Silent Saints: Deaf Mormons in Utah

Petra M. Horn

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SILENT SAINTS:
DEAF MORMONS IN UTAH

by

Petra M. Horn

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in
History

Approved:

Major Professor

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
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and deadlines.

Petra M. Horn
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ABSTRACT

Silent Saints: Deaf Mormons in Utah

by

Petra M. Horn, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 1992

Major Professor: Dr. Anne M. Butler
Department: History

Research for this thesis drew on the network of Deaf Mormon wards/branches, newspapers, magazines, books, unpublished documents, personal collections, and oral interviews to illustrate the religious activities engaged in by deaf Latter-day Saints at the national and local levels during the mid and late twentieth century America. The study focused on the theological perspectives, church participation, and personal experiences of deaf Mormons with a special focus on the accommodations the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has for the deaf populace. This special attention was used to examine and demonstrate the influence and attractions the Mormon religion has for deaf people, who share similar cultural background and use the same language, distinct from the hearing world.

Deaf Mormons' church experiences mirrored those of deaf non-Mormons. However, the Deaf culture itself surfaced as a
distinct religious component for Mormons with hearing loss. Deaf Mormons both mesh with the general LDS religion and maintain their own separate sense of community.

Data gathered through interviews was preserved in a videotape collection. These videotapes were then transcribed and analyzed for both patterns of information and individual points of view.

(139 pages)
"My testimony is that I know that there is a purpose to our life on earth and to our death, as we will have an everlasting life after death. I also feel that our church is authorized to give the gospel to people through an on-going revelation with God."¹

These thoughts belong to a member of the Latter-day Saints, born into a two-generation deaf LDS family in Utah. Born deaf in 1937, he grew up on a farm with three garden lots in Manti, Utah. Informant Six conveyed his religious belief explicitly and spiritually through his native language, American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is the only means of communication with his parents, brother, and hearing sister.

A communication system, developed and used by deaf people in the United States, ASL is a linguistic form with its own highly articulated means for expressing and relating concepts, and with an underlying network of regularities connecting visual form with meaning. Thus, ASL is clearly a separate language, distinct from spoken English.²

¹Informant Six, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 15 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Six - Horn.

words, the Deaf community in America speaks in ASL, and it is not an universal language for the deaf around the world.

Because of the ease in family conversation, Informant Six relished the privilege of learning the LDS gospel. Despite his isolation from the rest of the Utah Deaf community, he had a zealous spiritual growth through the teachings of his deaf Mormon parents. Historically, deaf people in Utah normally clustered together in the vicinities of Ogden, Salt Lake City, and Provo, out of the cultural need to be with their own people. Informant Six's family residence in Manti, Utah, was unusual among the deaf.

However, Informant Six did not mature into an adult with strong faithfulness in his LDS religion without any influence from other deaf Latter-day Saints. He attended the Utah School for the Deaf and Blind at Ogden, the heart of the Deaf LDS community. In 1917, Ogden, Utah, saw the


establishment of the very first Deaf branch. This Deaf branch played a significant role in Informant Six's religious growth because the members there communicated in ASL and taught Informant Six about the LDS gospel through ASL.

After his high school graduation, he married a deaf LDS woman. Despite their temple wedding, their marriage ended in divorce in the 1980s. This divorce stirred some trouble in his religious life. The LDS doctrine does not encourage the termination of any temple marriage, because the marital sealing (spiritual binding of an union) is for eternity. Consequently, a divorced couple jeopardizes the highest possible eternal reward. Yet, he weathered this difficult period and remained loyal to his church. Countless charitable services to the deaf LDS in Utah, California, and Washington, D.C. marked his life. Currently, Informant Six attends Washington, D.C.'s Gallaudet University, the only Deaf liberal arts university in the world, as a non-traditional student.

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5Bruce R. McConkie, ed., Doctrines of Salvation, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), 44. Although Joseph Fielding Smith wrote three volumes of the Doctrines of Salvation, McConkie edited and sent these volumes for publication.

6Informant Six – Horn.
This informant's life revolves around his church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That church, unique to the American experience, has a special connotation for its deaf members. In both its temporal history and its theological tenets, the LDS church appeals to deaf people.

The origins of the LDS tradition date to its founder, Joseph Smith, a nineteenth century charismatic personality. According to Smith, in 1820, he received heavenly visions around the area of Palmyra, New York. In Smith's visions, he witnessed God and Jesus Christ descending from the heavens, and Jesus Christ delivered to Smith a revelation of His Second Coming and commanded a restoration of the true church. Three and a half years after Smith's initial visions, another heavenly manifestation revealed the existence of the *Book of Mormon* plates to Smith. Smith then understood his responsibilities included the translation of a *Book of Mormon* from secret gold plates, the restoration of

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prophecy and priesthood, and the dissemination of the true gospel. Subsequently, Smith's followers regarded their church's teachings as revealed truth that comes directly from the Son of God.

Yet, despite the fact that America saw a number of emerging religious groups during the early 1800s, Joseph Smith and his followers received unfavorable treatment from the American public. To salvage his newly established church from possible dissolution and find a safe place for its worship in the 1830s, Smith announced that he and his people would need to migrate to Missouri. But the Missourians also persecuted the Mormons who, in turn, relocated several times in various Missouri cities, before completely removing themselves from the state in 1839. The Mormons' next stop, originally at peace for approximately three years, in an area near Nauvoo, Illinois, met with no more favor. Local residents violently rejected Joseph Smith and the LDS group. In 1844, the powerful anti-Mormon resentment in Nauvoo also made martyrs out of Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, from an angry mob.

After the death of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young emerged as the new church president because many LDS claimed they

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9Arrington and Bitton, 45.
saw the mantle of Joseph Smith fall upon Young's shoulders. In 1847, Young, guided by revelation and planning regarding the creation of a new Zion in the West, led the struggling group out of Illinois. A long convoy of wagons reached its final destination in the unsettled area of the Great Basin, a place they had scouted prior to their relocation. Young and the Mormons, as they came to be known, established Salt Lake City, Utah, as their new home because, according to the Mormons, it was the place that appeared in Young's vision.

The narrative drama of early church history lends itself to sign communication. In addition, certain spiritual aspects of the church appeal to deaf members.

10 O'Dea, 70.


12 Sign language is a visual language, and deaf people are easily fascinated by dramatic narratives that display images, actions, and sufferings. Also, the deaf can easily identify with stories about suffering and cultural misunderstanding because these are basically the life story of deaf Americans. For more information, see: Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); John V. Van Cleve, ed., Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness, 3 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1987); and John Vickrey Van Cleve and Barry A. Crouch, A Place of Their Own: Creating the Deaf Community in America (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989).

13 Spiritual aspects of the Mormon doctrine are taught to the deaf in sign language. Deaf Mormons find the LDS theology appealing, for it seems simple. For the first time, these Latter-day Saint informants can understand the implications of commitment to the commandments of Heavenly Father, the acts of love and charity, and life after death.
According to the LDS belief, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints is the only religious body on earth to receive periodic revelation from Jesus Christ through the living prophet, usually in the Holy Room inside one of the church temples. Originally, Joseph Smith could receive visions anywhere, as long as he knelt and prayed for an answer from the Lord. But in October 1841, Jesus Christ instructed Smith to begin building temples as places to perform church rites and ceremonies. Erected in 1893, the Salt Lake Temple serves as a sanctified site for the prophet to get messages from Jesus Christ, even though the prophet can have revelations in places other than the temple. This sacred ritual of revelation makes LDS temples, now located world-wide, holy places in the eyes of Mormon people.

Further, LDS temples provide the church members a means to secure eternal salvation. Temples serve as a place for sacred rites and ceremonies pertaining to exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom of God. In the temple, the "worthy" LDS receives his/her celestial name and certain key words

Further, the Mormon doctrine states that bodies will be perfected after resurrection, meaning that the deaf will hear again, and this becomes attractive for some of the deaf Mormons.

14Informant Ten - Horn.
15McConkie, 170.
16Ibid, 231.
designed to open the gate to God's house.

A commitment to the conversion of non-Mormons dates to the early days of the LDS church. The Mormon church believes strongly in giving a fair chance for the "unfortunate" living souls to convert to secure salvation. This LDS belief prompted church leaders to initiate an intense missionary program in the 1840s. Mormons engaged in their missionary work to insure "lost souls" an everlasting life after death. Further, according to the LDS tenet, church membership provided people a better chance to enter the highest possible kingdom after their earthly life. Thus, Mormon temples in other countries become a visual symbol of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for church members.

Another Mormon belief includes a doctrine of God's spirit children. Human birth will enable these spirits to pass through mortality, where, by trial, they prepare themselves for exaltation.17 This concept encourages Mormon families to produce many children. In spite of the statistical fact that Utah has a higher percentage of working women than most states, members tend to support a family ideal, where mothers stay in the home to nurture children, while fathers engage in work and church outside the home.

This intense bonding of family in both the present and spirit worlds bears directly on the experience of deaf persons within the LDS community. Although barriers of communication threaten many hearing families with deaf children, this does not appear to be the case among LDS people, and offspring often blossom into loyal church members. Informant Three, who attended her hearing Salt Lake City ward, when many hearing LDS wards and branches lacked sign language interpreting service for their deaf members, typifies this sort of family experience.

All her life, Informant Three endeavored to be a good church member because of her hearing parents and their impact on her religious training. During her childhood, Informant Three and her family regularly attended their Salt Lake City ward, where she frequently had trouble following theological discussions during the sacrament meetings, Sunday school classes, and Relief Society sessions. As a young deaf person in the 1970s, she did not grow up in an era of interpreting services for the deaf. To assist Informant Three's religious growth, her mother often functioned as her interpreter by writing down the messages on a piece of paper. Occasionally, her father would mouth the words of the lectures to his deaf daughter for her to lipread. In this manner, Informant Three remained

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18Informant Three, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 25 September 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as
"connected" to church activities.

The role of the family in shaping deaf children cannot be over-emphasized. For instance, Informant One, a Logan native, remains in the church to follow his parents, particularly his father, despite the fact that he developed minimal LDS theological knowledge. Raised in a hearing world, without any interpreters, he articulates very little of the spiritual constructs. Yet, in his adulthood, he maintains an excellent church attendance record, because of many meaningful LDS moments he shared with his family and other Mormons as a young boy. When asked to choose between the LDS community and the LDS religion, Informant One picked the LDS community as a more important aspect. According to him, the LDS community includes his relationship with his family and his role as a father of three hearing children, whom he wishes to rear in the traditions of the Mormon church. 

Informant One's comment illuminates the Mormon belief that "families are forever." Thus, family life plays an enormous role in LDS children.

The expansion of these family contacts and concepts embraces one of the Mormon church's biggest programs, established specifically for deaf people. The LDS church's

Informant Three - Horn.

Informant One, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 19 September 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant One - Horn.
highly structured missionary program, which originated in Joseph Smith's days, targets "gentiles," or non-Mormons, around the world for conversion. To make this possible, the LDS church devises language training for potential missionaries to facilitate their communication with foreign "gentiles." Yet, the missionary language training program, functioning since the 1840s, excluded ASL, the language of the deaf.

However, family concerns, missionary goals, and growing awareness of deafness in the twentieth century led to the organization of an ASL training program for the missionaries for the deaf. Despite individual family success stories, deaf persons remained largely outside the center of Mormon activities. For decades, a large number of deaf LDS either struggled to educate themselves about the gospel through scripture reading or drifted away from the Mormon church. Further, without the availability of sign language, missionaries, who did convert, learned LDS doctrines either through their deaf Mormon acquaintances or their independent investigative efforts.20

Consequently, the success story of membership recruitment for the deaf paled in comparison with those of hearing converts. An overarching communication barrier

20This type of religious acquisition is demonstrated in the interviews of deaf subjects who joined the Mormon church prior to the establishment of the missionary program for the deaf.
between the hearing and the deaf contributed to the low number of converts with hearing loss. Only recently, the need to reach out to deaf people became apparent. Increased public knowledge of deafness and gradual growth in deaf services promoted the realization of the necessity to proselytize the deaf population about Mormonism. In 1968, a group of deaf and hearing Mormons pioneered an unofficial missionary program, designed to teach about the church doctrines and convert deaf people. ²¹

The positive outcome of their deaf missionary work encouraged the LDS church authorities to launch such a program for the deaf. In Los Angeles, California, the church saw a dramatic rise in deaf membership when two deaf Latter-day Saints, Sam Judd and Joe Bradenburg, went about to spread the gospel to the Los Angeles deaf population. As a result, more than 150 deaf people converted. In the face of such religious zest, the Mormon church opened the signed

²¹Jack Rose, "Missionary Work for the Deaf," typescript, n.d., n.p., 1. Jack Rose, a hearing LDS, is one of the people who helped organize the missionary program for the deaf. He along with Sam and Becky Judd, Elders Anderson and Brewster, Josiah Douglas, and Ray L. Jones developed a number of proposals to argue for the establishment of such program. Today, Rose resides in Heber City, Utah, where he works as a policeman, teaches ASL courses at Brigham Young University, interprets for deaf Mormons during temple ceremonies, and assists with the translation of the Book of Mormon from English into ASL. Documents from Rose can be found in his personal library, where he preserves copies of such information. Throughout this thesis, Jack Rose's name along with his documents will frequently appear as a reliable source on the history of the missionary program for the deaf.
program to the deaf under the California Mission in December, 1968.  

The program continued to expand through December, 1976, when the California Mission sponsored a two-week pilot program of language-missionary training, in reality little more than a superficial ASL course. The training helped prepare missionaries to spread the gospel to the deaf. The California Mission also offered a similar training in San Diego as well as Salt Lake City, Utah. Due to the ability of the missionaries to communicate with the deaf, the number of deaf converts in California and Utah mushroomed. In March, 1979, the Mormon church authorized a two-month language-training program, longer than the initial two-week program. In Ventura, California, twenty-three missionaries familiarized themselves with ASL and the basics of Deaf culture.

Again, the success proved to be tremendous. This led a team of several hearing and deaf Mormons to outline an extensive proposal in 1979. They suggested the development of a formal language-training program for the deaf in the Missionary Training Center (MTC) at Provo, Utah. The Mormon church authorities approved the proposal to have a

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22 Rose, 1.
23 Ibid, 2.
structured language-training program in ASL for the missionaries. Today, hearing and deaf missionaries attend an eight-week training program at the MTC, prior to their missionary work in Washington, D.C.; Seattle, Washington; Phoenix, Arizona; Indianapolis, Indiana; California; Florida; and other places.

In addition, as a result of this program, Deaf wards and branches emerged around the nation, starting with the first Deaf branch in Ogden, Utah, in 1917. Deaf LDS wards and branches bring many deaf Mormons together. In these wards and branches, the deaf can learn about the gospel and enjoy many church "calling" opportunities, where they become leaders within their group.

For example, Informant Twenty-four originally belonged to a hearing ward in Portland, Oregon. Because of his hearing ward membership, he was only called to be the bishop's second counselor, representing the Deaf group in the congregation. The position of first counselor or bishop remained unattainable for him if he stayed in a part of the hearing ward. However, shortly after he began his duties as the second counselor, he organized a new Deaf branch, independent from the hearing ward, and became its first Deaf branch president. Years later, Informant Twenty-four moved to Ogden, Utah, where he joined the Deaf branch and received a honorable calling to be a stake missionary for the deaf, a
position he still holds today.25

The varied experiences of Informants One, Three, Six, and Twenty-four demonstrate the need for a scholarly, historical study of deaf Mormons in Utah. Due to the complexity of the deaf LDS theological background, the study of deaf Mormons focuses on two distinct groups of the deaf LDS living in Utah. An arbitrary year, 1975, serves as a dividing line for the categorization of these two groups. The year of 1975 stands as the "medieval age" in the formal organization efforts that stretched from 1968 to 1979. The first group is drawn from twelve deaf members whose church affiliation preceded 1975. The second group consists of twelve deaf members who converted after 1975. In addition, three deaf males, who left the LDS church for different reasons, represent a third separate group. The actual total of interviews completed for all three categories is twenty-seven.

The methodology for the interviews consisted of an interview strategy and the use of a camcorder. Folklore methods, which call for finding people through acquaintances, helped locate informants. This included the task of contacting interview subjects, who in turn identified more people for the research project. Camcorder

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25Informant Twenty-four, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 16 November 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Twenty-four - Horn.
equipment videotaped the conversations with informants, because this technology offered a means for capturing interviews in sign language, much as a tape recorder does for an audio exchange between hearing people. John S. Schuchman at Gallaudet University pioneered this strategy as an innovative oral history method with deaf informants. In addition, a collection of correspondence and documents from one of the informants, James D. Still, of the third group, served as an invaluable source for study on deaf Mormons.

