

Questions & Answers about Sign Language Interpreters

Who is a sign language interpreter?

A person who is able to convey spoken language in sign language and to convey sign language in spoken language.

- In PA, a “qualified” interpreter must be certified by a national body and must register with the PA Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- PA Exemption: *Worship service* conducted by a religious entity and *services for educational purposes* for a religious entity or religiously-affiliated school...are exempt from having a certified/registered interpreter.

What about volunteer interpreters?

The diocese has several regularly interpreted Sunday Masses, interpreted by volunteers. Most of these volunteers are not available for weekday liturgies. Under PA law, volunteers can only be used for liturgies or religious education activities. It should be remembered that volunteer interpreters may not have the skills to adequately understand and communicate with a deaf individual. Persons who have “taken a sign language class” should never be used as interpreters.

What is the cost for a certified/registered interpreter?

In the geographic area covered by the Diocese of Harrisburg, the current rate per hour for interpreters is \$50-\$60 per hour. There is usually a 2-hour minimum and charges accrue door to door from the interpreters home.

How do I find a certified/registered interpreter?

Some interpreters can be contracted privately. The majority are affiliated with one of several “interpreter referral” agencies throughout central PA. The diocesan Office of Ministry with People with Disabilities has a list of private interpreters and interpreter referral agencies. The office also maintains a small list of volunteer interpreters, who may only ask to be reimbursed for mileage. As was noted previously, most volunteer interpreters are not available during weekdays.

Must the interpreter be Catholic?

In theory, certified/registered interpreters should be able to interpret in any setting. In practice, there are different signs used in different religious denominations. Most non-Catholic interpreters are not comfortable interpreting Catholic liturgies. In the diocese of Harrisburg, we have few Catholic interpreters.

For more information contact: Office of Ministry with People with Disabilities at (717) 657-4804, Ext. 322 or 317 or vduncan@hbgdiocese.org.