

SignWriting Used at Shores Deaf Church in Michigan

by Reverend Ronald H. Dettloff

At the Shores Deaf Church, SignWriting is an integral part of our mission. Presently we use SignWriting in almost every area of our ministry. Every Sunday we use SignWriting to project our Scripture text for the day and volunteers read the signs. Often we give prizes out to the best readers. All our pass-out papers include SignWriting.



Photo Above: Arthur, a Deaf congregation member, uses the [SignPuddle](#) program on the web to find English words, and to read the equivalent translation in American Sign Language, written in SignWriting.

We translate the English Bible passages into American Sign Language, typed in SignWriting, using our computers at the church. In the past, we used the SignWriter DOS computer program to create our documents:

SignWriter DOS

<http://www.SignWriting.org/forums/software/sw44>

<http://www.SignWriting.org/library>

Now we are using SignPuddle on the web to create our Bible translations:

SignPuddle for American Sign Language

<http://signbank.org/signpuddle/sgn-US/index.php>

Once the documents are created, we project the documents in SignWriting through Power Point, Microsoft Word, and PDF files. PDF files have the unique ability to show the gloss when the cursor is passed over the sign. All of our Bible documents are posted on the web, free for anyone to download, made possible by webmaster Jerry Spillman, who created the SignBible web site for us:

SignBible Web Site

<http://www.cyberjer.com/signbib/>

In our classes, we teach people how to read scripture in SignWriting, how to write the signs, and we teach English glosses so that eventually students can use SignPuddle.

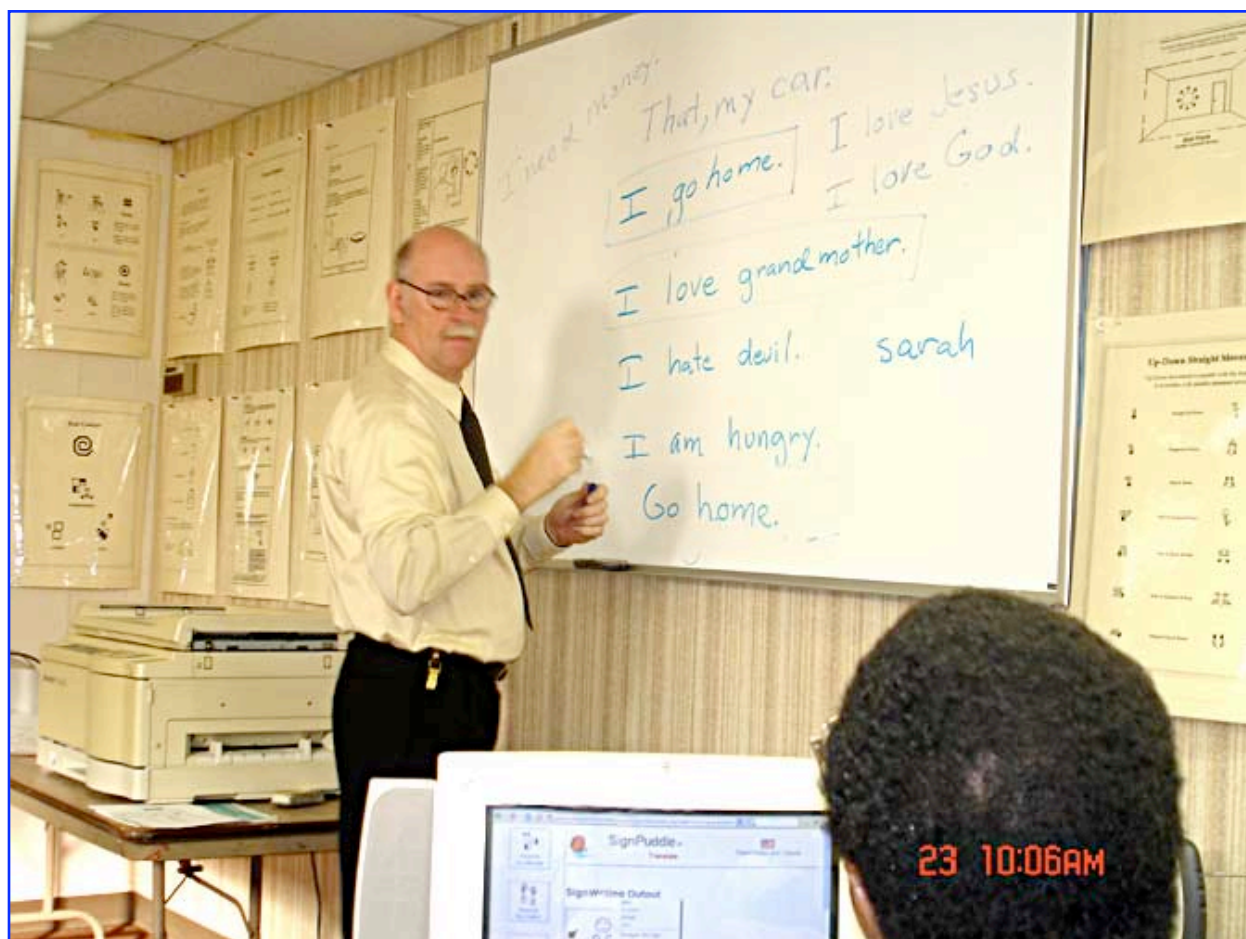


Photo above: Reverend Dettloff at the board, is teaching Bible passages in English, while a Deaf student at the computer uses the SignPuddle program on the web (<http://www.SignBank.org/signpuddle/sgn-US>) to find the translation of the words from English into American Sign Language written in SignWriting. For some Deaf students, this is the first time they have been able to read Bible passages.