The identity of the twenty-seven informants remains anonymous, except for one person, James D. Still. The nature of the topic is personal, for it covers informants' backgrounds and theological views. Oftentimes, religious subjects, which have delicate overtones, can create controversies and/or problems among church members. In addition, the dynamics of the Deaf community suggest the desirability of anonymity. The Deaf community functions much like a small town, where people know each other. One danger attached to the small community is the loss of one's privacy. Because of this and the sensitivity of the research topic, several of the interview subjects requested

\[^{26}\text{For this research technique see: John S. Schuchman, Hollywood Speaks: Deafness and the Film Entertainment Industry (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).}\]

\[^{27}\text{Jack Rose cannot be included as one of the informants because he is not deaf.}\]
anonymity. Therefore, all informants shall be numbered and known as Informant One, Informant Two, and so on. As for James D. Still, he has a well-established reputation as a deaf anti-Mormon writer. He works with the prominent anti-Mormon scholar, Jerald Tanner, of Salt Lake City, Utah. Still's name appears in many of Tanner's published works. Also, Still personally requested that his name emerge as one of the informants in this thesis.

In conclusion, this thesis discusses deaf Mormons and Mormonism in two important aspects. First, the hopes and expectations of these deaf informants within the Latter-day Saints Church have been defined. Consequently, this research illuminates some of the religious thinking of deaf members. Religious belief itself captures abstract and complex ideas, and the explication of abstract concepts is an area of Deaf study almost unknown to scholars. This thesis shows that deaf Mormons heightened their LDS theological knowledge and understanding, after the introduction of ASL in Deaf wards and branches. Second, this research considers the connections between the goals of the church hierarchy, as seen through the deaf missionary program, and the subsequent experiences of deaf members. Prior to the organization of the deaf missionary program, the deaf went through the motions of life without an equal opportunity to learn about the LDS gospel. Also, before the existence of Deaf wards and branches, deaf members remained
obscure in the sea of church membership, rarely called to serve the Mormon church in various leadership positions. The recognition of these problems by authorities created an environment within the church that altered the institutional involvement of deaf members. Therefore, the study of deaf Mormons exhibits a unique, yet universal religious experience among the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
CHAPTER ONE

"If I were in other church, I would be useless and helpless. Other churches would try to suppress us while in the LDS church, we, the deaf, had lots of opportunities to learn about the LDS religion."¹

Expressed with eloquence, these comments came from Informant Eleven, a deaf Mexican woman born into a devout Roman Catholic family. Her family, largely made up of hearing members, immigrated to Utah from Mexico in 1951. At that time, she was only two. Communication with her parents proved to be restricted for this child and one deaf brother, who was ten years older than she. The parents spoke Spanish and very minimal English. Neither Mexican nor American sign language were known to the family. Often, Informant Eleven relied on a hearing sister to interpret and exchange necessary information with the parents. Communication remained uneven and erratic for all family members. Essentially, they relied on oralism, a method whereby the deaf are expected to replicate hearing voices. However, the success stories prove to be meager, and this Spanish-speaking family burdened by multiple language barriers, proved no exception. This poor communication eventually wreaked havoc in her Catholic family, when Informant Eleven

¹Informant Eleven, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 16 November 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Eleven -Horn.
converted to Mormonism in 1962.

Her LDS conversion implies the lack of strong family bonding she had with her Hispanic family. Communication limitations and exclusion from family interaction appear to have played crucial roles in her decision to become a part of the Mormon church. This type of consequential occurrence is prevalent among deaf Mormons, who persist in their LDS church membership. As long as there are no restrictions in communication and group participation, deaf people remain in the realm of the church organization regardless of the dire effect their membership may have on others.

Informant Eleven's family did not escape from this phenomenon when Informant Eleven chose to terminate her Catholic membership despite eventual protests from her parents. The lack of direct and unobstructed communication with her Spanish-speaking parents caused a major misunderstanding among Informant Eleven, her hearing sister, and her parents. In 1962, Informant Eleven requested permission from her parents to join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She had learned about the Mormon religion through contacts at the Ogden-based Utah School for the Deaf and Blind. Assuming the permission form related to a school activity, her parents unwittingly signed the paper that allowed Informant Eleven to become a Mormon. Later the realization that their deaf daughter was no longer a Catholic devastated these immigrant parents. Yet,
Informant Eleven continued as a Mormon because she, for the first time, enjoyed the free flow of communication and the opportunity for equal participation in the Ogden LDS Deaf branch. Today, she serves as a stake missionary, along with her deaf husband, Informant Twenty-four.²

Informant Eleven's experience suggests that many deaf people feel the need to be with their own people to share the commonality of language and cultural ideas. Set apart from the mainstream population, deaf people gravitate toward those circumstances that provide them a barrier-free means of human interaction. Deaf people crave a sense of belonging and a need for sign language communication. Some of the deaf, feeling excluded, isolated, set apart, and discriminated against, voluntarily and naturally create their own Deaf world. That way, they feel at home and appreciated. In the Deaf world, the deaf is self-sufficient and included in all conversations and happenings. Because of the positive experience in their Deaf community membership and the negative experience outside it, the deaf people lack desire to assimilate or be assimilated and cherish their own language, American Sign Language (ASL).³

Two popular institutions typically provide

²Informant Eleven - Horn.

communication outlets for deaf people. The Deaf club functions as a way for the deaf to be among their people, who use ASL extensively and exhibit similar cultural thoughts. The second but significant institution is the residential school for the Deaf. More than often, the deaf develops the need for belonging and acquires sign language communication in the Deaf residential schools.

Such closeness in the Deaf world materialized as early as 1855, when John Jacobus Flournoy, an eccentric deaf politician and writer, proposed a "Deaf utopia." Despite his craziness and strangeness, he articulated the private feelings of the general deaf population in the nineteenth century through his writings. According to Flournoy,

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peculiar necessities and arrangements for community well-being would be best provided in their own "Deaf state." Farfetched or not, Flournoy's idea implied that the deaf would be more comfortable to be with other deaf.

Flournoy's proposal rested on the importance of ASL. Linguistically, ASL comprises a complex structured language with a highly articulated grammar, a language that exhibits many of the fundamental properties linguists posit for all languages. But the special forms in these properties are primarily a function of the visual-gestural mode. Despite its visual-gestural mode, ASL can express the most complex and abstract ideas as well as simple and concrete thoughts. These concepts gained credibility from the Salk Institute in San Diego, California, through the research work of two renowned linguistics, Edward S. Klima and Ursula Bellugi. Their research showed that the deaf spend as much communication time as the hearing with puns, wits, and poetry. However, the deaf use ASL. In other words, deaf people express both simple and intricate thoughts in their own language, a language that allows communication without restriction or misunderstanding.

Therefore, it does not surprise one to learn that

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8 Klima and Bellugi, 4.

9 Ibid, 319.
Informant Eleven opted for Mormonism rather than remaining in the Catholic church. During her first few years of life, her hearing Spanish-speaking parents assumed Informant Eleven to be hearing and speaking English. They stayed unaware of her deafness, despite the fact they already had a deaf son. Informant Eleven's elementary school teacher made the discovery, and immediately, she joined her deaf brother at the Deaf school in Ogden.\(^\text{10}\) There, through the manual communication of sign language, her exposure to a Deaf community eventually led her to the LDS church.

In fact, communication barrier shows up in many hearing Mormon families with deaf children. Informant Ten lost his hearing at the age of two months old. Thereafter, his hearing parents and siblings learned fingerspelling and few signs to communicate with Informant Ten. But the conversations tended toward the superficial. This informant often felt left out during family dinner and gatherings. Conversation moved quickly among the hearing members, and Informant Ten lost the thread more often than not.

However, he received special attention from his hearing grandmother. She could not sign a thing with Informant Ten, and yet, she regularly took him to LDS church services in Heber City, Utah. Heber City, a small community of only 2,000 people in the 1940s, certainly offered no possibility for interpreter services. Indeed, Informant Ten grew up in

\(^{10}\)Informant Eleven - Horn.
an era when the general public knew little or nothing about deaf people. So his well-meaning grandmother wrote scanty lecture notes on a piece of paper, offering incomplete LDS theological information for her deaf grandson.

Consequently, Informant Ten grew up with almost no understanding of his religion in spite of his attendance at the Utah School for the Deaf and Blind and the Ogden Deaf branch. He viewed his family's religion as meaningless because his parents and siblings never took pains to expound the LDS gospel and doctrine at length to him. It was in his early adulthood when he decided to study Mormonism, in response to constant mockeries received from his deaf non-LDS friends, through intense scripture reading and repeated prayer to God. Ultimately, through his personal prayer and scripture reading, as his next best available sources other than his hearing family, Informant Ten "converted" and became a very active member of the Mormon church. If it were not for his initiative to learn more about his religion, he probably would never possess a deep understanding of Mormonism and be a loyal Mormon.

As expected, he never returned to his hometown, Heber City, where his family lived, for Heber City lacked a Deaf community. He chose Salt Lake City for his home. There he mingled in the Deaf community and began to frequent the Salt Lake City Deaf ward in 1960s. After his marriage to a deaf Mormon woman, he and his wife relocated to Ogden, where they
attended the Ogden Deaf branch. Currently, Informant Ten is the president of the Deaf branch and professes a profound knowledge of his religion. He credits his independent Bible study and Deaf branch membership for his continued church affiliation.¹¹

The problem of the lack of unobstructed communication in a Deaf ward/branch emerged in the religious experience of Informant Twenty-five, a deaf man from a hearing LDS family. He left the Mormon church in his adulthood, despite his family's church commitment and his brief Deaf branch membership in Gooding, Idaho. He treasured many fond memories of the seminary classes and youth activities for LDS boys at the Idaho School for the Deaf, Gooding. After his high school graduation in 1987, Informant Twenty-five returned to his home in Smithfield, Utah, a very small town. His hearing ward did not provide an interpreter for him, in spite of the increasing public knowledge of deafness. In no time, he lost interest in his religion and began to drift away. Today he lives in Logan, Utah, and expresses no motivation to seek interpreting services, so he could resume his church attendance.¹² The difficulties of locating a Deaf ward and finding a reliable interpreter dominate the

¹¹Informant Ten - Horn.

¹²Informant Twenty-five, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 27 September 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Twenty-five - Horn.
small town church experience. The LDS church does not hire
interpreters for its deaf members, but relies on hearing
members, who often interpret out of kindness.

However, the problems of a deaf Mormon residing in a
small town are not limited to finding church interpreters.
There exist the general difficulties of deaf isolation and
the loneliness of never seeing other deaf people. Thus, a
deaf individual typically feels very alone without his deaf
counterparts in a small town.

Consequently, the Deaf world normally congregates in
large cities. In metropolitan cities, the Deaf community
has organized various types of associations under the
umbrella of the National Association of the Deaf, National
Fraternal Society of the Deaf chapters, and American Athlete
Association of the Deaf clubs. The cities and these
organizations act as magnets for the deaf populace,
including the Mormons. In metropolitan areas, with many
services available for the deaf, Mormons feel inclined to
establish their own Deaf wards/branches in large cities
around the nation.

Frequently, deaf Mormons either move to the Deaf
community or struggle with their hearing ward membership in

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14For more in-depth information on Deaf organizations and clubs, consult Jack R. Gannon's Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America, 1981.
a small neighborhood. But the task of contending usually lasts for only a brief period of time, as demonstrated in Informant Seven's religious background. Informant Seven and his wife formerly lived in a remote Missouri town, where they were the only deaf residents. As a result, they became a part of a hearing ward. Despite their ability to lipread and speak well, they initiated an informal sign language class for five hearing ward members. Eventually this group functioned as unpaid interpreters. That seemed to work out well for Informant Seven, and he supplemented his Deaf contacts by socializing with friends in Olathe, Kansas, at regular intervals. Years later in 1984, he and his family moved to Salt Lake City, Utah. They, again, belonged to a hearing ward, but only for a short time. The minute they learned about the Deaf ward, they transferred their membership and maintained their attendance to the present time. 15

Although Informant Seven himself never went to a Deaf residential school, he studied at Gallaudet University, the only Deaf liberal arts university in the world, in Washington, D.C. 16 At Gallaudet, Informant Seven received

15 Informant Seven, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 15 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Seven - Horn.

16 Gallaudet University was established during the Civil War in 1864, when U.S. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Charter. Thereafter, Gallaudet University serves as a federally funded institution of higher learning for the Deaf
an immersion in the Deaf world, for teachers and students there used sign language throughout the campus.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, Gallaudet University influenced Informant Seven's concepts of Deaf life.

In fact, Gallaudet University serves as a role model for all deaf people. Its structure and curriculum are emulated in the Deaf residential schools of America. The residential schools, in turn, function as the heart of local Deaf community around the country. These schools nourish the foundations of the Deaf community, for they produce a core of educated deaf adults, who share a common language and similar experiences.\textsuperscript{18} This includes the Utah School for the Deaf and Blind, which is further influenced by the surrounding dominance of the LDS church in the Beehive State.

The personal biography of Informant Five reinforces the importance of the residential school on deaf students and adults. Born hearing, but deafened at the age of two, Informant Five spent a good portion of her childhood in the hearing world. She attended public schools and the Catholic church in Scofield, a farm town near Price, Utah. She

\textsuperscript{17}Van Cleve and Crouch, 74.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid, 47.
communicated orally with her family and friends until her parents sent her, at age thirteen, to the Utah School for the Deaf and Blind. For the very first time, she talked in sign language with other deaf people. Invitations to attend the Deaf LDS branch services in Ogden introduced her to a new concept of a religious life. No longer lost during the service, as she had been in her own Catholic church, and placed behind the choir like a "wallflower," now she sat with the congregation. Informant Five began to participate fully in the branch meetings and activities. She found unrestricted religious and social expression through ASL, a language she could follow easily.

In due time, she expressed a deep desire to convert to Mormonism due to her positive experiences in the Deaf branch. In contrast, she felt she never had a pleasant moment in the Catholic church, to which her family belonged. In the Catholic church, she lacked involvement and often resorted to daydreaming to kill time. But in the surroundings of the Deaf branch, she never suffered from boredom and loneliness. Thus, these positive connotations encouraged her to join the Mormon church, an action she took in 1965.19 The bonding of the Ogden LDS church with the Deaf school resulted in conversions of deaf students like

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19Informant Five, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 15 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Five - Horn.
Informant Five’s experiences of church and residential school are not uncommon. Historically, residential schools generated close ties with local religious persons, for these schools often attracted benevolent ministers and church people. They believed that their mission on earth was to help the "unfortunate," and the deaf happened to be regarded as people in need of divine guidance. In 1814, after encountering his first deaf student in Hartford, Connecticut, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, an evangelical Christian, embarked on an overseas journey to Europe to acquire information about teaching methods for the deaf. Upon his return to the States, he established the first residential school in Hartford, with the assistance of America’s first deaf teacher, Laurent Clerc of Paris, France.  

Another Christian minister, Joseph D. Tyler, a graduate of Yale College and the Episcopal Theological Seminary of Virginia, joined these early forces in the education for the deaf in 1832.  

Since then, Deaf residential schools normally offered church services of various denominations for their students. The usual school policy permitted students to attend any church, as long as their parents approved. This is true for the Ogden Deaf school and Informant Four, an offspring of an unreligious

20 Van Cleve and Crouch, 32-33.
21 Ibid, 51.
Born in Bay City, Texas, Informant Four and his family moved several times before settling down in Las Vegas, Nevada, the land of gaming and endless temptation. His hearing mother and hard-of-hearing father sent Informant Four and his deaf sister to the Utah School for the Deaf and Blind because of the lack of a residential school in Nevada. Informant Four entered the Deaf school at seven years of age. Thereafter, his contact with his parents was limited to visits in Las Vegas during Christmas and summer breaks. The Deaf school became the home Informant Four and his sister knew. On Sundays, they frequented the Deaf LDS branch services. After ten years of church attendance, Informant Four finally got his parents to sign the permission form. He converted in 1959. His reasons for conversion were not from spiritual inclination but community orientation. His thoughts reinforce the belief that deaf people, out of a need for belongingness, hold a tendency to follow the mass of the Deaf community, even if it means church membership.

Thus, Informant Four's motive for his Mormon membership supports the notion that the deaf flock to a "Deaf church" because it functions as an extension of the Deaf community.

