

ASL, Realtime, and Caption Scrolling – a very effective set-up!

When Arnie Altman of Henderson, Nevada, first contacted me, he e-mailed an amazing photograph that said it all. It showed a very effective set-up, and I wanted to learn more! Combining ASL and realtime covers a wide range of hearing loss. And, to make this ministry even more effective, when there is no realtime, they use caption scrolling.

Arnie coordinated this article by asking a series of questions to each one on this most amazing team, and the following is what we hope will inspire and motivate you to provide CART/captioning for a church in your area.

-- Pat Gardiner

***by Arnie Altman, President, Rainbow Multi-Media Productions, Inc.
and Volunteer Coordinator For HIM – Central Christian Church***

I am not a Certified Court Reporter, just a parent of 5 children ... the oldest two are deaf. My wife, Corrine, and I helped start a ministry for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired at Central Christian Church in Henderson, Nevada. We call it “For HIM” and, aside from the obvious, it also means for Hearing Impaired Ministry.

We started the ministry with ASL and, in December of 2003, we added realtime captioning/CART. This was a real blessing to us because our children, while deaf, are not totally relying on ASL, as they were brought up Auditory Oral. As children, they were fitted with hearing aids and now they have the Cochlear Implant. They are very visual, good readers, and are very familiar with closed captioning from TV, movies, and school where captioned videotapes were common. They also have used CART for many situations.

Let me first paint a picture of Central Christian Church. Our church services are held in a theater style auditorium and would probably be considered very large from your typical church center. Our seating capacity is for 3500 plus, with two video projection screens on each side. The entire congregation, including the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, can view the video screens from their seats. A production department actually projects live video, worship song lyrics, and special produced video presentations.

The Deaf and Hearing Impaired have a section with elevated seating where they can view everything. Our For HIM Team, and needed equipment, is actually in that same area, at the floor level. For the realtime or the scrolled message, we have a Smart Board. It's a 61-inch Big Screen Monitor that we hook to the court reporter's machine for the realtime captioning or to the laptop, if the message is being scrolled. There is seating to one side of the monitor for the reporter or person caption scrolling. The ASL Interpreter stands near the monitor and is lit by a special light, so the Deaf, relying on ASL, can see well.

We felt God's hand on this from the start. The Smart Board technology that we currently use came from Manny Sousa of Sousa Court Reporters with offices in Nevada and Southern California. He had called our photography / videography business, inquiring

about us providing professional services for his company's Christmas party. As Corrine and Manny began to talk, she found out that a deaf aunt near Brazil, where I had just returned from a mission, raised him. As Corrine shared about the hearing impaired ministry and the research we were making into realtime, Manny told her about the Smart Board. We booked the party and found a way to project realtime in the same call.

Our very first service with the Smart Board was Christmas of 2003. I had randomly sent out emails to people who are deaf in the Las Vegas Valley. One of the emails went to a deaf pastor of a Deaf Church. Through an Interpreter, he explained that in the near future he would be retiring and needed a place to shepherd his deaf congregation. He was very encouraged by what he saw us offering to the deaf community. Today, he is retired and many from his congregation now sit in the For HIM section. . We have seen an increase from one to five deaf people each Sunday, to now twenty-five to thirty.

Vicki Turner, CCR, RMR, CRR, and Lisa Makowski were the first two reporters to help get us off the ground back in 2003 and our team has grown to include Stephanie Ruhland, CCR, RPR, RMR, along with several students from the court reporting program at Las Vegas College, whose director just happened to see us in action one Sunday. Catie Rojas, a certified interpreter and owner of Communication Accessing Network, heads and schedules the ASL interpreters.

The ministry is unique in that our skilled people work side-by-side as a team, providing both realtime or a scrolled message and ASL. The Interpreter uses ASL for the entire service and the court reporter writes all that is said, including the message, scriptures, dramas, announcements, etcetera. Those times when realtime is not possible, we have trained people to scroll the message through a laptop computer, which helps provide a close script of the message. At those particular Sunday services, the Pastor actually provides to us, as a Word DOC, the message he has prepared. His message is then uploaded to the laptop, where it can be scrolled and projected through the Smart Board.

In all situations, during the worship songs, we are able to switch the Smart Board to a feed that allows us to project the lyrics and video that is being seen on the larger screens, so that those sitting in the Deaf/Hearing Impaired section have a close-up view. The video and lyrics have been a tremendous benefit to the Deaf and Hearing Impaired as they can actually see and understand the words to the songs while experiencing the “live” video feed.

Aside from the benefit this ministry has provided to so many of the Deaf Community, we have plans of expanding our outreach to the many who are hearing impaired, which includes many senior citizens and those with losses that have them in hearing aids. I’m certain anyone you know who wears a hearing aid or cochlear implant will tell you that, in a large setting, hearing clearly everything that is being said is next to impossible. This, of course, makes CART a preferred option, once they have been given the opportunity to experience it.

We are by no means fully there. We also know that, as technology continues to improve in this area, we will use it to improve the ways to bring The Word to all people. One of our immediate goals is to obtain and use software that will allow us to show what is being projected, such as live video, with what is being written by our court reporter. We have many dreams and visions for what God may want to do with this ministry to touch the Deaf and Hearing Impaired in Las Vegas and throughout the world.

