



Deaf Missions
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

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Hearing Congregations Working With Deaf People

Principles.....	2
Patience.....	2
An Effective Mission.....	2
Where to Begin.....	3
Deaf Ministry Committee.....	4
Finding Deaf People.....	4
Christian Education.....	4
Vacation Bible School.....	5
Training Teachers.....	5
Visual Aids.....	5
Worship Services (variations with Deaf people).....	6
Interpreters.....	7
Finding Interpreters.....	7
Training Interpreters.....	8
Ongoing Training & Networking For Church Interpreters.....	8
How many interpreters?.....	8
Compensating the interpreter.....	9
Responsibilities of the interpreter.....	9
Responsibilities of the pastor and ministry team.....	11
Service Preparation.....	11
Sermon Preparation.....	11
Sermon Delivery.....	11
Interpreted Bible Studies.....	11
Logistics.....	12
Pastoral Care.....	12
Utilizing technology.....	13
Online Resources.....	13

Principles

When a congregation desires to begin missions with Deaf individuals, they need to remember that the success of that mission outreach will depend on the following factors:

1. The congregation should commit itself to a comprehensive mission process which includes at least: worship, Bible study, leadership training, and crisis pastoral counseling.
2. The official commitment of the congregation (this will be revealed by their priorities expressed in use of pastor's time, budget, etc.).
3. The involvement of the pastor.
4. The commitment to continuity (regularly providing the service irrespective of early response).
5. The allocation of space (where the interpreter stands, the use of a meeting room, etc.).
6. The amount of involvement of Deaf people in the normal activities of the congregation (serving on committees/boards, participating in fellowship events, etc.).

Patience

Many religious groups have attempted to minister to Deaf people. They have often emphasized the fellowship and social ministry aspects of ministry. They have also tended to work for a period to time and then give up.

Deaf people feel that many people are not really interested in being their friends and sharing Jesus with them. If you want to begin a mission with Deaf people, commit yourself to a long process which will have slow growth. Make a long-term commitment.

There will be times of discouragement as the mission grows very slowly, remember the joy (in heaven) of one sinner who turns to Jesus. Remember also that Jesus only had a small group after three + years of mission activity.

An Effective Mission

An effective mission within an interpreted setting must have four major components:

1. Plan appropriate small group opportunities for *Bible study*. These may be Sunday School classes or Bible study groups. Part of the purpose of the groups is to provide opportunities for Deaf people to share, care, love, grow in faith, and bring friends to become involved. Perhaps the interpreter can lead the group. A trained Deaf person will be a better leader.
2. Provide for regular *cultural gatherings* where Deaf people may meet with other Deaf people using sign language for Bible study, worship, fellowship and leadership training. These might happen quarterly or more often. Encourage your members to affiliate themselves with

the appropriate state, district, or regional groups of I.L.D.A. (the International Lutheran Deaf Association) so that they can regularly serve God with other Deaf people.

3. Program *regular interpreted worship services* for the Deaf members. (Provide FM or infrared amplification equipment for the hard-of-hearing.) It is fairly easy for an interpreter to mix law and gospel. The more they have prepared in advance, the better they will convey your words.
4. Some Deaf people greatly need *Christian Pastoral Counseling* in times of crisis. If the Pastor can not comfortably sign and understand signs, then there are several alternatives. One is to communicate by writing, a slow method, but far better than nothing. Another is to use an interpreter. It is often helpful to have a different interpreter serve rather than the worship interpreter so that private stories are not accidentally told. (See page 12 for guidelines for utilizing an interpreter in pastoral care settings.)

Where to Begin

Experience has shown that there are three elements which are essential to the launching of a deaf ministry in a hearing church.

1. There must be at least one Deaf family or individual who seeks the Christian fellowship and ministry of the local congregation.
2. The senior pastor must lead with his unhesitating support and commitment for Deaf ministry in his congregation.
3. The congregation needs to have at least one person who is competent to serve in Deaf ministry (interpreter, teacher, certified court recorder with CART equipment).

The following sequence can be an effective way to begin missions with Deaf people.

1. Establish Christian education programs for Deaf individuals
 - a. Religious education classes for children and youth (VBS, Sunday school, midweek after school programs).
 - b. Bible study classes for youth and adults.
2. Train and equip Deaf leaders to:
 - a. share Jesus Christ.
 - b. train other Deaf people to also share Jesus.
 - c. function as a caring elder.
3. Provide regular interpreted services for Deaf worshipers.
4. Offer Sign Language classes to hearing members of the congregation and to the community.

Deaf Ministry Committee

A congregation that has an ongoing ministry to Deaf people needs to have a Deaf ministry committee, consisting of Deaf leaders in the congregation, a congregational officer, one of the interpreters, and, ideally, a member of the pastoral staff.