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22 Informant Four, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 12 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Four - Horn.
The existence of the "Deaf church" concept goes back to 1850, when Thomas Gallaudet, eldest son of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, began a Sunday school class for deaf people at St. Stephens Church in New York City. A year later, Thomas Gallaudet accepted ordination as a priest of the Episcopal Church and founded St. Ann's Church for the Deaf in New York City. Thereafter, "Deaf churches" and deaf clergymen of different religions, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, emerged in various cities around the American nation.\(^{23}\) The LDS church organized its first Deaf Sunday school class in Salt Lake City, Utah, the then location of Deaf school, in 1891. As the Deaf school repositioned in Ogden in 1896, authorities organized another Sunday school class.\(^{24}\) In 1916, a benevolent hearing principal at the Utah School for the Deaf and Blind, Max W. Woodbury, recognized the need for a Deaf branch and approached the LDS president and prophet, Joseph F. Smith, regarding this. Smith promptly approved the plan, and the church erected its first Deaf LDS branch with Woodbury as its president in 1917.\(^{25}\) In fact, since the establishment of a "Deaf church," "Deaf religion" successfully attracted a Deaf congregation, largely due to the wide usage of ASL and


\(^{24}\) Ibid, 189.

\(^{25}\) Informant Ten - Horn.
the feeling of a Deaf community. This appears to hold true for the Mormon church and its deaf members.

In Informant Four's comments, he described the atmosphere of pure happiness in the Deaf LDS community. He claimed that there existed no fighting, smoking, or drinking among deaf Mormons and that the Deaf branch provided outstanding activities and sports programs.\textsuperscript{26} His thoughts clearly illuminate his underlying purposes for joining the LDS church. He sees tranquility and a family-like sphere in the Deaf LDS community. Also, his current active church membership consists of regular participation in his Salt Lake City Deaf ward sports activities. Indeed, the sports program represents the central most important aspect in his church affiliation.

Involvement in sports is premiere activity for many deaf people. In the 1870s, in an organized form, the Ohio School for the Deaf emerged as the first residential school to offer varsity sports to the deaf.\textsuperscript{27} Sports continue to grow as the most popular activity for deaf students, and these students continue to carry their love for athletics with them and join various sports-oriented Deaf clubs as team players, coaches, or fans. Deaf people face the social behaviors of a hearing world in their work, family life, social ventures, economic dealings, and other daily

\textsuperscript{26}Informant Four - Horn.

\textsuperscript{27}Gannon, 273.
activities. When these deaf individuals participate in Deaf sport, they have the opportunity to be themselves among their own people, who communicate in ASL and conform to the norms of the Deaf community.²⁸

Those sports-loving deaf persons tend to stay active in the LDS church once they realize that Deaf branches and wards support basketball and volleyball teams. Deaf LDS branches and wards gave deaf Mormons a means of belonging to an extra basketball or volleyball team beyond those at the Deaf club. When asked about various Deaf ward events, Informant Four did not hesitate to mention athletic activities as a significant part of the church program. He further went into details about his role and experience in Mormon sports.²⁹ It appeared as if he perceived his church membership as a way to remain physically vibrant and busy. Also, sports programs through church sponsorship enhance the overall socialization of deaf people.

In addition to the world of Deaf sports, the Deaf community formed a number of clubs for deaf youths such as the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Junior National Association of the Deaf (Jr. NAD), an organization for deaf students under the NAD. Organized in 1960s, Jr. NAD aims at leadership growth among the deaf young, so that as they

²⁹Informant Four - Horn.
mature as deaf adults, they will replace the older generation as leaders of the deaf.\(^{30}\) Deaf residential schools support the purposes and goals of the NAD by sponsoring Jr. NAD chapters for their deaf students. Joining a Jr. NAD chapter becomes a popular social activity for the students. After graduation, they can transfer their activity to a NAD membership.

But this does not happen in the Deaf branches and wards. The Mormon church endorses the Young Men and Young Women programs (formerly Mutual Improvement Association), where the members can be part of myriad activities, identical to those of the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Jr. NAD. The only difference is that the Young Men and Young Women programs welcome church members of all ages. They are divided into different age groups.\(^{31}\) Due to the extended programs for all ages, many deaf Mormons continue to enjoy full church activity experience, and thus, develop an attachment to their church as exhibited by a couple of informants.

Prior to her calamitous conversion from Catholicism to Mormonism, Informant Eleven participated in the Mutual Improvement Association (MIA) activities with regularity and loyalty. Subsequently, she earned several badges to

\(^{30}\)Gannon, 319.

\(^{31}\)Informant Six - Horn.
symbolize her progress in gospel learning and comprehension.32 These badges became tokens of her youth, and Informant Eleven regarded her days with the MIA as an important part of her growing-up experience.

To reward the accomplishments of the deaf Mormon youth, the Ogden Deaf branch also provided the Green and Gold Ball at the end of the school year. The Green and Gold Ball afforded an opportunity for these youths to celebrate and spend final moments with their friends before returning to their hometowns all over Utah for the summer. Some deaf non-Mormon students also attended the affair. The young would decorate the room with elaborate designs, and arrange delicious refreshment and some music. At evening, the deaf boys, dressed in formal attire, escorted their dates to the Green and Gold Ball and danced the night away.33 Further, the dance did not exclude deaf Mormon adults. They regularly came in tuxedos and long dresses to join the deaf youth for the occasion.34 The inclusion of all in a festive "glamorous" event holds a special religious and community meaning for the deaf Mormon youth.

32Informant Eleven - Horn.

33The deaf do dance. They usually feel the music beat from vibration. Vibration comes through the dance floor or any furniture surface. Sometimes, a deaf person holds a balloon to feel the music. Deaf people typically prefer loud and bass type of music because they make it easier for the deaf to "hear" the music.

34Informant Six - Horn.
Also, church activities provide a means for the deaf to find a suitable marriage partner. Informant Twenty-six decided to seek a wife through various functions at the Baptist Church for the Deaf in Los Angeles, California. Before their marriage, the young couple, increasingly confused about religion, listened to a friend propagandize about the positive offerings of the Mormon church. Informant Twenty-six and his bride-to-be converted together.\(^{35}\) This points to the importance of an informal network among deaf people as the vehicle for LDS information to be passed.

During Informant Ten's boyhood, he never paid attention to the Ogden Deaf branch's service. Rather, he occupied himself with wooing girls during the sacrament meetings and Sunday school classes. In his early adulthood, he developed loyalty for his church. Yet, he sat during the Salt Lake City Deaf ward services with a woman friend, also a graduate of the Utah School for the Deaf and Blind and a former member of the Ogden Deaf branch. Eventually, they fell in love and got married.\(^ {36}\) The experiences of Informants Twenty-six and Ten are common in the Deaf community, where its members normally find their future husbands and wives.

\(^{35}\) Informant Twenty-six, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 19 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Twenty-six - Horn.

\(^{36}\) Informant Ten - Horn.
through residential schools or Deaf events. Thus, the Mormon church functions as an extension of the Deaf community for the deaf LDS to meet with their own peers.

The Mormon church structure includes the priesthood for men and Relief Society for women. Through these organizations, the church keeps its members constantly busy with varied duties. The basic responsibilities for all priesthood-holding males consist of the act of strengthening the established church, preaching the gospel to the world, and laboring for their dead. As for the Relief Society, it deals with family welfare such as homemaking, poor relief, and similar matters in the ward or branch. Every Mormon adult is an active part of the priesthood or the Relief Society, and the importance of one's role does not go unnoticed by the deaf. Deaf individuals generally have the inner need to play worthy characters in their community, and they find the opportunity to do so in the Deaf branches and wards.

All their lives, many deaf people receive instruction and direction from hearing people, who typically inform deaf persons that they will not excel as contributors to society but as mere members and followers. Historically, very few deaf individuals emerged as public office leaders, as in the

38Leone, 40.
experience of John Jacobus Flournoy.\textsuperscript{39} For more than a century, hearing people headed Deaf residential schools and Gallaudet University.\textsuperscript{40} In addition, even though deaf people have their own organizations to fight for their needs, to serve the deaf, and to lead their people, seldom do these organizations offer equal opportunity for all members to hold various key offices. There are just too few positions and too many members.

However, in the sphere of the LDS church, the priesthood and the Relief Society regularly call members for service. Many deaf feel wanted and needed by the church. Consequently, deaf Mormons develop a loyalty to their church through their active membership and varied roles within the Deaf branches and wards.

Informant Eight found her religion very attractive because the Mormon church allowed every member to participate fully. All members take turns doing things for the branch/ward. She felt that not one member is superior to any other. The Mormon church gives Informant Eight the opportunity to share in community. Because of that, Informant Eight enjoys a wide diversity of church commitments, such as being a Sunday school teacher, a Relief

\textsuperscript{39}Van Cleve and Crouch, 61.

\textsuperscript{40}Sacks, 125.
society teacher, and a missionary. Such wide-ranging church posts rarely develop outside the Mormon church and in hearing wards.

Although Informant Two received many calling opportunities as a young deaf boy in his hearing Logan ward, he pointed out that it would not be possible for a deaf man to become a bishop in the hearing ward, due to the limited number of interpreters available for him to communicate with his congregation. The responsibilities of a bishop are heavier than those of a deacon or a ward clerk. The tasks of handling the ward affairs, ward finances, welfare program, and members' personal problems fall on the bishop. So hearing wards and branches reserve the bishopric position for their hearing men.

Another deaf Mormon, Informant One, of Millville, a few miles south of Logan, served as an elder in his hearing ward for twenty years. The high priest, a part of the Melchizedek Priesthood, carries more administrative duties than an elder. The high priest performs baptism for converts, teaches the gospel to families, administers the

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41Informant Eight, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 19 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Eight - Horn.

42Informant Two, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 24 September 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Two - Horn.

43Kimball, 62-63.
sacrament, visits the houses of each member, ordains other priests, teachers and deacons, and leads meetings when there is no other elder present. The basic duties of an elder are comprised of teaching the gospel and assisting others with various ward programs. An elder is also a member of the Elders' Quorum, which consists of elders, presided over by a quorum presidency called by the stake president. Therefore, in his perspective, Informant One thought his chance of becoming a high priest remains remote. The decision depended on his bishop, and Informant One felt his bishop lacked confidence in the capability of a deaf man to serve the hearing ward.

Despite some negative experiences, deaf Mormons in hearing wards/branches are trying to be more assertive. They form Deaf groups in hearing wards/branches. A hearing ward can have a Deaf group if it has at least five deaf members like the one at Utah State University in Logan. The existence of a Deaf group in the Utah State University Mormon ward is very new to its hearing members. But Informant Three announced that she and the Deaf group plan to set up a Sunday School class for the deaf, where they can

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44 Kimball, 83.
46 Informant One - Horn.
take turns teaching the gospel in sign language.\textsuperscript{47} This indicates that deaf people want to assume leadership roles within their group and to be among their people, who speak their language.

In Gooding, Idaho, a Deaf group formerly existed in the hearing ward. The number of deaf members totaled up to around fifty, too many for a group and appropriate for the establishment of a branch. Within the Deaf group, deaf members taught their own primaries and seminaries, since the ward was situated near the Idaho School for the Deaf. In the late 1980s, the Deaf group separated into a branch but continued to depend on the hearing ward for sacrament meetings. In the 1990s, the Deaf branch handles the sacrament once a month, while the hearing ward performs the ritual thrice a month. Yet, when it is the Deaf branch's turn to conduct the meeting, the hearing ward still keeps some of its duties, such as preparing the bread and water, and choir.\textsuperscript{48}

The attitude of the hearing ward is prevalent among the hearing, Mormon or non-Mormon. Hearing persons often consider themselves caretakers of the deaf and are reluctant to grant them self-responsibility. Thus, it should not

\textsuperscript{47}Informant Three - Horn.

\textsuperscript{48}Informant Nine, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 1 November 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Nine - Horn.
amaze one to find that a large number of deaf Mormons transfer their membership from a hearing ward to a Deaf ward/branch, where they can take fair turns as the leaders of their people.

Informant Six enjoyed greater callings in Deaf wards until he and his deaf family had to be a part of a hearing ward at a town in California. Despite the advanced intelligence and talent of Informant Six, the hearing ward called him only to positions that required limited interaction with other members. These included library work and membership clerking. These two jobs ranked below the level of Informant Six's usual church service. In Deaf wards, he always taught Sunday school classes. Due to the restriction imposed on him by the hearing ward, he returned to the Deaf ward in Salt Lake City, where he filled his former Sunday school teaching post. 49 The existence of the Deaf ward/branch appears to account for the continued popularity of the Mormon church among the deaf.

One needs to consider the attractions of other denominations for the deaf in other American cities, where the Deaf community normally converges, to understand why certain deaf persons are members of a certain religious

49 Informant Six - Horn. Typically, in the Mormon religion, members move through a variety of church positions. Apparently, Informant Six regarded that the teaching post ranks higher than other regular positions. Maybe Informant Six perceived teaching as a job of status and felt excluded.
The Lutheran Church saw the need to serve the deaf in the 1870s, when its pastors added the work of ministering the deaf to their duties. As expected, the deaf in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, New York City, and other areas converted to Lutheranism after listening to and being enlightened by the services in sign language. The Methodist Church was also very successful in bringing together a large Deaf congregation in Jacksonville, Illinois, where the residential school is, and eventually in Chicago. In no time, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Atlanta caught on, and thus, witnessed the growing number of deaf Methodists in these areas. The Southern Baptist Convention also began its missionary work to the deaf in the deep South, where many deaf became its faithful members. All a church needs to accomplish its goal to minister to the deaf is the clergy's ability to use sign language. Then the rest will follow.

However, what makes the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints unique is its specialized program for the deaf. The Mormon church supports and utilizes ASL, establishes Deaf wards and branches, and provides various types of programs, giving a strong community feeling for the deaf. In these wards and branches, deaf LDS have the same

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51 Ibid, 189.
52 Ibid, 190-191.
opportunity as hearing members to learn the gospel without communication barriers, to participate in sundry honorable callings without oppression from the majority, and to socialize with other members during numerous ward/branch events without the possibility of being left out. Yet, one needs to take note that the opportunity and equality for the deaf are restrictive in nature and are confined to Deaf wards and branches. In spite of that, because of the special conditions the LDS church has for its members, deaf Mormons find inevitable happiness in their church and lack desire to seek spiritual comfort elsewhere.
"Then the elders began teaching me the gospel, and I listened through all Six Discussions. The gospel really made sense to me. Then the elders asked me to pray again to see if I would receive an answer that the gospel is right for me. So I prayed to Heavenly Father, and I received a burning inspiration."

The memory of Informant Twenty's conversion to Mormonism through two deaf missionaries relates to the significance of the establishment of the missionary program for the deaf by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. According to Informant Twenty, without these two missionaries, he would probably never have joined the church, for he led a "worthless" life, which revolved around drugs and parties. After his high school graduation in 1977, until his LDS conversion in 1981, he increasingly became a "hopeless case" for his hearing non-Mormon family to help. Alienated from everyone, he wandered around the outskirts of San Diego, California. His self esteem dropped to nothing; he felt ready only for the end of his life.

However, other events intervened. The Mormon missionaries found him, and he repeatedly rejected their overtures. One day, through the persistence of the missionaries, Informant Twenty finally decided to listen to

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1Informant Twenty, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 26 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Twenty -Horn.
them. After the Six Discussions\(^2\) and numerous church visits to the San Diego Deaf branch, this informant believed that the Mormon church might be the religion for him. He went through the baptism in 1981.

Despite these changes, he was not entirely converted. He still flirted with illegal substances. One night, his television set exploded and his hands caught fire. The doctor pronounced Informant Twenty's hands uncurable, meaning they would never be the same. Given the importance of his hands, he was devastated to the point that he wanted to die.\(^3\) But his Mormon friends sent him two priesthood-holding elders, who gave him a blessing. A few weeks later, Informant Twenty's hands returned to their normal state. He claimed that the blessing he received from the Lord, through the LDS church, healed his hands. After the ordeal, he turned over a new leaf and became a devout Mormon. Today, he is an extremely active member of the Deaf branch in

\(^2\)Several of the informants, who completed their missionary work for the deaf, explained that the Six Discussions, a part of the missionary program designed by the church, cover the history of Joseph Smith, the Mormon church, and the gospel to help educate the investigators about the LDS religion. If the investigators found the Six Discussions to their liking and received a Holy Ghost inspiration, they would request baptism and confirmation. A Holy Ghost inspiration is the strong spiritual feeling that one gets about something, indicating that he/she needs to heed the "spiritual message," sent by Heavenly Father.

