

## The Deaf of the Philippines The Philippine Sign Language Community



There are deaf found in every segment of the population. In any given population there is about one in every thousand babies who is born deaf or become deaf before they learn speech. In some countries there are more than that. In the Philippines there may be a slight increase over that figure because often parents cannot afford to get adequate medical attention.

There are two signed languages in the country, the national sign language, Filipino Sign Language (FSL), and Samar Sign Language which is in use by about 20 Deaf signers and a few hearing signers on the island of Samar. (We use “deaf” to indicate the audio logical status of the person, but Deaf capitalized) to refer to those who use sign language and consider themselves to be part of a community of Deaf people.)

Deaf children do not learn any language unless they have Deaf family members or go to school. There are many elementary schools for Deaf children throughout the Philippine islands, as well as some Secondary schools and colleges. In addition, some schools for hearing children also have classes for Deaf children. Some of the schools for the Deaf are run by missionaries, either Protestant or Catholic. There are no vocational schools, but there are agencies which have training programs for the Deaf. A number of Filipino Deaf have gone overseas to university and have earned degrees in such fields as computer, linguistics, etc. There are at least four denominations with work among the Deaf. For several months now a Baptist church has been reaching out to the Deaf on Samar, using FSL. Some of the bilingual Samar Deaf are teaching the other Deaf FSL.



**Primary Religion:**  
Christianity

**Disciples (Matt 28:19):**  
5-10%

**Churches:**  
None

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

**Population (date):**  
81,000—234,000 (2002)



## The Philippine Sign Language Community

### Have They Heard The Gospel?

**Call Themselves Christian** 75%

**Believe In Jesus As  
God & Only Savior** 5 to 10%

**Believe In The Local  
Traditional Religion  
Response To The Gospel** Less than 1%

Varies depending on the culture. For the animistic cultures there is no information about the deaf, since they are situated in remote areas. If a young Deaf person goes to a school for the Deaf, he or she becomes part of the Deaf community at the school. If the school is Catholic, there will be religious instruction, and he or she may have the opportunity to hear the gospel clearly. If the school is Protestant, there will also be religious instruction, and in general the gospel is clearly preached. Often the Protestant schools are associated with a church, which may have additional ministry to the Deaf. In some churches the ministry to the Deaf is in SEE (Signing Exact English) instead of FSL. Since the Deaf do not understand SEE well, many stop attending the services.

**Is The Word Of God Translated?** Some. Mark is finished and has been published in Written Filipino Sign Language which uses English words but written in a way that is easier for the Deaf to read than regular English. It is not widely distributed. Nothing has been produced in visual format yet. The Noah story has been translated and has been approved for publication using Sign Writing. This is a writing system using symbols to represent the signs. There are also many small portions done in rough draft.

**Forms Of Gospel  
Presentation Available** Literature in Pilipino and English

**Do They Have a Church?** Yes. Ratio of churches to population: not known. There are a few churches which are run by the Deaf and have a Deaf pastor, and there are also quite a number of hearing churches that have an outreach to the Deaf .

## **The Philippine Sign Language Community**

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### **Any Hindrances to Scripture Distribution?.**

The Deaf prefer face-to-face interaction. They usually do not read much. Writing systems are based on the sounds of a language, but if a person has never heard the sounds associated with the letters, reading to them is like seeing a series of phone numbers that stand for words. What they would prefer is something that looks like the way they sign. Most of the Deaf are poor and cannot afford VCRs or DVD players.

### **Other Forms of Gospel Presentations Available**

Recordings:

No

Literature:

Yes

Films/videos:

No

Jonathan Tusalem produces a monthly calendar with a daily Scripture text in written Filipino Sign Language which he uses with some college students, and a few other Deaf.

### **What Kind Of Missionaries Are Needed?**

Someone to teach at Seminary level, and train the Deaf to reach out to their own people. Also need someone to teach the Deaf translation principles in order to translate the Scriptures. (Currently there is only one hearing Pilipino working with the Deaf who has this training.)

# The Philippine Sign Language Community

## Group Description

### **Population**

Urban Percent

90%

Comments

The Deaf normally go to big cities to find work and to be able to socialize with other Deaf. The largest population of Deaf in the Philippines is probably found in Manila. There are many in other large cities also.

### **Geography & Environment**

Geological Type

Islands, Volcanic

Climate

Tropical, frequent typhoons, high temperatures up to 96o F., low temperatures 27o at sea level

Comments

Island nation with 7000 islands, mountainous in the north of Luzon, several volcanoes that erupt periodically, mostly on Luzon.

### **Language & Linguistics**

Primary Language

FILIPINO SIGN LANGUAGE

Comments (Dialect)

Regional variations, no outstanding dialects as far as is known.

Attitude Towards Mother Tongue

Receptive

Monolingual

Not known

Comments

There is a good educational system, but for those in remote areas services are limited including education.

Second Languages

English and Pilipino, especially for the hard of hearing.