This committee needs to meet periodically (monthly is best), to address issues relating to policies, activities, concerns, outreach, and staffing as they pertain to the church's ministry among Deaf people.

It is important to utilize an interpreter for the meeting *other than the interpreter who serves on the committee*. It is very difficult (and a violation of the interpreter's Code of Professional Conduct) to interpret for a meeting and to participate at the same time.

Deaf leadership is vital to the success of any deaf ministry. The pastor should identify those among the Deaf members who are gifted as servant-leaders, and to train them to serve in the church's ministry. The congregation would do well to have a Deaf member serving on the board of elders.

Finding Deaf People

1. Ask the children in Sunday School if they know any Deaf (or any other handicapped) people. They will. Learn and record the names of the people they know. Invite them. Witness to them. Share Jesus with them.
2. Offer a Vacation Bible School, day camp, or camp for Deaf people in the late summer. (Parents are often willing to share their Deaf child by then.)
3. Advertise in publications that serve the local Deaf community.
4. Ask each known Deaf member or friend for the names of their Deaf friends.
5. Volunteer in service programs that reach Deaf clients (tutoring in ESL/ASL classes for Deaf immigrants, volunteering in a Deaf Senior Citizens center, assisting in public/school library programs for Deaf children). This kind of community service not only enables members of the Deaf ministry team to meet Deaf people; it also earns the church a reputation in showing that it cares through its service.

Christian Education

Often congregations begin with plans for an interpreted worship which is fairly complex and difficult to set up. It is somewhat easier to set up a Christian education program for the Deaf people, such as a Bible class or Sunday School class.

When implementing a midweek after-school program for deaf children, you can reach many unchurched Deaf children by providing their transportation.

Vacation Bible School

Summer VBS offers special opportunities to reach unchurched Deaf children. Many parents are looking for suitable diversions for their deaf children, and parents tend to be more willing to make a short-term commitment to have their children participate in a one- or two-week session.

When you schedule your VBS program, you can have a class for Deaf children during the story-telling portion of the lesson, and then mainstream the Deaf students for crafts, play, and snacks. Or if your VBS uses activity centers with classes rotating among the centers, use a person skilled in Sign as your story teller.

Music time gives everyone an opportunity to learn a bit of Sign Language.

Recruit high school students who may know even a little sign to serve as assistants, giving them opportunity to further their communication skills. They may be your future interpreters.

Training Teachers

It is important the teachers learn to make every lesson visual. They should prepare at least three different ways to visualize every Bible Story. There should be a clear application to life that can be *visualized*.

To make the story simpler use the "6 X 6" rule. Take a Bible story and rewrite it in 6 sentences of no more than 6 words each. The sixth sentence is the application sentence. They should then use that summary story to teach the lesson explaining and amplifying it.

Visual Aids

It is important that you use a variety of visual aids when presenting ideas to Deaf people. You should use a minimum of three different visual aids, one from each of three different categories.

Categories of visual aids:

1. Two dimensional
 - a. pictures (prints or projected).
 - b. film strips.
 - c. work sheets.
 - d. maps.
2. Three dimensional
 - a. models.
 - b. puppets.
 - c. dioramas.
3. Action
 - a. videos.
 - b. movies.
 - c. a drama

Always have variety in visual aids. Do not use the same type of visual aid week after week.

Worship Services (variations with Deaf people)

1. The following are **variables** which influence decisions regarding services for Deaf people:
 - a. **Place** (*separated, in, near, with*)
 - b. **Frequency** (*weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly*)
 - c. **Leader** (*Hearing pastor with interpreter, full-time Deaf pastor, part-time Deaf pastor, lay leader*)
 - d. **Number of Deaf people.** The goal is to provide weekly worship services for each Deaf member. (*The number of Deaf people involved in worship may lead to decisions about the frequency of services.*)
 - e. **Incidence of and degree of deafness.** (*An individual who has more remaining hearing or a later incidence of deafness will probably prefer worship with hearing people. An individual who was born Deaf will probably prefer worship in a separated setting.*)
 - f. **Geography.** (*We desire to provide worship opportunities for Deaf members that are as convenient in terms of driving time and distance as the opportunities provided their hearing peers.*)