\(^3\)Deaf people value their hands greatly because they function as their "voice."
The experience of Informant Twenty suggests the benefits the missionary program for the deaf have for deaf "gentiles." The program provides a way for the deaf to have access to religion and theological concept. Also, the missionary program offers a comfortable means for deaf people to accept religion basically because the Mormon church program accommodated the Deaf community structures instead of expecting the deaf populace to adapt to the hearing church program.

Prior to the establishment of this program, the deaf either remained in the "dark" or struggled to learn the gospel the hard way. In general, most churches offered little accommodation for deaf people interested in religion. In 1968, eight years after a well-respected hearing scholar, Dr. William Stokoe, Jr., had declared to the linguistic community that ASL was truly a language, a team of deaf and hearing Mormons approached the problem of proselytizing to the deaf.

The Mormon missionary program lacked missionaries who could communicate in ASL, a strategy in the dissemination of the gospel to the deaf. In response, these organizers devised a missionary program designed for deaf people. They

4Informant Twenty - Horn.

chose the California mission as the ideal location for this experiment, for the number of the deaf "gentile" population exceeded those of Utah and other western states. The mission assigned four deaf missionaries with their hearing companions, and these missionaries began their work in the vicinity of Los Angeles, California. In 1976, the success of their initial effort resulted in the expansion of the pilot program. The LDS church sent missionaries throughout southern California, as well as other parts of the country and some foreign countries. In 1979, the Mormon church, based on its success with the deaf, launched the formal two-month language-training program for missionaries in the acquisition of ASL and preparation for the missionary work with the deaf. Thus, the formal church program evolved its missionary service to draw deaf converts.

In the development and the establishment efforts of the missionary program for the deaf, the missionaries touched many deaf people's lives, including those in the "after 1975" group. For the group studied here, their conversion

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6The LDS missionary program mandates that all missionaries have their own companion with whom they live and work on a twenty-four hour basis. The program makes all the companion assignments, and in the deaf program, a deaf missionary normally pairs with a hearing companion for the purpose of communication facilitation.


to Mormonism differentiates them from other deaf Mormons. Deaf LDS in the "after 1975" group are converts, whose families do not belong to the LDS church. In addition, they first learned of Mormonism either through their Mormon acquaintances or the LDS missionaries. Then, after their conversion, a large percentage of these deaf Mormons embarked on their mission out of an inner need to save others from "damnation."

Their past sufferings, according to these deaf Mormons, proved bleak compared to their present happiness. They claimed that the LDS church contributed to their joy and peace, because for the first time, they could understand the implications of the Gospel and the church doctrine through the use of their language, ASL. This form of communication facilitated the missionaries in the conveyance of important theological information to the deaf non-Mormons, who saw the "light" and converted.

For instance, Informant Twenty attended the California School for the Deaf at Riverside, where he used sign language to obtain his education. After his high school graduation in 1977, he continued to profess a fluency in ASL, whereas he lacked skills in oralism. Through sign

9These comments came from Informants Eighteen, Twenty, and Twenty-three. For further interview footnotes, see pages forty-seven, sixty, and seventy-one.

10Oralism is another communication method. In oralism, the deaf needs to learn to speak like the hearing. However, studies have shown that this type of mode is not effective
language, he could grasp concrete and abstract ideas, and the missionaries' ability to communicate with him in ASL increased the chances for Informant Twenty's conversion to Mormonism. Further, the simplicity and clarity of the gospel appealed to him.¹¹

This was also true for Informant Nineteen, a deaf Canadian native, raised in the oral system. Her communication method switched to manualism after her enrollment at the Deaf residential school in the Canadian province of Quebec. For the first time, Informant Nineteen could discuss complex topics, and her residential school experience encouraged her to attend Gallaudet University in the fall of 1985 as a preparatory student. Her experiences at Gallaudet University exposed her to many facets of life, including certain religious aspects. She became acquainted with members of the Latter-day Saints Students Association,


¹¹Informant Twenty - Horn.
a Mormon student organization at Gallaudet. One of the LDS students inquired of Informant Nineteen's interest to meet with the missionaries.

With this informant's approval, her Mormon friend sent two missionaries to her room. There she began to question them about their church and its doctrine. The missionaries replied to all of her inquiries in sign language, and their answers interested her. Informant Nineteen investigated the religion further through the reading of the *Book of Mormon*. One night at her cousin's home in Virginia, over the Thanksgiving break, she read about the Holy Ghost inspiration and felt the inspiration immediately. She then knew that she should pursue this more and returned to Gallaudet to have the missionaries go through the Six Discussions with her. Finally in December, 1986, Informant Nineteen converted.  

The perspecuity of the Six Discussions appears to play a crucial role in the conversion decisions of Informants Twenty and Nineteen. The content of the Six Discussions includes a videotape of signed lessons on Mormonism, a flip-chart of simplified information on the gospel, and a number of tracts particularly suited to the interests of deaf

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12Informant Nineteen, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 26 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Nineteen - Horn.
potential converts.\textsuperscript{13} These ingredients of the Six discussions may be appropriate and attractive for deaf people, who rely heavily on visual aid and sign language. Hearing loss prompts deaf individuals to "hear" through their eyes, and anything optical catches their attention almost instantaneously. The Mormon missionary program's efforts to modify the Six Discussions to meet the needs of deaf people proved innovative and effective.

In 1981, a videotaped signed narrative of Joseph Smith's first vision did the trick for Informant Seventeen. Prior to the viewing of the videotape, Informant Seventeen spent two years in his inquiry about the Mormon church, among other churches, often feeling inconclusive about religion. Throughout those two years, he befriended, in his opinion, a warm and loving hearing LDS family with a deaf daughter in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and during his frequent visits, he argued with the family about Mormonism. Nothing from these exchanges convinced him to convert. Nor did he sense any Holy Ghost inspiration, either.

One night, the mother of the LDS family sat down with Informant Seventeen and spoke with him in sign language about the history of the people appearing in the \textit{Book of Mormon}. He felt she clarified his misconception about Moses. Informant Seventeen, based on information from other

deaf friends, thought that the LDS church believed in the existence of two Moses. The mother in this family informed him otherwise, and that motivated him to learn more about the church. Once he displayed an interest, the mother immediately made arrangements for two missionaries to meet with him.

According to Informant Seventeen, these two hearing missionaries possessed a fair signing skill. Lacking formal training in the program designed for the deaf, they acquired basic signing skills on their mission from the deaf daughter of the family, so they could communicate sufficiently with Informant Seventeen and other deaf people. Also, these missionaries utilized the Six Discussions, specifically designed for deaf people. They succeeded in converting Informant Seventeen with the help of a visual aid, the videotaped signed narrative of the history of Joseph Smith. For the first time, Informant Seventeen felt the Holy Ghost inspiration from viewing the videotape, and that incited his desire to convert.¹⁴

The success stories of these converts need to be understood within the language context. The missionaries' signing skills and the modification of such discussions to meet the needs of the deaf populace help to account for

these speedy conversions. Generally, deaf persons graduating from high school are four to eight years behind their hearing counterparts in English skills. The seemingly endless controversy among educators about the best teaching methods for the deaf and the linguistic differences between ASL and English are the contributory factors in these learning disparities.

Further, the many differences between the Deaf culture and that of the hearing world necessitates that missionaries undergo some type of training on deafness. One difference is the spoken language, namely ASL, which deaf people use to communicate with one another. Another difference is the issue of hearing loss, a topic deaf individuals concern themselves with all their lives. They choose certain playmates, clubs, schools, and careers based


17For the fine introduction to the Deaf culture, see Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).
on their pathological and social needs.

These language and cultural factors remain important, even after conversion. Otherwise, deaf converts will feel alienated, after their baptism, in the hearing environment. Some hearing missionaries, with no background knowledge on the Deaf world, unintentionally harm deaf people's spiritual growth by not leading them to a Deaf ward/branch to which these converts belong.

Such feeling of abandonment and uncertainty took place after Informant Thirteen's LDS conversion in Kansas City, Missouri. Her baptism occurred in 1971, when the Mormon missionary program lacked a formal program for the deaf. According to Informant Thirteen, one of the two missionaries, who taught her the gospel, signed adequately. However, the Six Discussions were somewhat hastily conducted, and she had trouble accepting some information. Joseph Smith's discovery of the golden plates and translation of the Book of Mormon remained unclear to her. Yet, according to Informant Thirteen, she converted anyway in a move to spite the Catholic church for its refusal to allow her to marry a divorced non-Catholic.¹⁸

After Informant Thirteen's conversion, she joined the hearing ward. She felt out of place because nobody

¹⁸Informant Thirteen, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 15 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Thirteen - Horn.
communicated in sign language or interpreted for her during the services. Thus, Informant Thirteen was unable to understand the lectures and continued to feel theological confusion. Sometime later, she decided to frequent the Catholic church services again in hopes for some clarification on biblical stories and scriptures. This proved futile. Informant Thirteen eventually returned to the Mormon church. On this try, she met a hearing woman, who dedicated her free time to learning sign language, interpreting for Informant Thirteen, and helping with her spiritual growth.

Motivated, Informant Thirteen began reading the scriptures in the Book of Mormon and discussing theology with her hearing Mormon friend. One afternoon, Informant Thirteen finally "saw the light" and reconverted. She approached the bishop for a second baptism, but the bishop, according to Informant Thirteen, informed her she did not need to go through another baptism because the Lord instructed him so in his prayer. She reported that ultimately in 1983, she was reconfirmed.19

Informant Thirteen's decision to fully convert to

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19Informant Thirteen - Horn. Baptism washes the person's sins away while confirmation, normally taking place on Sunday, the day after the baptism, signifies the receiving of the Holy Spirit through the hands of a bishop, branch president, or priesthood holder. Theologically, the church does not reconfirm members. But apparently, Informant Thirteen believed that she had a second confirmation.
Mormonism through her friendship with a hearing Mormon woman indicates the importance of a deaf individual's close ties with another human being within a community. A deaf person tends to associate with those who can sign and who demonstrate an interest in deafness. There are many historical examples of this. For instance, in the nineteenth century, deaf residents of Martha's Vineyard, a small island off the Massachusetts coast, never felt the need to create their own distinct community because all of the hearing inhabitants there used sign language. The hearing people on that island interacted equally with the deaf and did not isolate them from the society.

In the event of disjunction, deaf people typically depart from the group to seek connectedness elsewhere. In 1970s, when Informant Eighteen was sixteen years old, she recognized the need for strong human integration. Her hearing family repeatedly failed to communicate with her in ASL, a language she could understand. Subsequently, she began to run away from home to become a regular visitor of families who spoke sign language. During this period, Informant Eighteen also started to bother her mother and grandparents about her father, with whom she longed to

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20 Cleve and Crouch, 1. Interestingly, in the nineteenth century, at Martha's Vineyard, one out of every 155 children born were deaf, and the deaf population on that island was phenomenally higher than anywhere in the United States. However, the deaf population in Martha's Vineyard diminished over time as deaf began to migrate to other parts of America.
Finally, in 1974, Informant Eighteen's mother allowed her to move to Salt Lake City, Utah, from Bellflower, California. Here she joined her father and his family. The minute Informant Eighteen was in her father's home, she sensed a deep family bond. Further, her father's wife, Informant Eighteen's step-mother, and the children expressed a sincere interest in her by their unlimited inclusion of her in any family affairs. For the first time, Informant Eighteen felt wanted and cared for. These emotional experiences resulted in her growing interest in her father's religion, Mormonism. Sensing her step-daughter's curiosity about the LDS church, the step-mother sent for two deaf stake missionaries, who used ASL fluently. These missionaries provided clear theological information in sign language, and this motivated Informant Eighteen to join the church. In December, 1974, she became a Mormon, and she claimed that her life turned for the better afterwards.

The Mormon missionary program has two distinct missionary fields, the regular missionary program and the stake missionary program. The former program aims at the task of spreading the gospel around the world, away from home; whereas, the latter targets people in the missionaries' neighborhood. The length of the stake missionary usually is two years, but occasionally, a stake missionary serves as long as five years. There is no age limit for Mormon adults to become stake missionaries. Most importantly, stake missionaries render their service part-time while regular missionaries serve full-time.

Informant Eighteen, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 25 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as
Informant Eighteen's initial exposure to Mormonism through someone she knew very well appears to be a common experience among the deaf converts. The deaf person is apt to seek the mass he/she feels a part of, namely the Deaf community. When a deaf individual finds social comfort in the Mormon religion, it becomes inevitable that he/she joins the church, even if it differs greatly from his/her family's theological beliefs.

Informant Sixteen, a deaf Japanese citizen, was raised in a devout Buddhist hearing family, who knew no Japanese Sign Language. In her adolescence, Informant Sixteen acquired the notion of the value in the worship of a western religion from her schoolmate at the Aomoriken-Hachinohe School for the Deaf. The western church happened to be that of the Mormons, and Informant Sixteen's friend persuaded Informant Sixteen that the LDS church offered sounder theology than Buddhism. After her high school graduation in 1981, Informant Sixteen promptly moved to Tokyo, Japan, where the mainstream of the Deaf community clustered, and sought a Mormon ward, which she eventually located and began to frequent. At the Tokyo hearing ward, she interacted with a Deaf group of seven members and listened to the services through an interpreter. In 1986, Informant Sixteen concluded that the LDS church was the right church for her and converted without the experience of Six Discussions with Informant Eighteen - Horn.
missionaries. Currently, she and her hearing Japanese husband are members of the Provo Deaf branch.²³

If it were not for Informant Sixteen's residential school matriculation, she might have missed the opportunity to learn of Mormonism, because Japan lacks a formal missionary work for the deaf. Throughout all her Japan residency, she came in contact with only one deaf missionary.²⁴ Yet, Informant Sixteen enjoyed the benefits of her LDS membership, for it expanded her Deaf contact in Tokyo, where her ward was situated, instead of her small hometown, Iwate. Further, her Mormon religion helped her move to the United States for a year with her hearing Mormon husband, who communicated with her in Japanese Sign Language. In America, Informant Sixteen had the opportunity to meet more deaf people at the Provo Deaf branch.

The conversion of Informant Twenty-one demonstrates the similarity in practical benefits of LDS membership. Born in Puerto Rico in 1963, Informant Twenty-one grew up in a traditional Catholic family and attended a Catholic School for the Deaf. At the age of fifteen years old, his life underwent a dramatic change. He emigrated from Puerto Rico to America and enrolled at the Florida School for the Deaf

²³Informant Sixteen, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 26 October 1991, videotape interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Sixteen-Horn.

²⁴Ibid.
at St. Augustine. For the first time, he could communicate in sign language freely and openly. In addition, he enjoyed an expanded religious freedom in the United States and began visits to various churches. A few years after his high school graduation in 1983, Informant Twenty-one moved to Big Springs, Texas, to attend Southwest Collegiate Institute for the Deaf (SWCID).

At SWCID, he met a deaf woman in the tutorial center. Friendship began to develop as Informant Twenty-one frequented the center. One day, they discussed the topic of religion, and the woman mentioned that she was a Mormon. At this time, Informant Twenty-one was entirely unfamiliar with that religion. Her comments triggered his curiosity, and he requested that she take him to her church one Sunday. After his initial visit at a hearing LDS ward, which provided an interpreter for the Deaf group, Informant Twenty-one discovered Mormonism fascinating enough for him to investigate further.

At about the same time, he and the deaf woman began to confer at the tutorial center, go out on dates, and attend church services together with regularity until the woman relocated to Provo, Utah. They corresponded, and he continued his visits to the LDS church without her. One day he decided to pray to see if he would receive guidance regarding his religious quest. He felt the Lord gave him an answer through the Holy Ghost inspiration. In 1987,
Informant Twenty-one converted to Mormonism, moved to Provo, and married the deaf woman, who had led him to the church.25

Another deaf man, Informant Fourteen, led a chaotic life of which he became increasingly tired. In 1987, he decided to leave his native state, Maine, for Portland, Oregon. In Portland, he began his life anew and maintained his contact with the Deaf world through his fraternization with new deaf acquaintances at various functions. In the ASL translation of Informant Fourteen, he could not keep his eyes off a deaf woman all night long at a party. According to him, he made a date with her despite his discovery that she was a Mormon.

They went out on several dates until the woman informed Informant Fourteen that she needed to return home to Utah. He decided to accompany her. Shortly after, they wed in a Mormon church in Morgan, Utah, even though Informant Fourteen never studied Mormonism. After their honeymoon, they settled in Maine, and two hearing missionaries began tracting26 their home in 1989. In spite of the missionaries' inability to sign and the LDS hearing

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25Informant Twenty-one, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 1 November 1991, videotape interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Twenty-one - Horn.