I told you in the beginning that I have five children and two are deaf. I also mentioned that the two that are deaf were brought up on captioning. Our TV is always turned to the captioning mode. Any program or video since our oldest two were children -- they are now 21 and 19 years old -- we have watched with captioning. Our two deaf children are better writers, readers, and communicators because of captioning. Guess who also excels in reading and writing? I'm sure you already know... that's right! Our 17, 15, and 12 year olds have also benefited. Can you imagine, when realtime captioning becomes more common, -- and it will -- how many more will benefit from any church service by seeing that which is written?

I, for one, pray that more people step forward that have the talents and skills to write as Certified Court Reporters. I dream of the day when the Deaf, Hearing Impaired, senior citizens, older and younger alike, have realtime captioning to rely on for every church service.

I'd like to share some thoughts from the For HIM Team:

Stephanie Ruhland is a Certified Court Reporter that has been dedicated to the ministry, For HIM, since they moved the Smart Board Unit into the church. Many are amazed at her speed and accuracy. She fully understands her call to serve and we feel blessed to have her along with our entire team. She writes:

We all have gifts for a reason. We are called upon to spread the Word and I am thrilled to be able to serve in being a part of a team that does that and doing my part in getting the message out there.

Being that the Pastor speaks so fast, I would say the most challenging thing has been dropping words, phrases, sometimes a sentence, and thinking about what I already have displayed on the screen and trying to make it read clearly or substituting a word if I know a particular word won't be in my dictionary. But I have gotten more comfortable with also letting it go, throwing in dashes and picking up anew.

I often reflect back on the story Corrine, Arnie's wife, told me about a gentleman that attended a service I was providing CART for and he said it's usually like taking him to a movie theater and putting his back to the screen and then asking him to tell you what the movie was about, but that day at our service he said it was like now he is facing the screen and can tell you what it's about. That is such an inspiration to me. I often have to remind myself as I'm "dropping words" that it's still more than they would have, had I not provided my services.

I love working in conjunction with an ASL interpreter, and their hands easily mesmerize me.

***Clara Hanson** is a Director at Las Vegas College for the court reporting program. She has been very supportive and continues to encourage students to understand the possibilities that CART can provide. We are on a new frontier and getting students to understand that possibilities are endless is so important. Clara says:*

What are the chances that realtime and ASL would come together at the very church and very same service that I just so happen to attend? Las Vegas College is seeking a grant to begin offering captioning and CART in conjunction with its court-reporting program. The need for this service is evident, and it would be nice to have the funds to be able to provide the tools and instruction necessary to accomplish this goal.

Many students are interested in learning captioning. It's a pleasure to see the excitement in a student's face when they learn of the opportunity to see captioning in action at Central Christian Church and to have the opportunity to speak with those who provide the service.

Because the audience consists of some who prefer ASL and some who prefer captioning, the "Team Concept" in this type of setting is wonderful. Scrolling the service script is a great idea when live captioning is not available.

***Lilien Long** is a court reporting student. At present she is not writing to speed. She often sits with her machine and builds her dictionary, as she also practices her skills. She has helped, many times, transcribe non-captioned DVDs / videotapes that are used for small groups where the deaf attend. She writes:*

Being able to provide the deaf and hard-of-hearing an opportunity to feel included has been a wonderful opportunity for personal growth. It's been rewarding to help others who otherwise wouldn't be informed while meeting people with different perspectives from all walks of life.

***Meredith Aurs** is one of our ASL Interpreters. She is very skilled and passionate at serving. She shares the following:*

I was introduced to Central Christian's ministry by Catie Rojas, Central's Lead Interpreter. I have communicated with many of the deaf and they love the options of having both a realtime transcription and interpreter. It is a wonderful team of options. When I go to a conference with both, I find myself being drawn to the bi-modal input.

With the exception of large conferences/multi-organizational events, this is the first church I have seen make the kind of commitment Central has made to serve the various needs of this ministry. On a weekly basis, captioning and interpreting can actually

supplement each other, benefiting all members of a congregation (including many of the hearing members).

Corrine Altman, my wife, is so passionate for the deaf and for the Word. She helped organize the ministry program from its concept and was very instrumental in bringing in realtime captioning. In a last-resort situation, where we do not have a certified writer, she has learned to scroll. Corrine writes:

After scrolling the message I witnessed and heard a Hearing Impaired member go up to Pastor Jud Wilhite and thank him for what Central offers. He said that he had lost interest in church because he could not hear in an auditorium setting. Now, with what Central Christian is offering, he is so excited! He believes he understands 80-85% more because of the realtime or scrolled message.

This is a letter from Vicki Turner, who is on the Board of Directors of the Nevada Court Reporters Association serving as the Vice President for the south division. Vicki has provided realtime captioning at Central Christian Church and helped in the very beginning to get the ministry started.

Captioning/CART has been one of the most fulfilling endeavors, both personally and professionally, I have ever undertaken. The ability to use our skills in such a positive manner and to open the world to so many individuals has enriched my life enormously. **I have met such kind and loving people and have received a priceless education in the beauty of the human spirit.**

I love variety in my life, and a combination of CART and court reporting has granted me this unique opportunity in my career. The more I caption, the more I realize the infinite possibilities where this service can be utilized. I have captioned high school and university classes, Broadway shows, seminars and workshops, meetings, and doctor's appointments. We are only limited by our imagination.

What a blessing it is to have chosen a career that affords us this amazing opportunity, if we don't let our fear or insecurities stop us.

To contact Arnie Altman directly, please e-mail him at: pa333ma@earthlink.net and/ or for more information on providing CART/captioning for a church, go to www.captioningtheword.com.