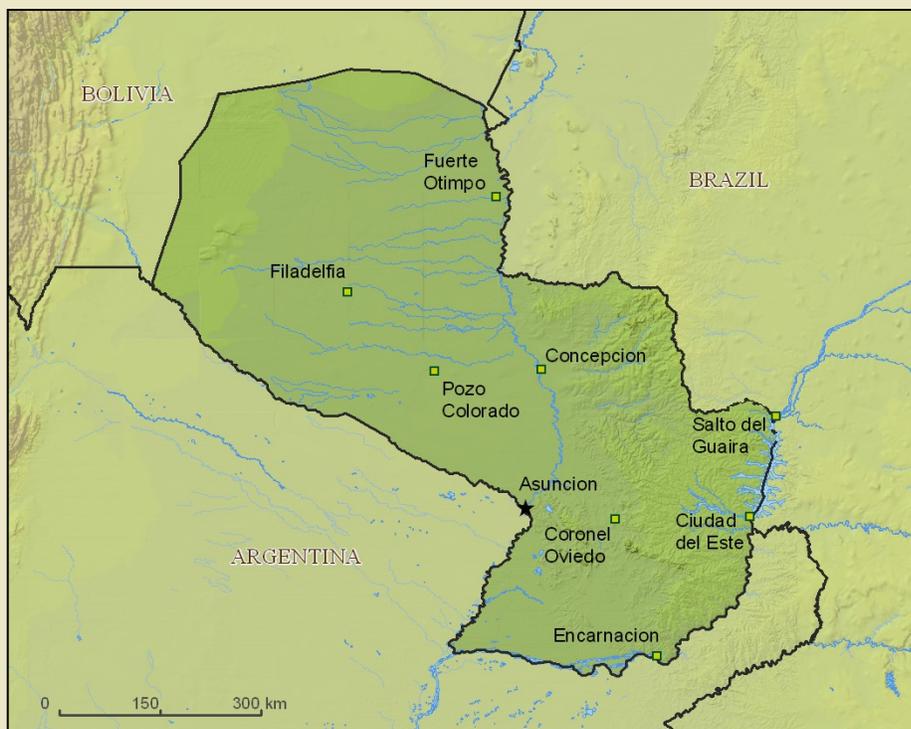
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**Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):**

Translation in process

**Population (date):**

15,000 (2008)



## The Paraguayan Sign Language Community

### Heard the Gospel?

#### **Hindrances to Scripture**

A translation team through Letra Paraguay is beginning to translate Scripture into the indigenous sign language of Paraguay, Lengua de Señas del Paraguay (LSPY). Although Spanish Scripture is available, deaf people indicate that they find it difficult to read because of low literacy levels. The translation team has contacts with local associations and encouraged their involvement in the process but found that association leadership did not feel they had skills to offer in the translation of religious materials. The primary hindrance to successful LSPY Scripture use will be in the translation team finding adequate time to produce the materials (as they all have other full-time jobs), as well as deaf leadership in the associations advocating the product.

#### **Response to the Gospel**

Deaf people have traditionally had to rely on interpreted services in hearing churches. However, in the last few years deaf people seem to be responding well to the gospel as it is presented by a Deaf pastor in the Primera Iglesia Bautista de Sordos Manos de Vida y Luz in Asunción. In the last year, they have had three additional church plants in the capital area and are experiencing moderate growth.

#### **Bilingualism**

Deaf adults primarily use LSPY as their first language and Spanish or Guaraní as second languages. They have moderate bilingualism but indicate that they do not feel confident in their Spanish or Guaraní literacy skills. This appears to be a characteristic of all deaf people, regardless of where they live, their age, or their social networks. Deaf people choose to be involved in one or a few of the various deaf associations or churches that use LSPY. Schools are only now beginning to use LSPY in the classroom, primarily with older students who have not achieved well under oral education. older students who have not achieved well under oral education.

#### **Cross-cultural missionaries needed**

Cross-cultural missionaries could be helpful in training the local community to do various types of ministry, but the local Christian community is growing and strong enough to effectively be able to address their own needs in coming years.

#### **Number of Christian Congregations Serving Group**

4

#### **Number of Congregations Use Primary Local Language**

4

#### **Language of Outside Communication or Trade**

Spanish

# The Paraguayan Sign Language Community

## Group Description

### **Geographical/Environmental**

Location

The Republic of Paraguay is landlocked in South America and bordered by Brazil to the east and north, Argentina to the west and south, and Bolivia to the north and west.