26Tracting is a Mormon missionary term for missionaries' calling at people's homes to minister about the gospel.
interpreter's minimal ASL knowledge, Informant Fourteen converted because of the Holy Ghost inspiration he kept on receiving. However, he conceded he had no theological grasp of the Mormon religion.

A few months later, he and his wife returned to Utah to make Clearfield their home and became members of the Ogden Deaf branch. Through the Deaf branch, Informant Fourteen learned more about his religion. Deaf members in the branch discussed Mormonism in ASL. Being among the deaf who talked in sign language facilitated his LDS spiritual growth. Now he believes that the LDS church is a true church. 27

Once again the force of the residential school and the influence of Deaf social relations are seen through the experiences of these informants. Even more so, separation from the Deaf school often leaves deaf people seeking a communal world. 28 When these deaf graduates step into the world, they are thrust into a life of their own, where they need to make countless choices and decisions. Many of the

27 Informant Fourteen, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 19 October 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Fourteen - Horn.

residential school alumni find themselves wandering around aimlessly or producing poor judgements. They are drawn to a structured form that mirrors the Deaf institution. The Mormon church appears to supply this sort of firm base. Informant Twenty-two fits that image.

On October 7, 1964, a hearing couple gave birth to a deaf daughter in San Bernardino, California. Eventually they sent her to the California School for the Deaf at Riverside. At the school, Informant Twenty-two learned to follow the rules, but on weekends at home, she had to abide a different set of rules, imposed by her mother. Her mother always preached to her to attend church and be a "good girl." Yet, Informant Twenty-two led a somewhat different life-style, a habit she carried with her after her high school graduation in 1983. Sometime later, she began to contemplate the importance of church attendance, for it would secure her a place in heaven. She felt she wanted to find the right church.

One day at a Deaf picnic, she encountered a Mormon, who introduced her to the world of Mormonism. After several meetings with the Mormon acquaintance, she decided that the LDS church was the religion for her. At that time, she felt she received a holy inspiration; however, she never experienced the sensation again. Yet, in 1986, Informant Twenty-two requested her baptism and confirmation because she thought that the Mormon church would help her "stay
good." Further, she confided that despite her Provo Deaf branch membership, she does not believe in a strict religious life. Rather she is comfortable with a flexible, yet faithful Christian life. Informant Twenty-two's confession suggests that the Mormon church offers an atmosphere where the deaf can recreate the life from within the realm of residential school and Deaf community.

In addition, according to some of the informants, the religious life provides a means for a deaf person to remind himself/herself about morality and mortality; whereas, a life without church can bring misery or confusion to him/her. Thus, they, in turn, applied for missionary work with the LDS church. Deaf or not, many Mormons, who are converted through the work of a missionary, often desire to be missionaries at home or abroad to repay for the new joy that they feel comes to them. Also, as missionaries, they have an avenue to set good examples for the "gentiles" by sharing their experience and newfound happiness with others. That is how Informant Twenty-four came to be a stake missionary.

Informant Twenty-four's initial conversion took place in Portland, Oregon, in 1972, through two hearing

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29 Informant-Twenty-two, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 1 November 1991, videotape interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Twenty-two - Horn.

missionaries working with an interpreter. He immediately joined the Portland hearing ward that included a Deaf group. After a while, he moved to Vancouver, Washington. Yet, he continued his Portland hearing ward membership because there existed no ward with a Deaf group or Deaf branch in Vancouver. Somehow, the bishop in his Portland ward learned of his Vancouver residence and mandated that Informant Twenty-four attend a ward in his neighborhood, as in the church's policy. Informant Twenty-four protested to no avail. He began to attend the hearing ward near his new home. Frustrated by the lack of an interpreter, he rather quickly let his membership lapse to inactive. However, a hearing LDS member in the Portland ward realized Informant Twenty-four's situation and flew to Salt Lake City to confer with one of the church's general authorities about these circumstances. He received authorization for Informant Twenty-four to return to the Portland ward. Subsequently, Informant Twenty-four returned to the church.

In return for the hearing Mormon's effort, Informant Twenty-four became extremely active in church matters. He formed a new Portland Deaf branch, of which he became the first president, and he travelled miles in Oregon and Washington to gather more deaf people to the church and to set up interpreting services for deaf members. Tragically, Informant Twenty-four's mental health gradually deteriorated. He assessed that it occurred because of the
accumulated pressure from church activities and work. He sought medical and psychiatric assistance, and recuperated shortly afterwards, he obtained a divorce from his wife and moved to Utah to start all over. In so doing, he completely withdrew from his church affiliation.

In Utah, Informant Twenty-four, after hearing pleas from his son, returned to the Mormon church through the Ogden Deaf branch. He worked hard to show the Mormons that he had repented. Finally, in 1983, he was rebaptized and had his priesthood keys restored. Also, he married his second wife, Informant Eleven, and his life improved dramatically. Thereafter, he felt deeply indebted to the Mormon church and was happy to be called as a stake missionary because he saw the necessity to share his experience with local inactive deaf Mormons as well as deaf “gentiles.”

Further, embarking on a mission helps deaf converts learn more about the gospel. The primary purpose of the establishment of such missionary programs is to preach the gospel in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. To be able to spread the Mormon gospel, missionaries need to study the Standard Works extensively during their

31 Informant Twenty-four - Horn.
32 Kimball, 59.
33 Mormon Standard Works consist of four books: Bible (Old and New Testaments), Book of Mormon (history of people in the New World), Doctrine and Convenants (revelations
service, and thus possess increased knowledge and understanding of LDS theology.

A teenage convert in 1976, Informant Twenty-three had a superficial knowledge of the Mormon gospel, and yet remained loyal to the church because she distinctly sensed that the gospel was significant in her life. In 1986, as an adult, she decided to go on a mission to escape from problems at home and to gain independence from a co-dependent relationship with her mother. The missionary program assigned her to a Spanish-speaking program due to her ability to communicate in Spanish, despite the fact that she specifically and repeatedly requested the deaf program. In spite of this, Informant Twenty-three felt she learned tremendously about the gospel during her mission in Utah. Her increased knowledge centered on the doctrine of life after death. This topic proved difficult for her to teach because she grieved and felt bitter towards her late father for abandoning her and the family. However, during her missionary work, Informant Twenty-three read abundant materials on life after death. She stated that she came to the realization that dead people needed living people's

given by Mormon's past Prophets), and Pearl of Great Price (selections from Books of Moses and Abraham, and history of Joseph Smith's revelations with Jesus Christ and Moroni).

34It appears that the missionary program lacked sufficient Spanish-speaking missionaries in 1986, and that the missionary leaders felt compelled to assign Informant Twenty-three to the Spanish program to fill the vacancies.
forgiveness to live happily in eternity. She also understood that families would reunite after death.\textsuperscript{35} In 1988, Informant Twenty-three completed her service with a positive attitude about her father's death and life in general.\textsuperscript{36}

In addition to the benefit in the self-education of the LDS gospel, the missionary program offers an opportunity for deaf Mormons to assist in the creation of various Deaf community projects and to meet new deaf people. In the prime areas for missionary work, resources available for deaf missionaries include a Deaf branch/ward, a post-secondary educational program serving deaf students and employing deaf staff, an Institute of Religion program for the deaf, and last but not the least, a Deaf community.\textsuperscript{37}

In other words, through the missionary program, deaf individuals expand their contact with and experience in the Deaf community, and this type of chance is especially gainful for those who grew up orally and had a minimal Deaf cultural background.

\textsuperscript{35}Although there exists sundry Mormon literature on life after death, Bruce R. McConkie's \textit{Doctrines of Salvation}, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955) comes highly recommended.

\textsuperscript{36}Informant Twenty-three, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 16 November 1991, videotape interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Twenty-three - Horn.

\textsuperscript{37}Rose, "Proposal to Develop a Language Training Mission to Prepare Missionaries to Use the 'Language of Signs' in Their Work With Deaf Persons," 2.
Raised in a predominantly hearing world with a public school education background, Informant Fifteen never understood the Deaf world nor could speak ASL until his matriculation at Gallaudet University and LDS conversion in 1981. Two years later, Informant Fifteen left Gallaudet University to serve the deaf mission. His first area turned out to be in Oakland, California, the mecca of the northern California Deaf community. His duties consisted of public relations work to distribute information about the Mormon church to the deaf, planning activities for students attending the California School for the Deaf at Fremont, and volunteer work at the Deaf school as an English tutor. Also, Informant Fifteen and his companion assisted with the affairs of the Deaf branch across the street from the California School for the Deaf. Often, they ended up debating with deaf non-Mormons regarding the gospel of various denominations. Consequently, because of the dramatic exposure he received from his missionary work in northern California, he learned extensively about the Deaf culture. Today, he belongs to the Provo Deaf branch and teaches ASL classes at the Brigham Young University.38

Thus, the importance of the missionary program for the deaf for deaf Mormons cannot be ignored nor considered as

mediocre. Prior to their conversion, many deaf individuals led isolated lives with low regard for life in general. Some of them never knew the meaning of religion or understood the gospel until missionaries for the deaf entered their lives. A small number of them felt alienated from their family religion, only to sense the welcome in the Mormon Deaf branch/ward immediately. Some of the deaf converts never enjoyed leadership roles and/or Deaf culture until they embarked on their own mission.

In other words, the Mormon church and its missionary program for the deaf played a significant role in the shaping of deaf converts' lives. It did this in a manner that blended with ingredients central to a comfortable communication style and social ambiance for deaf people. The LDS Deaf program meshed with the Deaf world, rather than asking deaf people to adapt to hearing circumstances. These factors, in part, help to explain the attraction deaf people feel for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
CHAPTER THREE

"You know, many people often don’t know why they are here on earth. Why am I deaf?... Then what will I do after I die? Where will I go?... Our church provides a lot of common sense answers."¹

Comments by Informant Eight illuminate the general need of deaf Mormons for answers to their existence. Apparently, the gospel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints offers satisfactory explanations to deaf people’s inquiries regarding their purpose on earth, life after death, and their deafness. For many deaf people, the LDS church addresses universal questions about the meaning of life. Beyond the practical accommodations of the Deaf wards/branches and signed church services, the LDS spiritual explorations allow the deaf to feel enlightened. Nonetheless, deaf informants revealed a broad range of theological concepts in their comments about their church.

For instance, Informant Six asserts that the Mormon church meets his needs and understands him. According to him, the LDS theology is full of rational explanations, one of which defines the purpose of his existence, a point that makes him feel significant. "Work hard and you will be rewarded" is Informant Six’s favorite Mormon doctrine. This implies that he comes to this life as a somebody. He also concedes that this doctrine of "reward waiting for him in

¹Informant Eight - Horn.
the end" helps him live his life, even if livelihood proves painful, because the gold pot awaits at the end of the rainbow.²

Informant Eighteen struggled to understand her spiritual place as a deaf person for most of her life. The deaf child in a hearing family that never bonded with her, Informant Eighteen became increasingly frustrated and angered.³ During her teenage years, she saw no point in living her life as a worthy human being until she came across the Mormon doctrine. The LDS gospel taught her that God intends for earth to be imperfect, so that its inhabitants can learn to be better individuals. Deafness, Informant Eighteen realized, is one of earth's imperfections, and the responsibility of dealing with her hearing loss fell to her.

Further, she pointed out that the story of a biblical character, Job, related to her in sign language made a dramatic impact on her perspective on life. She recounted the familiar story as follows: Job lost his wife and children all in one day. Subsequently, he felt hollow with an empty outlook on his life. His friends claimed that it was God's retribution for his sins. Yet, Job never refuted his friends' comments nor complained to God about his misfortunes. Instead, he silently went through the motions

²Informant Six - Horn.
³Informant Eighteen - Horn.
of life and passed all of God's tests. In the end, God gave Job double blessings for everything in his life, including his family and work.4

The mention of Job as Informant Eighteen's biblical role model suggests a quest for some type of emotional guidance, especially when it concerns the struggle and acceptance of one's loss. In the case of Informant Eighteen, her hearing loss becomes a daily personal battle for her, and she uses the story of Job as her prototype to live with her deafness. Other obvious attractions of the Mormon church for some of the informants included the existence of God and Jesus as two literal, distinct beings, the story of Joseph Smith, pre-existence, existence and life after death, and the seemingly factual, unabridged details found in the *Standard Works*.5 The Mormon *Standard Works* appear to appeal to several deaf Latter-day Saints, especially Informant Ten, for it seems to offer in-depth and accurate information about Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, the gospel, and the doctrines.

After a long period of self-study in Mormonism, Informant Ten concluded that the LDS church possessed the original Bible, which is recomposed into the *Standard Works*. He believed that the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price* compensated for all the biblical

4Informant Eighteen - Horn.

5Arrington and Bitton, 27-28.
omissions he felt the Catholic monks made during the Middle Age. In addition, he affirmed that the world has seven different versions of the Bible, and these versions contradict one another, confusing people. Some of the Bibles either eliminated or altered the words of Jesus Christ, while, in his view, the Mormon reading materials consisted of actual sayings of Jesus. Thus, according to him, the Mormon church provides clear-cut answers to any theological and historical questions human beings may have through its unedited Standard Works.6

As for Informant Five, she pointed out that reading the Book of Mormon became her favorite religious practice, for it explains events in a sensible and simple way. Also, she named the story of Joseph Smith's struggle to get the LDS church established as her preferred aspect of Mormonism.7 Coupled with the use of sign language in the church, the simple narrative of Smith's battles against oppression appealed to Informant Five. This also demonstrates the similarity in the experiences of Smith and deaf people as their lives generally revolve around constant battle against oppression.

With these benefits, Informant Five felt comfortable about leaving the Roman Catholic Church of her family and joining the Mormon church. She contended that the Catholic

6Informant Ten - Horn.
7Informant Five - Horn.
religion never could explain satisfactorily the doctrine of Trinity, which states that God, Jesus Christ, and Holy spirit are not separate beings but one. Informant Five had trouble understanding this complex idea because the Catholic church in her hometown did not offer religious instruction in sign language. Informant Five made contact with the LDS church through the Utah School for the Deaf in Ogden. There, she received an entirely different explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Mormon belief taught her, through sign language, that the Heavenly Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit are indeed two literate, distinct beings. Suddenly, it all made sense to her. 8 Despite the obvious difference in the Godhead doctrine found in Mormonism and Catholicism, Informant Five finds Mormonism more appealing and understandable because the LDS church equips one with complete theological literature and provides the best possible communication method for deaf members.

It is also through ASL that deaf Mormons acquire an appreciation for the sacredness of LDS temples. According to the Mormon practice, after the formal dedication of a temple, 9 no one but those worthy of "recommends" 10 may

8Informant Five - Horn.

9Arrington and Bitton, 302. When the erection of a temple reaches its completion, the non-Mormon public is welcome to visit for a limited period of time, usually a month. Then the temple is closed to the public until it undergoes a major remodeling. Afterwards, it again is open to "gentiles" until its rededication.
enter. Once inside the Mormon temple, the individual not only enters the building but also performs specific ordinances and ceremonies. Thus, the sanctity of the LDS temple has a special connotation for deaf Mormons as well as other church members.

When asked about his view of the LDS church as the true church, Informant Ten listed the existence of temples as one tangible evidence of this. He further explained that he believed, based on one of Joseph Smith's revelations with Jesus Christ, that the temple is open for people, who are worthy and stand by the gospel to receive a special blessing for time and eternity. Informant Ten added that the doctrine of time and eternity signifies an individual's worthiness in the eyes of the Lord. Through this blessing, the member has a precious entrance to the Celestial Kingdom with an eternal happiness after death. In that kingdom, the mysteries of God will be revealed to the person. This became Informant Ten's biggest goal. Thus, temples served as a symbol of his eventual entry to the highest possible

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10 Arrington and Bitton, 302. "Recommends" are certificates given to loyal, worthy Mormons by their ward bishop and/or branch president. To obtain such a recommend, one must go through an interview with the bishop/president, who will ask questions pertaining to his/her church membership, activities, and christian deeds. Then the bishop/president determines the member's worthiness before issuing him/her a recommend.

11 Ibid, 302. Such temple ordinances and ceremonies include temple marriage, temple work for people of past generations, and family sealing (spiritual binding of family members for eternity).
The temple serves as an important symbol of connection with the LDS community. Informant Six, a Utah School for the Deaf graduate, decided to pay a visit to the Washington, D.C. Temple during his Gallaudet University days. He described explicitly with deep emotion his initial viewing of the D.C. Temple. While on a drive one afternoon, his friend claimed that the temple could be seen for many miles around the D.C. area, but Informant Six doubted him. In his description, the minute Informant Six spotted the D.C. Temple with its huge spires from the freeway, he felt overwhelmed with excitement. Suddenly, the D.C. Temple brought back many memories for him, for he had gotten married in the Salt Lake City Temple and entered several other temples. The D.C. Temple became more like a home to him, and he felt a sense of belonging.