2. The following are examples of various models and methods for a hearing congregation to host a deaf ministry. The method/model chosen depends on the needs of the Deaf people who are participating in the church's fellowship, and on the availability of human resources to serve and to lead in the church's Deaf ministry. (Please consult "Models of Deaf Ministry," a companion to this document, for a brief description of each model, with respective advantages, disadvantages, and precautions for each model.)
 - a. Hearing signer-led Bible study with devotion.
 - b. Deaf signer-led Bible study with devotion.
 - c. Interpreted service with worshiper personally reading a copy of the pastor's sermon.
 - d. Interpreted service with a lay Deaf person signing the pastor's sermon.
 - e. Interpreted service with video taped sermon.
 - f. Interpreted service with an interpreted sermon.
 - g. Real-Time Captioning provided in a hearing worship service.
 - h. Separate Deaf worship service in hearing building.
 - i. Separate Deaf congregation in/near hearing building.
 - j. Separate Deaf congregation in own building.
 - k. Bi-lingual (Sim-Com*) service with Deaf & hearing people.
**Sim-Com is a contraction for "simultaneous communication." In this instance it refers to a hearing pastor who is fluent in Sign, conducting a combined worship service simultaneously in voice and Sign.*

Interpreters

Competency in Sign Language does not necessarily mean competency in interpreting. The art and science of interpreting takes training and practice. In most communities, professional interpreters must prove their competency through a difficult process of certification.

Similarly, competency in community service interpreting does not guarantee competency in religious interpreting. Interpreting in a church setting requires not only familiarity with the nuances of the religious concepts, the religious interpreter needs training and experience in translating those concepts into intelligible signs. And by all means, an interpreter for a Christian worship service absolutely must be a believing Christian. It is terribly unfair to both interpreter and Deaf worshippers when a non-Christian is hired to interpret for a Christian event.

Finding Interpreters

There seems to be a good percentage of Christian people who pursue the field of Sign Language interpreting as a ministry, as a profession that serves people. Some of those good-hearted folks are members of our congregations. Finding them is the first hurdle. A second obstacle in procuring their services, particularly if they are not already members *your* congregation, is that these good Christian people already have their own church life and Sunday commitments which make them unavailable to serve in deaf ministries of other congregations.

The best source of contacts for Christian interpreters is through the network of relationships of folks in the congregation who are already involved in the deaf community. Just as families of deaf children know other families of deaf children, so also interpreters know other interpreters. And families directly touched by deafness also often know willing and capable interpreters.

Some aspects of Church interpreting offer an ideal setting for mentoring hearing students who have learned Sign, but need training and experience in interpreting. For example, students are able to prepare and practice to sign hymns days in advance of the Sunday service. A mentor may initially provide a beginning student with a signable translation of the hymns, while a more advanced student can learn through the process of working out his/her own hymn translations in preparation for the service.

When Deaf members of a hearing congregation become involved in the social and spiritual life of the congregation, they build relationships with hearing members who then make the effort to learn Sign in the congregation's weekly evening Sign Language class, simply out of a motivation to communicate with their Deaf brothers and sisters in Christ. In time, however, these same hearing people who learn Sign simply to learn to communicate can be gently recruited to assist in signing songs and other easy parts of the worship service. Eventually, they may find themselves interpreting the sermon.

Many community colleges have Interpreter Training Programs. It would not hurt to contact the director of your local ITP, and alert him/her of your need for interpreters for Sunday worship.

When recruiting interpreters, please remember that professional interpreters expect to be paid for their services. It is inappropriate to expect a Christian interpreter - even a member of the

congregation - to donate professional services without compensation. If an interpreter chooses to donate his/her compensation back to the congregation, that is a matter of personal choice.

Training Interpreters

People desiring to serve as church interpreters need training in:

1. American Sign Language (ASL) communication.
2. Interpreting.
3. Signing religious concepts.

As part of training, two criteria are important:

1. Theological understanding.
2. Adherence to RID Code of Professional Conduct (see www.rid.org).

It is possible to learn ASL in many community colleges, universities and also some community Adult Education programs. Students of Sign may advance to the next level of training through Interpreter Training Programs offered at many community colleges.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod offers a summer training program for church interpreters at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Information about the Church Interpreter Training Institute (CITI) is available on: www.LCMSdeaf.org. Other resources for religious interpreting and training interpreters are also available through LCMSdeaf.org.

Do not overlook the obvious. If you want to learn to communicate with a Deaf person, go and learn the sign language from that person. You will get the satisfaction of learning sign language and they will get the satisfaction of teaching you.

Ongoing Training & Networking For Church Interpreters

Church interpreters need to network with other church interpreters to share concerns about interpreting procedures, language, ethics, roles and responsibilities. It is advisable that a congregation's interpreting staff meet quarterly or semiannually to discuss these concerns. Deaf leaders and the church's pastoral staff should also participate in the interpreters' ongoing training.

Periodically the church ought to host a church interpreting workshop to enable other church interpreters from share their challenges, insights, and encouragement.

Church interpreters, pastors, and Deaf leaders may also participate in nationwide Email discussion groups, such as [LCMSteps](#), whose focus is on interpreted ministries. (You can find information about LCMSteps through the LCMSdeaf.org website.)