Climate

Subtropical to temperate; substantial rainfall in the eastern portions, becoming semiarid in the far west.

### **Language/Linguistics**

Attitude Towards Mother Tongue

Very receptive

Second Languages

Spanish, Guaraní, Brazilian Sign

Other Mother Tongues of this Group

Spanish, Guaraní

Linguistically Related

Uruguayan Sign Language [ugy]

Neighbor Languages

Brazilian Sign Language [bzs], Argentine Sign Language [aed]

Corrections to Ethnologue entry

New entry for LSPY; Deaf institutions: 7; Deaf population: 15 thousand; Current literacy rate of overall population is 94%

Comments

The local deaf association and Dr. Soper's estimates both indicated a signing deaf population of approximately 15 thousand, but other deaf population estimates range from 3 thousand to 91 thousand (not including the current estimate on the Ethnologue)

### **Literacy**

Adult Literacy

Fewer than 57%

Literacy Attitude

Very receptive

Active Program

Deaf schools are required to teach both Spanish and Guaraní literacy but there is currently no written form of LSPY being used in Paraguay.

Publications in Mother Tongue

A couple of books of LSPY dictionaries. The first was published by Lichtenberger in 1989.

Comments

57% is the literacy rate of the overall disabled population DGEEC 2002), and it is anticipated that due to communication barriers and lack of bilingual education, literacy rates in the deaf community are even lower.

### **Economics**

Average. Annual Income

\$1300 USD or less

Unemployment Rate

70% (overall rate for people with disabilities in Paraguay)

Occupation

Deaf people currently find employment as mechanics, clerks in supermarkets, mailing services, carpentry, tailoring, electric services, computers, painting, construction, and other jobs that focus on manual labor.

Modernization/Utilities

Most modern conveniences are used by the deaf community in Paraguay, and anything that is available to the general Paraguayan community is available to the deaf community as well (e.g. television, computers, DVD players, cars, etc.).

Comments

The average annual income of the overall disabled community is approximately \$1300 USD but it is anticipated that because of increased linguistic discrimination that the deaf community's annual income is less. The minimum wage in Paraguay is officially roughly \$1900 USD per year. The unemployment rate for the overall disability community is 70% and this could be representative of the deaf community as well.

## The Paraguayan Sign Language Community

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### Community Development

Clothing	Typical western clothing
Transportation	Walking, buses, taxis, private vehicles, airplanes
Infant Mortality Rate	.025% (25 deaths/1000 births)
Life Expectancy	76 years
Comments	This is based on figures given for the general Paraguayan community as given by the CIA World Fact book.

### Society

Family Structures	Patrilineal nuclear families
Social Habits/Groupings	Deaf social networks form around deaf associations and churches
Identification with Nat'l Culture	Integrated, yet a distinct deaf cultural community within Paraguay
Self Image	Threatened
Attitude to Outsiders	Somewhat receptive
Attitude to Changes	Very receptive
Cultural Change Pace	Medium
Local Lang Broadcasting	None

### Education/Youth

Primary Schools	7
Primary School Enrollment	Greater than 600, exact number unknown
Secondary Schools	2
Secondary School Enrollment	Very small, exact number unknown
Language of Instruction	Spanish, Guaraní, starting to use minimal LSPY in the classroom
Language of Textbooks	Spanish
Unmixed Schools	All 7 deaf schools are deaf only schools. Some deaf students also attend schools for general disabilities or are integrated into hearing classrooms but the number or locations of these are unknown.
Problems/Needs	Deaf people are frustrated with the oral method of communication in schools and the lack of teachers and role models in the classroom. They hope that LSPY will see increased use in schools and that there will be more opportunities for higher education, including university.

### Religion

#### Religions

	<u>Number of Adherents</u>
1. Roman Catholic	90%
2. Protestant Christian	6%
3. Other	4%

#### Primary Religion

##### Comments

Christianity (Roman Catholicism)  
This information is based on the general Paraguayan community. Within the deaf community, the two largest religious meetings that use LSPY are the Jehovah's Witnesses (with approximately 100 attending in the capital) and Baptist (with approximately 80 attending in the capital).

