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Series: LINK

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LINK TO CHURCH

One Sunday, I went to a small town church. As I arrived, I noticed a board outside the church building. There was a message on the board. The message said,

Ch __ ch What's missing?

What letters are missing? U and R. This means "you are." Like many Deaf people, I have a pager and I enjoy sending and receiving messages. Often I use the initials UR to abbreviate "you are." Many people are missing church. Many Deaf people do not go to church. Many Deaf people are not linked to church. I have seen Deaf people sign:

- Church is boring.
- I don't like church.
- I don't like one person who goes to church. Because they don't like that person, they don't go to church.
- I don't understand what is happening in church.
- Why should I go to church?

Those are sad, discouraging remarks. However, if we ask another group of people for their remarks about church, we would get completely different answers. Who are these people? They were Christians who were a part of the "early church." This "early church" was a gathering of Christians who met around 30 A.D. (after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven). Their church was exciting. This church is a wonderful model of how God designed and intended the church to be. Let's take a look at this "early church" in Acts 2:40-47 from *The Bible: American Sign Language Translation*:

"With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted this message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in

their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

WOW! What an amazing church. What an exciting church. Now, when I sign the word "church" I am not referring to a building. When I sign the word "church" I am talking about a gathering of people who worship God together. The Greek word Jesus used for church is ekklesia. The word ekklesia means "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly."

So, church means a gathering of Christians who are called to assemble (meet together) for worship, serving, and loving God. As we have seen, Acts 2:42-47 is a wonderful model of Christians meeting together. What did they do linked together as a church? They did many exciting things and many exciting things happened:

- Devoted themselves
- Learned from apostles' teaching
- Fellowship
- Breaking of bread (communion or Lord's Supper)
- Prayer
- Everyone was filled with awe
- Miracles happened
- Gave to others
- Met together at the temple courts
- Met together in their homes
- Ate together
- Had glad and sincere hearts
- Praised God
- People respected them

Many exciting things happened when the "early church" came together. The Christians in those days were linked to a wonderful church (gathering). What happened as a result? The last part of our Bible story today says, *"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*

You see...there are many Deaf churches and ministries for the Deaf across the United States. Some are doing great things for God. However, if we all truly followed the example of the "early church", I believe more Deaf people would be linked to Jesus and linked to church. How may this happen? Let's be:

- More devoted
- Learning and teaching more
- Spending more time in fellowship
- Breaking bread together (remembering Jesus often)
- Praying more
- Filled with awe of what God is doing

- Sharing God's miracles and wondrous work
- Sharing with each other more
- Meeting more often (not just on Sundays, but during the week, too)
- Eating together (potlucks)
- Showing glad and sincere (honest) hearts
- Praising God

Don't you want to be linked to an exciting church (gathering of Christians) like the early church? I believe it's still possible today. I've witnessed this. Christ's Church of the Deaf (CCD) in Council Bluffs, Iowa, is a great example. Several years ago, CCD was a small, struggling church. The highest number of people that would show up was 5 or 6, including my wife and me. We only met on Sunday morning. We did not spend a lot of time in fellowship. We didn't devote ourselves enough to prayer. We rarely ate together. It was not a very exciting church.

Then, a few years ago, a husband and wife (and their children) became involved and committed to leading CCD. The husband added a weekly Thursday night Bible study. They provided more opportunities for fellowship. More potlucks are held on Sundays after worship services. Once in a while, during Thursday night Bible studies, cookouts with hamburgers and hotdogs are held. During church services on Sunday mornings, time is spent in sincere praise and prayer. As a result of an increase in meeting, prayer, fellowship, and breaking bread together, God has truly blessed CCD. Now, the average attendance at CCD is 60 to 70 people on Sunday mornings. God has blessed CCD because of its increased motivation and commitment to following and serving Jesus.

You can experience the same. But, it begins with each one of us. For each one of us, it means becoming devoted. It means spending more time with other Christians. It means learning and teaching. It means more time in prayer. It means being willing to follow and serve Jesus just like the early Christians in Acts and members of Christ's Church of the Deaf in Council Bluffs.

Let's do it...link to a church (gathering of Christians), and may God bring others to link to Jesus and link to your church, too. May God bless your church with more members.

Let's pray.



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This printed manuscript is the English translation of a sermon presented in American Sign Language.

The sermon may be viewed at www.linkasl.com. LINK is a ministry of Deaf Missions.

All printed scripture is taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

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