Further, performing rituals in a temple help bind deaf people to the Mormon church. Being in a temple appears to have a lasting effect on deaf Mormons. Those who have entered a temple tend to emphasize that this experience is a way to certify the validity of Mormonism.

Informant Thirteen bore her testimony on the truth in the LDS doctrine of life after death based on the knowledge of

\[12\text{Informant Ten - Horn.}
\[13\text{Informant Six - Horn.}
\[14\text{Informants Five, Six, Ten, and Thirteen - Horn.}
received during the family sealing ceremony inside the Salt Lake city Temple. She and her deaf husband, along with a Mormon interpreter, entered the sealing room to spiritually bind Informant Thirteen's dead great grandparents, grandparents, parents, and the ten-day old baby her parents lost. As Informant Thirteen and her husband sealed the baby to her parents, Informant Thirteen, holding hands with her husband, felt a tingle from her feet through her body right before sensing something else. It was almost like a light fan blowing. So she knew deep inside her that the baby was sealed with her late parents and that there exists life after death.

Informant Thirteen's participation in the family sealing ceremony illustrates the Mormon belief that family life plays a big role in the religious lives of deaf Latter-day Saints. Another church member, Informant Seventeen, indicated that being a Mormon is a paramount aspect of his life. According to him, the LDS church taught him how to lead a more productive life through marriage and child-rearing, as well as active church membership. In life without Mormonism, he conceded that the daily routine of

\[15\] McConkie, vol. 2, 49-55. Although children, who have perished under the age of eight years old, are not held responsible for their sins and receive entrance to the Celestial Kingdom, they are not exalted unless someone on earth does the endowment work (sealing them with their families) for them in the temple.

\[16\] Informant Thirteen - Horn.
eating, sleeping, and working has no special meaning for him. Once he entered Mormonism, these regular patterns of life, such as eating, sleeping, being happy, learning more, having fellowship, and passing the Mormon religion on to his family for generations, assumed a new purpose for him. Informant Seventeen also believed that if it were not for his LDS membership, he would be doomed because his church affiliation provided him a means of having an everlasting life with his family.¹⁷

Informant Seventeen's theological perspective of family life as a central facet of Mormonism follows church trends, for many people since Joseph Smith's days have found the LDS doctrine on marriage and parenting appealing. Thus, they converted and promoted the doctrine, even to its extreme, the practice of plural marriage. Smith claimed he received instruction in divine revelation that God intended a man to have more than one wife and family.¹⁸ However, in the 1880s, the United States law mandated that marriage be monogamous, and the Mormon church "cancelled" polygamy in order for Utah to receive statehood and to save the church from dissolution. The LDS church officials put the tenet of plural marriage aside because it would only destroy the

¹⁷ Informant Seventeen - Horn.
¹⁸ Leone, 14-15.
Despite early legislative persecutions against the Mormon belief in plural marriage, Informant Ten regarded the polygamy doctrine as profound. He further confided that he personally studied this particular doctrine and came to a complete understanding of it. According to him, it is connected to God's way. In the Bible, it said that Solomon and David had many wives, and this signified God's principle, not man's. This type of marriage should not be known as polygamous but plural. Regardless of the biblical backing on plural marriage, Informant Ten expressed his deep-seated fear that it would create jealousy among wives. Yet, he added that the Mormon scriptures pointed out that once women understand the principle of plural marriage, they will be more accepting.20

Compliance or not, Mormon women still have the duty to observe the basic doctrine of marriage and family. Such teachings include the concept of men as family heads and women as childbearing and nurturing mothers. Through that doctrine, parents become co-creators of God's spirit children with fathers as breadwinners and priesthood holders, and mothers as housewives/working women and Relief


20Informant Ten - Horn.
The meaning of role division of Mormon husband and wife is not lost on Informant Nineteen when asked about the notion of women holding the priesthood. Informant Nineteen supported the doctrine that women should not hold priesthood, because she claimed that women already have enough family responsibilities, while men have few duties to occupy their time. Informant Nineteen argued that should women handle both motherhood and priesthood, their husbands would not learn how to develop and maintain their responsibilities. She found this inappropriate. In addition, Informant Nineteen believed that she is very much a part of her husband's priesthood as a protective shield for their family. For example, her husband goes out of the house to give someone a blessing while she remains home to protect their homestead. When asked if the Lord had commanded that women also hold the priesthood, Informant Nineteen simply replied that she would obey whatever commandments the Lord might have.22

The perspectives of Informant Nineteen reflect some tendencies of the general deaf population. Historically and characteristically, deaf individuals regarded themselves as dependent and incapable, because the structures of the  

21Ezra Taft Benson, To the Mothers in Zion (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 2-3.

22Informant Nineteen - Horn.
society often restricted their opportunities to be independent and self-determined beings. Thus, many deaf people grew to adulthood without adequate training in how to make their own personal decisions and intellectual assessments of academic, as well as religious subjects.

However, the Mormon doctrine of equal choice for self-betterment and forgiveness for those who demonstrate sincere desire for such also gives the deaf a chance to see themselves in a new light. For instance, Informant Nine was born into a strict Mormon family. Yet, she became inactive as soon as she completed her residential and public high school education, and enrolled at Gallaudet University. For a very long time, she regarded herself as unworthy to go to Heaven after death because she was sexually abused as a child. Like many victims, this woman went through life blaming herself for these occasions. Even though Informant Nine learned about forgiveness of one's sins, she did not realize that it applied to her until she attended a Brigham Young University workshop on atonement. Suddenly, it dawned on her that all her sins had been washed away, and the cleansing of her sins meant that she had the potential to ascend to Heaven. Thereafter, she became an active Latter-day Saint and affirmed that the Mormon atonement doctrine plays a crucial factor in her church membership. Yet, this informant conceded that she still has lingering problems.

**Sacks, 150-151.**
Deaf Mormons perceive that the concept of Jesus Christ's atonement provides a way to learn from their earthly mistakes in preparation for their eternal life with God, as in the doctrine of salvation. The LDS church believes that if human beings followed God to their best possible "perfection" and did not attempt to improve what God has given people, they would be able to walk, talk with, and behold His face. This particular doctrine offers a ray of hope for many deaf individuals, for they often regard themselves as unequal to hearing people. They cannot hear, and thus, are lower forms of God's creatures as demonstrated in the perceptions of Informant Two.

When asked if God had something to do with his deafness, Informant Two denied that God allowed him to become deaf. He further explained that German measles caused his deafness, and thus, doubted that it was the decision of God. However, Informant Fifteen's point of view differs from those of Informant Two. She insisted that the gospel taught her that she is deaf because she made the choice in her pre-existence. God commanded everyone to choose one or more imperfections for their earthly existence as a way to learn and to improve from their human errors.

24Informant Nine - Horn.
26Informant Two - Horn.
That way, they can be like God after their death. Therefore, it is clear to Informant Fifteen that she opted for deafness as a part of the lessons of life. She concluded that people need to go through trial and error to become perfect, the same as if they have to "study to pass their test." \(^{27}\)

Further, the Mormon gospel defines with simplicity the purposes of man's existence on earth. They include the following of the Lord's Commandments; the receiving of a body of flesh and blood; the development of one's gifts and talents; the sealing to a companion for eternity; and the act of childbearing. \(^{28}\) The reference to gifts and talents appears to inspire a number of deaf Mormons. Frequently, deaf people wonder why they can not hear, while others can. Their puzzlement is understandable, for the deaf are actually a minority population. Thus, they tend to make unfavorable comparisons of themselves and try to find a reason for their state.

However, the LDS church provides answers for their deafness and existence through the scriptures and

\(^{27}\) Informant Fifteen - Horn. Although the concept of selecting one's imperfection is not clearly expressed in LDS writings, it apparently is a common explanation among deaf Mormons. Incidentally, nineteen out of twenty-seven informants mentioned in the interview that they believed they would be able to hear again in life after death. Some of them also said that deafness in pre-existence, existence, and life after death is one of the most discussed theological topics among deaf Mormons.

\(^{28}\) Richards, 305-306.
Six months after his conversion, Informant Seventeen requested his patriarchal blessing, which he promptly received. He read his blessing, and suddenly, the reason for his deafness became clear to him. His blessing said, "You came to Earth with no perfections in you for a special reason." Thereafter, he accepted his deafness completely.30

Informant Thirteen herself had a difficult childhood. Her parents never dealt well with her deafness. They made a series of attempts to find an explanation and cure for their daughter's hearing loss. They sent Informant Thirteen to various hospitals and even to psychiatrists for different kinds of treatment. These incidents had a lasting psychological effect on Informant Thirteen, who always questioned her own condition. But when she converted to Mormonism, she ultimately received an answer to her deafness. Her patriarchal blessing explained that the Lord has plans for her. She needed to bring souls back to Zion.

29Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1958), 504. Patriarchal blessings are given to members, who make a formal request for such, by ordained patriarchs. These men are specially selected brethren, appointed for life to make the blessings. To give a blessing, a patriarch solicits for divine guidance to make his prophetic utterances, cautions, and admonitions. Blessings generally consist of predictions of what would happen to the members and their posterity after them, which will be recorded. Members can not receive more than one patriarchal blessing unless their situation calls for another blessing.

30Informant Seventeen - Horn.
This, Informant Thirteen took to mean that she came to earth to work with the deaf. Finally, she felt relaxed and knew that she was deaf because she has a special mission on earth, which includes helping other deaf people learn about the gospel.31

In addition to their earthly status, deaf Mormons ponder death. This appears to bear some type of moral significance connected to their self-esteem as deaf individuals. When they receive reassurance from the LDS doctrines regarding life after death, they want to secure their salvation, for the belief brings them hope and joy.32

The scriptures in the Doctrine and Covenants teach that the primary and fundamental principles of the plan of salvation revolve around faith in God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost; acceptance of Their authority; acceptance of the infinite atonement of Christ; repentance of all people's sins, giving hearts to God and serving Him; baptism in water; proper confirmation after baptism; willingness to serve the Lord with all heart, mind, and strength; and keeping his Commandments, even to the end.33 These very same principles appear in the words of Informant Twenty, when asked about his favorite LDS scriptures. He replied

31Informant Thirteen - Horn.

32Informants Five, Eight, Fourteen, Sixteen, Eighteen, Twenty-two, and Twenty-three - Horn.

33McConkie, vol. 2, 3-4.
that they were the scriptures, loosely quoted, and said that if we keep all the commandments, which He gave us until our death, we will have an eternal life. 34

Informant Twenty further went on to explain what the scriptures imply by an eternal life. According to him, it means that he would live with the Heavenly Father forever, as in seeing Him every minute, hour, day, and year. Informant Twenty found this attractive because God made the world, animals, air, men, sun, and other things. So he preferred to live up there in heaven with God rather than being all cooped up in a dark casket. Also, he wanted to dwell with the Heavenly Father to thank Him for letting him exist on earth to experience things, no matter how painful, including his deafness. 35 Clearly, this informant defined his after-life as a condition that will replicate his time on earth.

In spite of the attractions of and seemingly truthfulness in Mormonism as perceived by active deaf Mormons, not all necessarily continue LDS affiliation. Two Informants, former Latter-day Saints, after years of church affiliation, concluded the Mormon doctrines to be fraudulent. Informant Twenty-Six based his rejection on his experiences and information learned from his Mormon acquaintances. The other, James D. Still, relied on

34 Informant Twenty - Horn.

35 Ibid.
personal research to justify his termination of church membership. Basically, their findings concerned their feelings about deceit, and deceit, in a way, simply became "the magic word" for Informant Twenty-Six and Still to leave the church.

A South Dakota native, Informant Twenty-six grew up to believe that one should lead a good Christian life. He followed this philosophy to the point of participating in various church activities, even if he did not belong to a particular denomination. His family practiced Methodism, a belief he maintained until his LDS conversion in 1964 during his Los Angeles, California, residency. After his Mormon baptism, he approached his duties as an extremely active member. Living in various cities prior to his relocation in Salt Lake City, Utah, Informant Twenty-six devoted his time to spreading the LDS gospel to the Deaf community, because he felt strongly the importance of salvation. This he regarded as a necessity, especially after his first temple visit.

Inside the temple, Informant Twenty-six and his wife received their endowment ceremony, and he regarded the ceremony as sacred, for it included receiving a celestial name. According to the Mormon belief, each individual should be given a special name, by which he will be known in Heaven. This new name must not be known by anyone but himself and the Heavenly Father. During the endowment
ceremony, Informant Twenty-six got his name, and the name bore a special spiritual connotation for him because it was someone whose experiences proved similar to his. Upholding his oath of secrecy, he never shared his celestial name with anyone, not even his wife, throughout his Mormon church affiliation. Following his excommunication, in 1977, he continued to keep this confidential until one day in 1980. He decided to approach a friend, who was still an active LDS member but contemplating withdrawal, about the endowment ceremony. They had both received their endowment at the same ceremony many years before. Informant Twenty-six, an excommunicated Mormon, suggested that he and his friend, a Latter-day Saint, write down their celestial names on pieces of paper and exchange these. Agreeing to the idea, his friend complied. Unfolding the paper and assuming that his friend's name differed from his, Informant Twenty-six was dismayed to find his friend's celestial name identical to his, Job.36

This experience disillusioned him, but prompted him to recall another unsettling event. This concerned his other deaf friend, formerly an architect for the Mormon church. That friend got a job with the Church Office Building in

36Informant Twenty-six - Horn. It is a common practice for many members to receive the same celestial name during the same temple ceremony. However, this episode points to the limitations that deaf often encounter with general knowledge.
Salt Lake City, Utah, by the Temple Square. One day, Informant Twenty-six paid the architect a visit, and the friend showed him around the offices. In the context of the conversation, Informant Twenty-six learned that there would be a new Mexico City Temple, and this perplexed Informant Twenty-six. In the Mormon doctrine, Mormons do not build temples without the prophet receiving a revelation from the Lord, instructing the church to build one. Yet, the architect was already preparing a blueprint of a New Mexico Temple, prior to the prophet's formal announcement, given during the semi-annual conference. The architect then told Informant Twenty-six that the prophet would make such a proclamation at the upcoming meeting. A few months later, Informant Twenty-six, then a Mormon, attended the conference. The prophet, according to the "plan," informed

37 The LDS Temple Square usually consists of a temple, a tabernacle, and a visitor's center. In Salt Lake City, the Temple Square is enormous in size, for the Mormon Headquarters is situated by the square. Around the square, there are buildings for the headquarters. Although there also exist numerous departments and functions in these buildings, they primarily house presidential office, administration, genealogical department, relief society, history department, and bureau of information.

38 McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 705.

39 The Mormon semi-annual conference in Salt Lake City Temple Square always takes place on first weekend in October and April, when members from around the world attend to listen to spiritual lectures and to be informed of church news. It is supposed to be one of the most important church functions for the members to participate in. The living prophet and twelve apostles normally are present throughout the conference, and their presence becomes one of the conference highlights.
the Mormons that he had received a revelation the night before that the Lord wanted the LDS church to build a temple in Mexico City, Mexico. Informant Twenty-six described himself as "speechless" at this pronouncement.  

Further, prior to that incident, Informant Twenty-six lived in Lubbock, Texas, where, through a woman with whom he worked, he met a fine, non-Mormon, hearing man. The man happened to have a deaf brother and thus knew sign language. Friendship blossomed after Informant Twenty-six's initial encounter. Unfortunately, however, the hearing friend died from a heart attack only five months later. In sorrow, Informant Twenty-six and his wife paid a visit to the deceased man's family at the funeral. When Informant Twenty-six viewed the body, he was startled to see his friend wearing the traditional white garment with green "apron" as his burial attire, for he was not a Mormon, but of a different religion. So Informant Twenty-six approached the widow regarding the garment, only to learn that his

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40 Informant Twenty-six - Horn. In nineteenth century, it was a normal practice to make important statements of the church business during the semi-annual conference. However, since the World War II, no major announcements have occurred during the semi-annual conference.