# The Paraguayan Sign Language Community

## Status of Christianity

### **Church Growth**

Reached Status	Adopted
Total Believers	Fewer than 6%
Pastors	2, one hearing and one deaf, in the Baptist church
Lay Leaders	Approximately 10
Churches	5 (4 Baptist, 1 Jehovah's Witness)
Bible Schools	1 (4 deaf people are currently attending a hearing seminary with an interpreter)

### **History of Christianity in Group**

Year Began	May 2006 marked the beginning of the first protestant deaf church
By Whom	Mirta Barreto, Paraguayan Baptist Convention
Significant Events	3 church plants by Baptist church in 2008.
Other Literature/Video Materials	There are reports that the Jehovah's Witnesses have produced and are distributing some type of religious material on DVD to the deaf community.

### **Scripture/Literature/Media**

Translation Status	Definite need, work beginning in 2008
Available Scripture	None in LSPY
Available Form	Translation team to publish in DVD form
Use of Translation/Scripture Use	LSPY: not at all. Full Spanish Scripture is available but used hardly at all.
Hindrances to Scripture Distribution	A translation team is beginning to translate Scripture into the indigenous sign language of Paraguay, Lengua de Señas del Paraguay (LSPY). Although Spanish Scripture is available, deaf people indicate that they find it difficult to read because of low literacy levels. The translation team has contacts with local associations and encouraged their involvement in the process but found that association leadership did not feel they had skills to offer in the translation of religious materials. The primary hindrance to successful LSPY Scripture use will be in the translation team finding adequate time to produce the materials (as they all have other full-time jobs), as well as deaf leadership in the associations advocating the product.

### **Reason for Urgent Need Explained**

The deaf church is growing but they do not have any kind of Scripture to effectively access in their personal and community growth.

### **Missions/Churches Working Among People Group**

Organization #1	Primera Iglesia Bautista de Sordos Manos de Vida y Luz
Main Ministry	Church planting, evangelism
Adherents	60-100
Number of Congregations	4
Use of Local Language	Majority
Total expatriate missionaries	0
Total national missionaries	4+
Total local workers	10+

## The Paraguayan Sign Language Community

Organization #2	International Mission Board
Main Ministry	Evangelism, Chronological Bible Storying
Adherents	Unknown
Number of Congregations	0
Use of Local Language	Learning and using LSPY
Total expatriate missionaries	2
Total national missionaries	0
Total local workers	1

### Comments

Ray and Cindy recently moved to Paraguay from Uruguay where they were previously working with the deaf community. They work through the Southern Baptist Convention (IMB) and are focusing on creating Scripture materials through Chronological Bible Storying.

Organization #3	Letra Paraguay LSPY translation team
Main Ministry	Bible translation
Adherents	5
Number of Congregations	1
Use of Local Language	LSPY
Total expatriate missionaries	0
Total national missionaries	5
Total local workers	2

### **Responsiveness**

Attitude to Christianity	Somewhat receptive
Attitude to Religious Change	Indifferent
Spiritual Climate and Openness	Indifferent

### Comments

Deaf people indicate that the number one most important aspect of meeting their deaf spiritual needs is to first meet their communicative needs. Deaf people tend to go to the places where they feel that their linguistic needs are best met, where signing is most clear, and where there is deaf leadership.

### Approaches/Ways to Reach Group

Because the Baptist church is already growing and is receiving positive feedback from the local community, future religious work should be coordinated with them. In addition, deaf association leadership tends to be the leadership of the whole deaf community, so language and community development work should be done in cooperation with them.

### Deaf people indicate the following as their greatest needs

- Unity between associations and churches
- Deaf people to learn LSPY earlier and more fluently
- Deaf people to grow in deaf cultural pride
- LSPY recognized as an official language
- LSPY materials
- Better education (using LSPY) in schools
- Better adult education so they know how to take care of their families
- Better employment
- Better medical care to diagnose hearing loss in children at younger ages
- Equality between deaf and hearing people

## The Paraguayan Sign Language Community

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### Items for Prayers

More connection with deaf people in other countries to learn from shared experiences.

Better and more interpreters

Pray for the development of the translation team and that they will find influential and skilled signers to film for the translation materials.

Pray that the associations will become more involved and excited about the process and work in the distribution and testing process

Pray for the Baptist church and specifically for their first deaf pastor, Gustavo, that they will effectively meet the needs of their local community.

Pray that more deaf churches and Christian leaders would be found in outlying communities, especially in second largest city of Ciudad del Este.