

## The Deaf of Venezuela

### The Venezuelan Sign Language Community



Venezuelan Sign Language (LSV) emerged with the founding of the first deaf school in 1935. It appears to be fairly standardized due to the high degree of mobility within the country and the interconnectedness of the deaf community.

With an estimated 15 to 52 thousand members, the signing deaf community appears to be growing in strength and vitality, fighting for their linguistic and social needs as a unique ethnolinguistic culture. The Venezuelan government, deaf associations and supportive organizations are making progress through bilingual education, increase of trained interpreters and unified national and regional deaf associations. Other encouraging factors include the recognition of LSV's importance by the government and the growing body of LSV linguistic publications and resources.

There are a number of religious ministries for deaf Venezuelans, including Baptist, Assembly of God, Seventh Day Adventist and Latter-Day Saint groups. Other missionary groups are active as well.

Bob Bell, with the Voice for the Deaf ministry in Puerto Rico, started the first known deaf ministry in Caracas in 1986 and hosted several Christian deaf camps in Venezuela. The Ministerio Nacional Bautista de Sordos provides training for deaf and hearing people on various topics such as the culture and language of the deaf community. They also offer camps and support programs for deaf Venezuelans, assist deaf street children, established a deaf Christian school and created a manual of religious signs. The deaf ministry at the Paraiso Seventh Day Adventist church focuses on evangelism and offering sign language courses.

With a population of approximately 29 million, 93% of Venezuelans live in urban areas. Venezuela's main source of income is oil. Roughly 89% of the employable population has work but 38% live below the poverty line. The foremost religion in Venezuela is Christianity, with 96% of the population adhering to Roman Catholicism. Spanish is the official language and 93% of the population over the age of 14 is literate.

**Primary Religion:**  
 Christianity

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

**Churches:**  
 Several

**Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):**  
 None

**Population (date):**  
 Potentially 100,000 (2011)



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## Status of Christianity

### **History of Christianity** Significant Events

There are a number of religious services and ministries for deaf Venezuelans, including Baptist, Assembly of God, Seventh Day Adventist, and Latter-Day Saint groups. In 1986, Bob Bell, a missionary with the Voice for the Deaf ministry in Puerto Rico, started the first known deaf ministry in Caracas and hosted several Christian deaf camps in Venezuela. Also in 1986, the Browders and Perdomos formed a deaf ministry at Central Baptist Church which had over 75 deaf regular attendees in the 1990s. (Speidel 1990) The Ministerio Nacional Bautista de Sordos provides training for deaf and hearing people on various topics such as the culture and language of the deaf community. They also offer annual camps and support programs for deaf Venezuelans, assist deaf street children, established a deaf Christian school, and created a manual of religious signs. (MINABASOR 2010) Pastor Rafael Ramirez was trained by Efata, an Independent Baptist ministry in Lima, Peru and is now working in Venezuela (Efata n.d.).

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

Founded in 2003, the Ministerio de Iglesias de Sordos (Ministry of Deaf Churches) is an Assembly of God church-planting ministry. It appears to be the most widespread deaf ministry in Venezuela with at least 12 ministers to the Venezuelan deaf community, five deaf churches and five churches with interpreted services. In 2006, they founded a national deaf Bible institute and they continue to be involved with deaf Assemblies of God around the globe. (SADVEN 2009) On average, 70-80 deaf people attend the Assemblies of God church in Caracas alone (Smith 2008).

The deaf ministry at the Paraiso Seventh Day Adventist church has five interpreters and five assistants. They focus on evangelism and offering sign language courses, hoping to construct a church for deaf members in the future (Gospel Ministries International 2009). According to Deaflds.org (2009), there were Latter-Day Saints (LDS) missionaries from the United States who worked alongside deaf Venezuelans in the early 2000's to create an LSV church lexicon but left due to Visa complications.

Organization #1

Iglesia Evangélica Cristiana de Sordos

Organization #2

Ministerio Nacional Bautista de Sordos (MINABASOR)

Organization #3

Venezuela Baptist Strategy Center of the IMB

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### Group Description

#### Population All Countries

Comment

potentially 100,000 as a rough estimate

When we speak about Deaf people as opposed to deaf people, we're making the distinction of, among other things, their language of preference. Simply stated, Deaf people identify with the Deaf culture and use that signed language; deaf people do not and prefer to use the spoken language. Estimating the population of a Deaf community is difficult. Quite honestly, no one knows how many Deaf there are in a given country. However, some generalities seem to hold true. In 1st world nations (like the US) 1-2 people in 1000 are Deaf; in those nations that are considered "2nd world", 3-4 people per 1000 are Deaf; in 3rd world nations, the numbers are much higher: 6-8 people per 1000 are Deaf. Again, this is an estimation only. There is absolutely no quantifiable documentation to support these numbers. But, they are the best we know.

As implied, the estimated number of deaf is always larger than the number of those who learn sign language and become part of the Deaf community. Some become deaf late in life. Some children's parents do not have the funds to send their child to a deaf school and some of these children never encounter others with whom to communicate. Almost all deaf children are born to hearing parents. Instead these children grow and work at home where they use gestures and sounds but do not have a true language. The number of these is unknown.