41 McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 278. The Mormon church believes in members' wearing garments to signify cleanliness, perfection, and salvation. Latter-day Saints generally wear their garments, made of thin and light material, under their clothing and do not remove the garments unless necessary.
deceased friend belonged to the Masonic Order.\textsuperscript{42} Informant Twenty-six left the funeral service confused. It upset his confidence in the LDS church to learn that sacred rituals had been borrowed from another group. These events led to his decision to end his active membership, which resulted in eventual excommunication from the LDS church in 1977.\textsuperscript{43}

Similarly, James D. Still's personal research brought his membership to an end in 1978, despite his numerous contributions to the Mormon church for fifteen years.\textsuperscript{44} What incited Still to begin his investigation on the authenticity of Mormonism was his paternal ancestors' connection with Freemasonry. His hearing father and brother, still living, belong to the Masonic Order and forewarned Still against his LDS conversion, as the Masonic brethren stress the fact that Joseph Smith was once a Mason. It is their feeling that Smith borrowed abundant material from Freemasonry to create his own religion. Such materials include stories and ideas found in the Book of Mormon, the endowment ceremony, and secret rites. Further, the Masons believe that the mob that killed Smith and his brother, Hyrum, in 1844, was composed of angry Masonic members. They

\textsuperscript{42}Masonic Order, otherwise known as Freemasonry, is a secret organization for men for the purpose of fellowship and brotherhood. For more information, see: Stephen Knight, The Brotherhood: The Secret World of the Freemasons (United States of America: Dorset Press, 1984).

\textsuperscript{43}Informant Twenty-six - Horn.

\textsuperscript{44}James D. Still, personal letter, 24 January 1992.
felt the betrayal, when Smith used the secrets of the Order to establish the LDS church.  

The Book of Mormon, according to Still's documents, proved to be a composite work derived from Reverend Solomon Spaulding's writings, lines from the Shakespearean play, Hamlet, and the Bible. A curious publication, Mormonism—

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45 James D. Still, "Correspondence and Documents," by Petra M. Horn, 1 February 1992, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Still - Horn. Still also used some published sources on Freemasonry, including: Stephen Knight, The Brotherhood: The Secret World of the Freemasons (United States of America: Dorset Press, 1984); and Albert Pike, Morals and Dogma (1871; reprint, 1925).

46 See: E.D. Howe, Mormonism Unvailed [sic] (1834); and "The Book of Mormon," Midsummer Holiday Number of Scribner's Monthly 20:4 (August 1880): 613-6. Reverend Solomon Spaulding was a graduate of Dartmouth College in 1785, and eventually became a preacher only to give it up due to his frail health. Spaulding resided in Conneaut, Ashtabula County, Ohio, in 1812. It was in Conneaut, where round mounds of earth were a part of the landscape, and these mounds ignited his imagination to create a story about the "manuscript found." He used the biblical style (in a scriptural form) to write the story about a group of people with names, such as "Mormon," "Moroni," "Lamanite," and "Nephi." Spaulding forwarded his manuscript to a publisher, Mr. Patterson, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for his opinion. Patterson held it in his possession for a long time before returning it to Spaulding. In 1816, Spaulding's health gave, and he passed away in Amity, Pennsylvania, leaving the manuscript to his wife, who unwittingly entrusted it to a stranger by the name of Hurlburt in 1834. Hurlburt claimed he was sent by a committee to compare Spaulding's manuscript with the Book of Mormon, and made a promise to return the manuscript to Mrs. Spaulding. But she never saw it or Hurlburt again. This topic has been explored for many years, and there are various explanations for this event.

47 Reverend Ethan Smith, View of the Hebrews (Poultney, Vermont: 1823).
Shadow or Reality?, by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, caught Still's attention. This book covered Joseph Smith's revelations, the origins of the Book of Mormon, Smith's doctrines that concerned polygamy, the Godhead, anti-Negro sentiment, and temple ceremonies, among other subjects. This information in the book gave Mormonism a different light. The book's authors, through their documented findings, refuted the known Mormon belief that the LDS church is a true church because of the on-going revelation with Jesus Christ, and the restoration of priesthood keys and Christian writings.

Also, a few years after Still's excommunication from the LDS church, the story about a Salt Lake City resident, Mark Hofmann, and his forgery crimes had a final and explosive impact on Still. As a child, Hofmann rejected Mormonism out of spite, for his devout Mormon father demanded his son's loyalty to the church. When Hofmann reached his adulthood, he became an active Mormon, only to plot to deceive the church. He made numerous seemingly

48Jerald and Sandra Tanner have published numerous documents, booklets, magazine issues, and other books. To order or to get more information, contact: Modern Microfilm Company, Box 1884, Salt Lake City, Utah 84110.

49Still - Horn. Still never described his excommunication trial. But in a paper dated December 1991, he said, "In two weeks or a month from now [December 14, 1979] I expect to stand before the High Council Court and request that my family's names to [sic] be removed from the [c]hurch. In other words, we will be excommunicated at our request."
successful reproductions of various religious documents, including those of the Mormon church, to create "new evidences." This way, he could "verify" the authenticity of Mormonism. Many of the church leaders took Hofmann's "discovery of long-lost manuscripts among others" about the Mormon religion to be genuine. Suddenly one day, through the accumulation of events, Hofmann, in an attempt to conceal facts, exposed himself through three bombings that killed two people in 1985.\(^{50}\)

The story on Mark Hofmann led to Still's speculation about Smith's ability to reproduce manuscripts as a way to "prove" that the LDS church is the true church. Further, Still wondered why Smith reburied the critically important gold plates without giving them to the church. Still felt this created a church climate, where authorities repeatedly emphasized to members that they must have faith in the existence of gold plates. So Still's conclusions based on his personal research findings prompted him to begin a long-term research project on Mormonism as a way to keep the public informed about the Mormon church.\(^{51}\)

Despite the turn of events in Still's and Informant Twenty-six's participation in the LDS church, Mormonism made


\(^{51}\)Still - Horn.
room for these men to grow spiritually and intellectually. Now they have the background and training to investigate theology in general. Despite their separation from the church, Mormonism stimulated them to investigate important subjects, matters relevant to their own existence.

Deaf people, in general, constantly seek answers for their deafness, feel the need for some sense of belonging, and long for stories that resemble their personal experience. The deaf can find these things in the Mormon religion. The simple narrative structure of the church's history translates well into sign language. Deaf people connect with the Mormon story, and they can readily visit the historic and holy locations where these events took place. They find a sense of comfort in Deaf wards and a role within the church. Perhaps most important, the deaf believe the LDS church helps them to account for their deafness in this life and to believe that its constraints serve a purpose. Therefore, Mormonism brings them spiritual and emotional contentment.
"He [the Lord] chose us as servants. We don't choose Him. He chose a servant; we must follow Him. If the servant died, He had another person taking his place. We don't choose him. The Lord chose him; we must follow Him. It's His Will."¹

The Lord's will plays an important role within the sphere of the Mormon church as members perform their duties according to their understanding of the Commandments of the Lord and their callings.² Church responsibilities seem to help a member grow spiritually and intellectually in terms of his/her religious beliefs and practices. Deaf Mormons find growth possible in the LDS church, through their Deaf ward/branch membership and/or their assigned tasks.

Despite these seemingly positive personal gains, deaf Latter-day Saints occasionally face difficulties in church affairs with hearing Mormons. Generally, the hearing do not include the deaf in the nominations for higher church positions or cultivate a good grasp of the Deaf culture. However, deaf members usually manage to overcome such unsettling matters with their persistence, determination,

¹Informant Twelve, Interview by Petra M. Horn, 26 November 1991, videotaped interview transcript, Utah State University Archives, Logan, Utah. Hereafter referred as Informant Twelve - Horn.

²Callings are various church services that the Mormon church, in accord with its understanding of the spiritual guidance of the Lord, assigns members to perform within their wards/branches as well as the church.
love, and faithfulness.

Deaf Mormons develop these attributes through their toiling effort to be like God, who possesses pure qualities. These characteristics typically do not form in a Mormon individual without active membership. Active membership signifies a person's complete willingness to perform certain callings, even if they do not meet his/her liking, as in the experience of Informant Thirteen.

After an initial struggle with the help of a hearing female friend to eliminate communication barrier in her Kansas City, Missouri, ward, Informant Thirteen received her first calling to serve as a homemaking advisor. She found this impossible because it involved constant communication with hearing women during the Relief Society meetings. But as Informant Thirteen proceeded, she began to see the good in her calling. Through her calling, hearing members learned how to interact with deaf people, such as herself and her husband, Informant Seven. Informant Thirteen took this to mean that the Lord sent her to that hearing ward as a way to learn more about the religion and for the hearing to learn more about deafness.³

Further, after the termination of her homemaking position, Informant Thirteen became a primary second counselor, an assignment that required she work with Mormon children in her hearing ward. At first, she found this not

³Informant Thirteen - Horn.
possible because of the great age differences between herself and the children. But the Bible taught Informant Thirteen the wisdom of becoming like little children. Everyday when she entered the room, the children would hug her, despite her deafness. She then would hug them back. From her experience with these children, Informant Thirteen began to perceive for herself what the Lord meant. Everyday, she would go outside and look at the sky through the eyes of a child; this gave her a new perspective of the world. Ultimately, Informant Thirteen realized that as one gets older, he/she forgets to enjoy simple things in the world.4

Incidentally, the Mormon religion does not exclude the young from church functions. Male children, above the age of twelve, hold the Aaronic Priesthood, a lesser priesthood than the Melchizedek Priesthood. The Aaronic Priesthood, which prepares boys to accept Christ in His second coming, is an appendage to the greater priesthood.5 These young priesthood holders perform various duties, such as passing the sacrament, serving as the bishop's messenger, collecting fast offerings, and assisting Melchizedek priesthood bearers with some of their basic tasks.6 Boys remain in the lesser priesthood until their adulthood.

4Informant Thirteen - Horn.
5Kimball, 73.
6Ibid, 81-82.
Despite the apparent lower level of Aaronic Priesthood, these holders also gain access to the temple to do their work. This type of job provides a special meaning for deaf boys, as it did for Informant Seven in 1939. During his adolescence at the Utah School for the Deaf, the residential school, in collaboration with the Deaf branch, took Informant Seven and other young men to the Salt Lake City Temple for temple work. Inside the temple, Informant Seven stood in the line with other deaf boys, waiting to perform the work for the dead. Finally, he was baptized about fourteen times for his ancestors. 7

Through temple work and other responsible tasks for the young, deaf Latter-day Saints appreciate the value of Mormonism, and thus, their loyalty for the church, Jesus Christ, and God blossoms. But some deaf members are not as active as others for various reasons, such as distance from their home to the Deaf branch/ward, lack of interpreting service for the deaf, and domestic hardship. Yet, the church calls these "semi-active" members to service, apparently to make them feel a part of the ward/branch and teach them more about the value of Mormonism.

A convert in 1989, Informant Fourteen demonstrated only a fair commitment to the Ogden Deaf branch because he and his family faced financial difficulties and resided in Clearfield, a few miles south of Ogden. Informant Fourteen

7Informant Seven - Horn.
admitted that he had not been an "ideal" Mormon due to his poor church attendance and his smoking habit. Regardless, he described himself as called by the Ogden Deaf branch to serve as the president's third counselor, requiring him to give an opening speech at the sacrament meeting on Sundays. This, Informant Fourteen felt, helped him learn more about the religion.

In addition, the branch came to his assistance when he and his family nearly went bankrupt. The branch provided them food and emergency funding. In return, Informant Fourteen and his wife volunteered at the church welfare program, where they canned food. These experiences taught Informant Fourteen the importance of charity and love. Further, because of the help he received, he discovered a new motivation to study the Book of Mormon to understand Mormonism better.

In addition to volunteering for the welfare program, Mormon women have numerous opportunities to practice the gospel of charity and benevolence. Relief Society provides a way for women to implement the church beliefs. Within the hierarchy of the Relief Society, a female member handles the "compassion department," where women help the bishop/president oversee family welfare, poor relief, and

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8Typically, a branch president has two counselors, and the practice of one person giving a weekly opening speech at the sacrament meetings is very rare.

9Informant Fourteen - Horn.
similar tasks in the ward/branch.  

These duties seemed to enlighten Informant Five as she described them with endearing terms, for she grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, which she felt never gave her a chance to practice the belief in "service for all." However, as a member of the Salt Lake City Deaf LDS ward, Informant Five rose to Relief Society president, a position from which she learned a great deal. She had to ensure the organization for Sunday services, funerals, gatherings, and/or workshops. According to her, the Relief Society is charged with providing food after funeral services to help families in distress. Today, Informant Five holds the position of a compassionate service leader where she replaces the Relief Society president in case of her absence and handles sending sympathy/get-well cards to people. She expressed her love for her current calling because it offers her a position where she can tend for people with love and care. 

A recently released elders' quorum president, Informant Fifteen recalled the most intimate moments of his presidency. He relished the idea of men helping one another to become better persons, teaching each other the importance of willingness to serve others, and inciting men's motivation to clean the church building at regular

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10 Leone, 40.

11 Informant Five - Horn.
intervals. Then Informant Fifteen added that these elders also would welcome deaf Mormons moving into town as a way to make them feel at home. To welcome newcomers, elders assisted with the move, fixing the house, and bringing furniture into the home.\textsuperscript{12}

This type of participation by elders highlights the personal; however, elders' quorum is not the only place where deaf men can be their true selves. Informant Four mentioned that he had a share of intense moments with other elders during the priesthood meetings. At these meetings, men would engage themselves in intellectual conversations, occasionally offending one another with conflicting theological opinions. At one time, one elder insulted Informant Four to the point that he felt resentful.\textsuperscript{13}

But Informant Four insisted that he and other men do have a good exchange of ideas to help each other understand their roles and duties. The purposes of having priesthood meetings, Informant Four expounded, revolve around educating men to take care of the Lord's house and their families, giving blessings to the sick, planning sacrament meetings, and ensuring that their ward as well as other wards/branches remain in good standing. Occasionally, these priesthood holders would entertain themselves with guest speakers and partake in the semi-annual conference's priesthood meetings

\textsuperscript{12}Informant Fifteen - Horn.

\textsuperscript{13}Informant Four - Horn.
with other holders from around the world. Yet, discrimination against deaf members exists within the Mormon church in terms of certain calling opportunities for the deaf, such as elevation to a general authority, an apostle, or a prophet. Whenever deaf members step out of their ward/branch to join the mainstream of church members, they are faced with misunderstanding and misconception of their abilities to serve the church and God. Not one deaf male Mormon has entertained the chance of becoming the LDS church prophet, and this does not go unnoticed by Informant Twenty.

An extremely active member in the Provo Deaf branch, Informant Twenty holds a high religious aspiration to serve in various capacities in return for being saved by the Lord. However, he often wondered why the LDS church never called a deaf man to be the prophet. He said he had an argument with his hearing friend over that issue, and his hearing friend reasoned that it is impossible for the deaf to hold such a high position due to communication difficulty. The prophet would have to make announcements to the entire membership about his revelations with the Lord, and being deaf would hinder a prophet in performing his duties properly.

Informant Twenty disagreed with his friend, arguing

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14 Informant Four - Horn.

15 There is no church policy that clearly supports this opinion.
that the Lord never decreed against the deaf becoming a prophet. Thus, in Informant Twenty's opinion, this implied that men with a hearing loss could handle the prophet's job, as long as they have an interpreter to help bridge the communication gap. To support his argument, he added that he knew many very good deaf men with a religious spirit as strong as those of hearing males who currently hold the highest church positions. Therefore, he believed these deaf are as qualified as the hearing to be called to higher posts.  

Cultural misunderstanding between deaf and hearing Mormons dates to 1917, when the LDS church witnessed the establishment of the Ogden Deaf branch through the efforts of Max W. Woodbury, a hearing member with sign language knowledge. Despite the fact that deaf people loved and respected Woodbury, Woodbury became the symbol of discrimination against the deaf within the Mormon Deaf community. Instead of choosing a deaf Mormon, the Ogden stake called Woodbury to be the branch's first president.  

16Informant Twenty - Horn.  
17Informant Ten - Horn. According to Informant Ten, in the Mormon system, to be called as the branch president or ward bishop, members in the branch/ward nominate worthy men, and their nominations are taken up to the stake president. He, in turn, will discuss with his stake presidency, composed of first and second counselors, branch presidents, and ward bishops, before making the final choice. Then he will release the branch president or ward bishop and call the new man for the position. However, before the man can assume the duties, members in his branch/ward must approve him formally by raising their hands in favor of him during
In fact, Woodbury's presidency lasted for fifty-one years, unusual for a branch president. Typically, a Mormon remains in the same calling for approximately three to five years. But in Woodbury's case, the stake president was reluctant to release Woodbury on account of his hearing ability. Further, the stake president perceived the deaf as educationally limited and unable to handle a responsible job. In other words, the stake president lacked confidence in the ability of a deaf man to become the branch president. Finally, in 1968, a hard-of-hearing member, Leon Curtis, who possessed a fine speaking ability and used sign language fluently, replaced Woodbury. Afterwards, the Ogden Deaf branch continued to see its deaf members being called to the branch presidency. Today, Charles Roy Cochran, a deaf Utah native, is the president.