SignWriting Used in Bible Study

Our congregation consists of Deaf people with different levels of education. Those Deaf people who are college educated have opened up their minds to the possibilities of SignWriting, and have allowed me to use it on every level, especially for those Deaf members who do not read and write English well. Around a third of the congregation has some trouble reading the Bible in English. For them, SignWriting is a blessing.

We have a special class in which we use SignWriting to teach students how to read the Bible in English. We use SignWriting first and then we move over to English. We have had great success with this, especially with students considered illiterate or low functioning. In fact, I believe a system of writing that does not require a college degree is a much more useful system. We find it much easier to teach the Bible when we do not have to teach English first.

We are currently praying that God will supply us with some helpers in our translating of the Bible into SignWriting. Anyone considering assisting us in this worthy project must meet the following requirements: Born again Christian, knowledge of Scripture and Christian Theology, formal training in ASL and English, and a love for the Deaf. We will teach you SignWriting.

God bless,
Pastor Ronald Dettloff

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SignWriting Web Site
<http://signwriting.org/>

SignPuddle for American Sign Language
<http://signbank.org/signpuddle/sgn-US/index.php>

About the Author: Reverend Ronald H. Dettloff is an ordained minister with the Assemblies of God and has worked full time in Deaf ministry since 1987. He has earned degrees from Central Bible College, Macomb Community College, and has also earned a certificate in Sign Language Studies from Madonna University. Currently, he is working on translating the entire Bible into SignWriting.

A joyful noise from Shores Deaf Church

Pastor works on the cutting edge

BY ANDREA K. FARMER
FREE PRESS SPECIAL WRITER

January 24, 2006

The Rev. Ronald Dettloff helped found the Shores Deaf Church in 1987 to spread the word of God in a language that hearing-impaired people could understand.

What he didn't foresee was how that language would change in the next 20 years.

What sets the St. Clair Shores church apart from the 10 or so other deaf churches in metro Detroit is the extent to which it uses SignWriting, a series of printed symbols that represent signed languages, in this case American Sign Language.

Through use of a computer software program, Dettloff is working to translate the entire Bible into SignWriting. The church began using it about six years ago.

"We're very successful with teaching people through SignWriting," Dettloff said. "We're the only church in the world that translates the Bible to SignWriting."

During services, Dettloff speaks and signs simultaneously. He uses the SignWriting on a projector in lectures at the church throughout the week.

"Seeing people understand and get to know God," said Dettloff, 56, who lives in St. Clair Shores. "That is the most rewarding thing."

Dettloff, who began studying sign language in college, said he felt a calling to start a church for deaf people. But it wasn't until after he was a pastor at the Shores church that he researched his family tree -- he was adopted -- and discovered one of his grandfathers was deaf.

Christian churchgoers come from as far as Romeo to attend services at the Shores church, an Assembly of God affiliate at 10 Mile and Harper. The church, which has about 50 parishioners, uses a bus to pick up those who don't have rides to the Sunday service.

Annette Usher, 44, has been attending the Shores church for more than three years. Although Usher also worships at other parishes with her family, she has grown fond of the Shores services.

"I like to sit and pray in sign language so I can worship God myself," said Usher, who lives in Detroit. "At the hearing church, I can't understand the service because there is no interpreter."

Through the church, parishioners can participate in games, movie nights and an annual trip to FaHoLo deaf family camp in Grass Lake.

After the Sunday service, the church hosts a meal and social for all attendees.



The Rev. Ronald Dettloff uses sign language in a hymn Sunday at the Shores Deaf Church in St. Clair Shores. Dettloff, 56, is not hearing impaired, but studied sign language in college and helped found the church in 1987. (JERRY S. MENDOZA/Special to the Free Press)

For some, like St. Clair Shores resident Bob Doyle, 63, church-related activities are the main instances of social interaction during the week. Doyle is deaf and partially blind.

"We have a great time," he said. "It's a wonderful way to get out and meet new people."

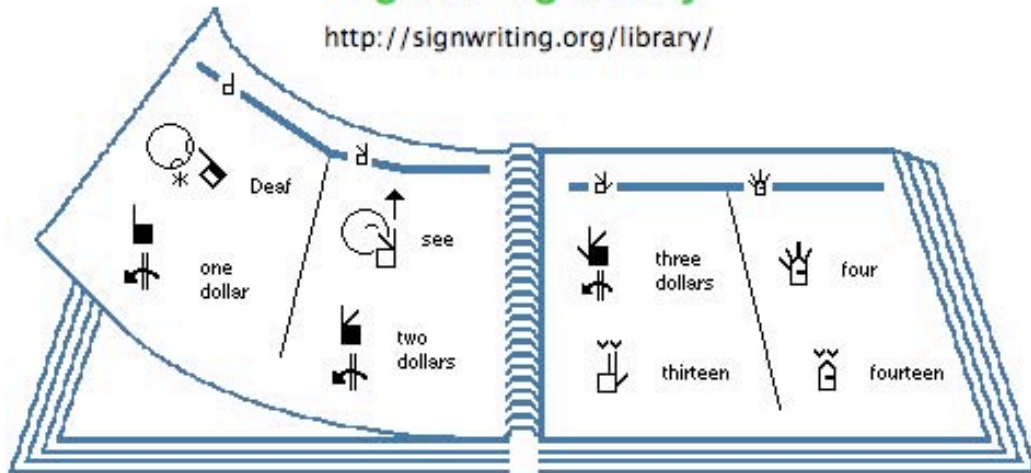
Clinton Township resident Nicole McReynolds, 18, has met many new friends through the church, including her boyfriend, Clinton Township resident Ken Benando, 32.

"In the fellowship, there are many different people to meet and we've all come to worship God," McReynolds said.

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SignWriting Library

<http://signwriting.org/library/>



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