Linguistically Related Languages

AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

### **Literacy**

Adult Literacy

50-60%

Comment

Functional literacy, probably about 50%60% in English and/or Pilipino (Tagalog-based) (based on analogy with the USA where educated Deaf usually have a reading level of elementary 4).

Active Literacy Program

No

Comment

No active literacy program is available in Filipino Sign Language.

Literacy Attitude

Attitudes not known

Publications in MT

Small hymn book, have the book of Mark and other portions of Scripture. Dictionary.

Comments

The emphasis amongst some church leaders is in using English. Sign language is vigorously discouraged. They forbid the Deaf to have the Scriptures in their own language.

## **The Philippine Sign Language Community**

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### **Economics**

Trade Partners

None

Modernization / Utilities

Electricity is available but tends to be erratic in the cities. The same is true for running water. Neither is available in many interior villages.

Comment (Economy)

The Philippines is still a third world country.

### **Community Development**

Health Care (Quality)

Good

Comment

Government hospitals and clinics. Often these facilities are scarce in the provinces.

Diet (Quality)

Fair

Comment

Not well balanced

Water (Quality)

Poor

Comment

Questionable sources, though there are many rivers

Shelter Description

May live in inadequate city dwellings, but more likely to be poor quality wooden or tarpaper shacks.

Electricity

Most city dwellers have access to electricity.

Energy/Fuel (Quality)

Fair

Clothing

Western clothing. Some can afford traditional clothing for special occasions.

Transportation

Buses, jeepneys, cars, motorcycles

Infant Mortality

Rate 29 per 1000

Life Expectancy

Male 64; Female 70

Leading Cause Of Death

Cancer

### **Society & Culture**

Family Structures

Patrilineal (depends on the culture)

Cultural Change Pace

Medium

Self Image

Neutral

Judicial / Punishment System

Follows the USA

Celebrations

Christian holidays, also have mock crucifixions at Easter

Recreations

Sports, group drinking, gambling, cock fighting

Media

Television (some have captioning in English)

### **Education**

Primary Schools

Many

Language Of Instruction Early Years

Filipino Sign Language

Language Of Textbooks Early Years

English

Comment

There is a good educational system, but for those in remote areas services are limited including education.

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### **Religion**

1. Christian – Roman Catholic	65%	Unknown
Protestant	10%	Unknown
Cults	9%	Unknown
2. Muslim	8%	Most
3. Buddhist	3%	Unknown

# The Philippine Sign Language Community

## Status of Christianity

### **Church Growth**

Bible Schools	1
Comment (Christian Clinics/Hospitals)	Several are available to the deaf and other people.
Comment (Church Growth)	Most Deaf churches are a subgroup within a hearing church

### **Religion & Response**

Religious Practices and Ceremonies	Start Christmas decorations and music in September or October, mock crucifixions
Attitude To Christianity	Somewhat receptive
Resistance / Receptivity	Receptive
Spiritual Climate And Openness	Open
Recommended Approaches	As for all Deaf communities who have been oppressed by the hearing for millennia, it is best to make the acquaintance of a person who knows the local sign language who can introduce the new person to the Deaf. In general, all Deaf are suspicious of the motives of hearing people until they become friends.
Current Needs	Probably cross-cultural workers would be useful in training the Deaf in higher education, e.g. seminary. The worker would need to learn the language first of course. Evangelizing through the use of Chronological Bible Storying is important to the Deaf who tend to have a low level of education.
Items For Prayer	Pray for a change of attitude among the hearing leadership some churches who want to prevent the Deaf from having God's Word in their own language.

### **History Of Christianity In Group**

Year Began	1960's & 70
By Whom	A. A. Coryell (American missionary) claims she first introduced American Sign Language to the Pilipino Deaf.

### **Scripture**

Translation Status	Definite need
Available Scripture	Portions
Form Of Scripture Available	Printed
Comment	The printed form is actually a gloss.
Comment	The reason the Pilipino Deaf need the Scriptures in their own language is that a related sign language, American Sign Language, was first used in the Philippines, but the language has changed over the years. Many local signs are being used making it difficult for the Deaf to understand American Sign Language.

## The Philippine Sign Language Community

### **Missions and Churches**

Organization #1	DOOR (Deaf Opportunity Out Reach)
Started	Approximately early 1990s
Organization #2	Filipino Deaf Christian Fellowship
Ministry	Bible School, Bible translation
Adherents	20+
Number of Congregations	1
Use of Local Language	Yes
Started	Early 1990s
Total national missionaries: 1	Total local workers: 3-4
Comments	This information is from 1996
Contact Comment	Jonathan runs a small church and a small College cum Bible
School for the Deaf.	He is a trained pastor and has also had SIL training through the Translators' Association of the Philippines (TAP).
Organization #3	DMI (Deaf Ministries International)
Comments	DMI runs a hostel for Deaf students in Davao City
Organization Name #4	Pilipino Deaf Christian Fellowship
Main Ministry	Bible Translation
Comment	Bible School is more their focus.
Year Started	Early 1990's
Number Of Adherents	20+
Number Of Congregations	1
Number Of National Workers	1
Number Of Local Workers	3-4
Language Used By Workers	Filipino