The cultural misunderstanding between hearing and deaf Mormons did not stop at Ogden, Utah. It went beyond Ogden to other branches and wards around Utah and other states. Deaf wards/branches share the stake building space with other hearing wards/branches. To have the space to themselves, ward/branch members must set up a calendar of events with other wards/branches. Often, this can be done the sacrament meeting. Ultimately, a priesthood-holding elder in that branch/ward will have the man set apart to the position of presidency/bishopric.

18Informant Ten - Horn.
19Ibid.
However, some members of the Salt Lake City Deaf ward expressed their frustrations in reaching agreement with other wards in their stake. Deaf members wanted to have the building space more often than usual, so that they could socialize with one another, as is the custom of the Deaf culture. But hearing members refused to see their cultural need. So deaf members had to reduce their ward interactions to once a week on Wednesdays. Further, in the world of sports, the Salt Lake City Deaf ward often was the last to know of stake tournaments because hearing wards there appeared to lack the desire to compete with deaf Mormon athletes.

In reality, regardless of similar religious experiences of deaf and hearing Latter-day Saints, the deaf receive a different treatment when in a hearing ward/branch. They face certain difficulties due to language barriers and cultural differences between them and hearing members. Such problems can last for a prolonged period of time until the ward bishop or branch president understands the Deaf needs.

To help the bishop/president learn about deafness, deaf members must educate him first. Once he is well informed on

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20 Informant Six - Horn.
21 Informants Four and Six - Horn.
22 Informant Six - Horn.
23 Informant Four - Horn.
the issues of deafness, he can share the information with the entire ward/branch congregation, and the lives of deaf Mormons will be easier. Yet, in the event of an administrative overturn replacing the old leader as the bishop/president, deaf members will have to repeat the whole process of educating the new person. In rare occasions, the outgoing bishop/president takes time to teach the incoming bishop/president how to meet the needs of deaf members.24

Cultural clashes go beyond wards and branches. In the missionary experience of Informant Eighteen, she had a hearing companion who wanted to take over and control the dissemination of the gospel to deaf people. Informant Eighteen disagreed, but her companion believed that she needed to tell deaf persons interested in Mormonism what to do. Informant Eighteen tried to reason to her companion that differences existed for the deaf. Deaf people liked to establish a friendship first, before learning about the religion. That was the nature of the Deaf culture. Yet, the hearing companion did not heed Informant Eighteen's advice. From that point on, Informant Eighteen felt intimidated and was not able to render her service to the fullest until her hearing companion was replaced with a deaf companion.25

On the national scale, in the 1980s, deaf Mormons

24Informant Six - Horn.

25Informant Eighteen - Horn.
requested an interpreting service for the semi-annual conference. The LDS church promptly provided the service, and the deaf assumed that the church also reserved a number of rows of seats in the front for them to sit together and "listen" to the service through an interpreter. But when they entered the tabernacle in the Salt Lake City Temple Square, they were dismayed to find themselves sitting in various parts of the room, far away from the interpreter, and thus, unable to see the signing. Some of the deaf had to point out to the hearing that they could not have fifty interpreters sitting all over the audience, where the deaf sat in scattered places, so that the hearing could sit in the front. Finally, the hearing members got the message. From then on, the tabernacle has always had several rows of front seats reserved for the deaf, and the semi-annual conference committee instructs the hearing to sit elsewhere.\(^{26}\)

Interpreting problems also emerge in hearing wards/branches with a number of deaf members, as in the experience of Informant Nine. During her childhood, in Gooding, Idaho, she belonged to a large Deaf group of the hearing branch. During the stake conference of the area wards, the deaf Mormons often had to make do without an interpreter. For instance, the primary meeting lacked an interpreter for deaf children. Even though Informant Nine

\(^{26}\)Informant Six - Horn.
was deaf and only six or seven years old, she had to function as an interpreter for herself and her deaf siblings. 27

In another situation, the hearing Gooding branch placed Informant Nine, then an adolescent, and her siblings in a Sunday school class with other hearing youths. The class lacked an interpreter for these teenagers, despite the fact that one hearing girl knew sign language because her parents were deaf. Sometimes the girl could not be persuaded to interpret for her deaf peers, and these deaf had to lipread the teacher themselves. 28

Frequently, because of these cultural clashes, deaf Mormons 29 either drift away from the church, join a Deaf branch/ward, create their own Deaf branch/ward, or develop means to help the deaf learn the gospel in their language, ASL. There are scriptures in the Bible regarding deaf people. These scriptures prophesy that the deaf shall hear the word of God. The Book of Isaiah, chapter twenty-nine, verse eighteen, says, "And in that day [in the future], the deaf shall hear the word of the Book, and the eyes of the blind will see out of obscurity and out of darkness." 30

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27 Informant Nine - Horn.

28 Ibid.

29 Informants Nine, Twelve, Thirteen, Eighteen, Twenty-three, Twenty-four, and Twenty-five - Horn.

Also, in the Book of Leviticus, chapter nineteen, verse fourteen, it reads, "Thou shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind."

Informant Twelve took these verses to mean that even though deaf can "lipread God," they cannot understand Him because they miss exact meanings through oralism. Further, the deaf have to read and write hearing people's language, English, and this proves to be difficult for them because it is not their native tongue. Informant Twelve recounted Brigham Young's days, when he and other church leaders faced the problem of proselytization of the gospel in "actual sounds of God." So Young instructed his men to devise a new writing system with phonemes, exceeding the twenty-six letter alphabet, because it did not convey exact aural connotation. The alphabet only printed the words in a visual and writing form. This destroyed the real meaning of God's message.

To preserve God's message in the form of written sounds, Young's men, in the year of 1878, developed a booklet called, "The Book," which consisted of thirty-eight different alphabetical sounds. A key of knowledge was also included to guide the reader in the translation of written sounds to spoken words, as if he/she actually heard God.

According to Informant Twelve, this was fine for the hearing. For the deaf, Informant Twelve singlehandedly

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created a new booklet that contains the fingerspelling part of sign language and Young's thirty-eight different alphabetical sounds. Through this combined system, deaf readers can fingerspell and mouth the words simultaneously, giving them an idea of how God's message may sound.  

Despite Informant Twelve's good intentions, deaf Mormons do not generally use his idea to read the Standard Works. The reasons his system remains unused are not known. However, it may be that his work is not well-publicized among deaf Mormons, or that they do not accept it for cultural reasons.

To be deaf means living in the world of silence. Although deaf people make various types of noises, such as laughing and screaming, they never actually understand the implications of sounds, except that they are something that human beings hear. Hard-of-hearing people or individuals with little hearing left are the subgroups of the Deaf community, who have some aural experience; they are a small composition of the deaf population. The majority of the deaf exchanges ideas and observes the motions in life through visual means. Therefore, it is highly probable that when deaf Mormons came across Informant Twelve's booklet, they had trouble transferring words from written phonemes to spoken sounds.

Informant Twelve happens to be not the only Mormon who

32Informant Twelve - Horn.
longs for the Bible and the **Standard Works** to be readable by the deaf. There exists an official group project in the LDS religion that focuses on the translation of the **Book of Mormon** into ASL, the language of the deaf. Jack Rose, a hearing Mormon, deeply devoted to the services for the deaf, pioneered the project in the 1980s. He saw the need for it after his involvement with the original missionary program for the deaf. The idea of translating the **Book of Mormon** started out as a small plan, using a system of symbols and videotapes of signed scriptures, to elicit responses from deaf Mormons. Rose and his team received favorable reactions from the deaf and brought this to the general authorities' attention. Rose utilized the Bible and **Doctrines and Covenants**, which say, "People in every nation will read the Bible in their language," and historical examples as his argument for the project. Finally on January 18, 1989, the LDS church approved, and a team of several hearing and deaf members was called and set apart.³³

Originally, the **Book of Mormon** translation team intended for the scriptures to be videotaped in ASL, using models to sign the verses. However, as time went by, Minnie Mae Wilding-Diaz, a leader and member of the team, came across Valerie Sutton's Sign Writing System. Sutton, a hearing ballet dancer and linguist of San Diego, California,

³³Informant Nine - Horn.
created the system, consisting of hand, face, and body symbols, to preserve ASL and other sign languages in the world. This caught Wilding-Diaz's attention because using Sign Writing helps make an accurate translation of English into ASL. Also, it makes the distribution of the Book of Mormon in ASL easier than a videotaped ASL version. By 1992, Wilding-Diaz and her team were undergoing an extensive training to learn Sign Writing, as they translate the Book of Mormon.

The experiences of these informants in terms of preserving and transferring the Deaf culture into the Mormon church system illuminate the importance of religion for deaf members. Deaf people seek comfort and happiness in an institution, and this they find in the LDS church. The church devises ways to accommodate the needs of the deaf populace, despite a number of cultural clashes and misconceptions. The Mormon belief in the goodwill of all men, love, faithfulness, and service to the Lord helps deaf Mormons weather cultural differences.

Dissimilarities between Deaf and hearing worlds prompt the hearing to unintentionally discriminate against the deaf

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Valerie Sutton and her organization, the Deaf Action Committee for Sign Writing, publish a newsletter, The Sign Writer, to spread Sign Writing to the public and to inform the public about ASL. For more information, contact: Deaf Action Committee for Sign Writing, Center for Sutton Movement Writing, Box 517, La Jolla, California 92038-0517.

Informant Nine - Horn.
in certain church callings, especially when they concern constant or frequent interaction with hearing members. Consequently, some deaf feel alienated from the hearing mass. Alienation leads to membership in Deaf wards/branches, where injustice is almost unknown, for any deaf Mormon there can be called to any position, mediocre or prestigious.

Through these Deaf wards/branches, individuals enjoy the privilege of socializing with their people, who communicate in ASL and have an understanding of their world. In addition, wards/branches allow the deaf to partake fully of the core church functions, such as the priesthood, Relief Society, and youth programs. For entertainment, these members participate in the church sports program, and because of their Deaf ward/branch membership, they have an equal opportunity to contribute their athletic skills to the team. In short, the LDS church becomes an extension of the Deaf community, where its members interact, using sign language, performing myriad community duties, and enjoying the lack of discrimination, rejection and misunderstanding.

Were it not for the Deaf wards/branches and the appropriate communicative technique for the teaching of the gospel, the number of deaf membership would in all probability remain relatively small. The total deaf congregation mushroomed in the 1970s, thanks to the creation of the missionary program for the deaf in response to the
growing desire to convert deaf people and the Mormon belief in giving people an equal chance for salvation. Trained missionaries, called to serve the deaf mission, utilize sign language, Six Discussions and visual aids, ideal for attracting deaf investigators, who are interested in possible conversion to Mormonism. In turn, these deaf converts embark on their mission out of a desire to educate their people about the gospel and to learn more about the religion.

Theologically, the Mormon church proves to be attractive for deaf members for various reasons. Primarily, the gospel, taught in sign language, seems to be easy for the deaf to grasp. The narrative of Joseph Smith and his visions, normally retold in videotapes and other visual aids, has a lasting impact on many of the members, for the deaf can easily identify themselves with Smith. Deaf people sense a similar experience in the area of struggling and battling against oppression and prejudice.

The life story of a typical deaf person revolves around deafness. Oftentimes, deaf children in hearing families perceive themselves as different and abnormal. Also, deaf offspring of deaf parents wonder why the rest of the world can hear and they cannot. So when they encounter Mormonism, which seems to provide fundamental answers for their hearing loss, they flock to the church to study more about their purpose and to give themselves a positive outlook on
deafness. Further, every Mormon receives a patriarchal blessing, which spiritually gives answers about existence and some predictions of the earthly future. Through this type of blessing, many deaf feel reassured about their deafness and usefulness on earth.

Earthly life calls for "trial and error," and these deaf Mormons take a liking to the doctrine that human beings live on earth to learn from their mistakes and to become better individuals. Jesus Christ's atonement plays a significant role in the doctrine of "trial and error," for forgiveness of one's sins makes room for deaf people to improve themselves through experience. Also, atonement provides the deaf a means to secure himself/herself a place in the Heavens, preferably in the Celestial Kingdom, where he/she can dwell with Heavenly Father and His Son, and rejoin his/her family.

Family life, of huge importance in the Mormon tenets, offers deaf persons a sense of belonging and warmth. These people have trouble envisioning life, as well as life after death, without their family members. Separation through death appears to inflict special suffering among deaf people, perhaps because they are denied the usual grieving interactions. Many grieve continuously over the deaths of their parents, grandparents, and siblings until they acquire the concept of family sealing through the Mormon religion. Family bonding for eternity, made possible in a temple
ceremony, provides the deaf with a new meaning of life, and hope for eternal happiness and harmonious unity with their family.

Last but not the least, the appearance of truth in the Mormon doctrine draws deaf persons to the LDS church. The church lays down tangible evidences for its members to observe. Such proofs include the Standard Works, LDS temples, the prophet's on-going revelations with the Lord, restoration of priesthood keys, and the Holy Spirit inspiration. This inspiration, felt by church members, signifies truth, and many bear their testimony based on it, among other factors. Therefore, the seeming truthfulness in the Mormon church is a paramount aspect in the deaf's church membership.

On the whole, the deaf Mormon experience manifests the significance of the LDS tenets in terms of personal growth. The Mormon doctrines help the deaf grow spiritually and intellectually through their active membership in Deaf wards/branches and the existence of the missionary program for the deaf. However, deaf Mormons in the late 1880s and early 1900s need to be studied for their religious experience with the LDS church.

Those deaf individuals, during the eras of Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, and Joseph Fielding Smith, do not share the same advantage as the deaf today. The Mormon church of an earlier day lacked the missionary program for
the deaf, interpreting service, and Deaf wards/branches. How did those deaf members learn about the gospel without special accommodations? Why did they join the church in the first place? What were their calling opportunities if any? Did they participate in the task of making the Great Basin their home? Did they practice plural marriage? The Mormon church archives possess abundant documents pertaining to the experiences of early deaf members. Furthermore, relatives, deaf and hearing, can be used as important oral history sources for accumulating more data. These resources suggest reliable primary sources for future research.

In retrospect, deaf Mormons today enjoy nearly equal opportunities for full participation in the practices, beliefs, and rites of Mormonism through certain factors. It may be highly probable that should the deaf continue to experience discrimination within the church hierarchy, other than Deaf wards/branches, they will become more assertive in removing prejudice to obtain callings for higher positions and to partake of all types of activities without cultural obstruction. Despite some limitations, the use of American Sign Language in sundry church programs is a fundamental element in the success of the Mormons among deaf people. Communication brings two groups of people together. The bridging of two worlds eventually leads to a better understanding of each other's needs. Well-informed Mormons, in turn, reinforce the thought in the formation of essential
conditions for the deaf, such as interpreting services, Deaf wards/branches, and the missionary program for the deaf. Such programs aid in the deaf's complete theological acquisition. Nonetheless, the dominant attraction for deaf Mormons concerns the intense sense of community offered through church activities. Of much less importance to the deaf are points of complex Mormon theology. However, ultimately, through these offerings, deaf Mormons receive substantial emotional, intellectual, and spiritual fulfillment in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
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Articles


The interviews conducted as part of this thesis were directed by Dr. Steve Siporin, Professor of History and English at Utah State University, Logan. Siporin suggested that I work from within the community and allow my contacts to develop my list of informants. Accordingly, I used two different types of methodology. For some informants, I scheduled my first interview and then asked this informant who else I might talk to about my subject. For other informants, I visited three Deaf wards/branches in Utah, through invitation of my Mormon acquaintances, who introduced me to other deaf Mormons. I, in turn, made interview appointments with these informants. This proved an effective approach and led me to many fascinating deaf Latter-day Saints of diverse backgrounds.

Siporin also suggested that the format of the interviews come from the informants themselves. In other words, I did not use a strict questionnaire but simply identified my area of interest and allowed the informants to respond with the information they thought pertinent. Again, this worked well, and prevented me from imposing a false structure to the respondents information.

At the beginning of each interview, I told the informant my purpose for interviewing them and asked each one to sign a release form that would allow me to use the
information obtained. Each person signed the form with full knowledge of how the material would be used.

During the interview, I used a videotape camera to record the conversation between me and my informant. This became a fine technique for recording the interview with deaf subjects, for they communicated in sign language, which was primarily a visual language.

Overall, the system worked well in that I was not after precise statistical data but perceptions held by the deaf Mormons I interviewed.