How many interpreters?

An ideal arrangement is to have two interpreters serving during each worship service. One interpreter handles the liturgical and musical portions of the service, while the other interprets the sermon and Scripture lessons. Or, modeling the style of worship in Deaf churches, one interpreter signs the Pastor's parts while the other interpreter signs the congregation's responses. Sharing duties not only reduces the stress load of long stretches of interpreting, the change of pace also helps Deaf worshippers keep their focus on worship.

Because the hymns and congregational responses in the liturgy can easily be prepared in advance and usually are sung or spoken at a slow pace, an interpreting student can often receive on-the-job training by serving as the second interpreter. Because interpreting sermons, Scripture, and prayers is more difficult, those tasks are the responsibility of an experienced interpreter.

When a congregation has the luxury of have more than two interpreters, the interpreters are able to rotate their duties so that they can enjoy their own times of worship with their families. When interpreting, it is difficult to also participate, to worship, and to absorb teaching and preaching.

Compensating the interpreter

Professional interpreters, even Christian interpreters, expect to be paid for their services. That expectation is articulated in the RID Code of Professional Conduct. And it is reasonable to expect that a church that is committed to serve its Deaf members and a church that seeks to reach out to unchurched Deaf people will reflect that commitment in its budget.

On the other hand, interpreters who serve in congregations where they hold their church membership often elect to interpret *gratis*, or to return their compensation back to the congregation as their offering in ministry. That choice must be left to individual interpreters.

The issue of compensation becomes critically important when circumstances require the church to hire interpreters from outside its own membership.

Student interpreters may offer their services in exchange for the time spent by an experienced interpreter mentoring them in preparation for Sunday worship.

What may be considered a reasonable rate of compensation depends on the certification and skill level of the interpreter, and on what is the customary interpreting fee scale in the State and local community. The amount needs to be evaluated and established on an annual basis.

Bear in mind that a freelance interpreter who may be hired for a special event or is called in as a substitute may a fee that differs from what has been customary in the congregation's interpreting ministry.

Also be aware that in many communities it is conventional practice for interpreters to charge by the hour, including travel time, with a two hour minimum. So even though you may have a 55 minute service, you will pay your interpreters for two hours of service.

Responsibilities of the interpreter

1. Know and understand the Interpreter Code of Professional Conduct. Know your limits and your abilities. Do not take on interpreting assignments that exceed your skill level.
2. Understand your role as a church interpreter. Occasionally you may need to remind members of the church, both deaf and hearing, that you are not the "pastor" for the deaf members. Encourage deaf members who come to you with pastoral concerns to contact the pastor directly.

3. Establish a regular schedule for meeting with the pastor or staff to discuss issues that concern interpreting worship, Sunday School, and Bible study, and needs of the deaf members.
4. Alert the pastor or staff of any interpreting changes well in advance. If you plan to be absent, notify the pastor and offer suggestions for a replacement interpreter. Provide your replacement with worship materials, so s/he may adequately prepare to interpret the service. Explain logistical considerations to the substitute interpreter.
5. Tell the pastor what equipment you need to perform your duties -- chair, music stand, hymnal -- and where to put them.
6. Own a copy of the hymnal(s) which the church uses, so you may adequately prepare. If you ask, the pastor will likely give you one.
7. Know the liturgy, and strive to be able to interpret the liturgy for memory. Learn when the congregation customarily stands, sits, and kneels. Become familiar with what comes next.
8. Every week arrange to get specific information about the worship service -- Scripture texts, prayers, litanies, hymns, choir anthems, seating changes -- several days before the service. Use that information to prepare for worship. Think ahead how you will sign new liturgical material. Prepare hymn glosses, and save them so you can use them again in the future. Even the most skilled interpreters practice signing lessons and hymns. (Many hymn texts are available on the Internet.)
9. Establish a rapport with music ministry leaders. Each week make arrangements to have the music leaders provide you with choir anthems and text to special music.
10. *Suggestion:* Produce a large print version of all worship materials (liturgy, lessons, hymns, anthems), and arrange them in order in a three-ring binder. This will help eliminate any need for fumbling around with books and papers. The church secretary may be able to assist you in preparing materials, especially if s/he produces a large print version of the bulletin for visually impaired worshippers. Or the secretary may email to you the bulletin file, which you can edit and print as an interpreting aid.
11. Professional interpreters arrive at their assignments early. This also applies to church interpreters. Have your chair, music stand, papers and books arranged before the service begins.
12. Don't "chit-chat" before or during worship. This sets a poor example and is very distracting to hearing worshippers and other worship leaders. Avoid chatting during the offering or during communion. Outside the worship setting, deaf ministry leaders may be able teach members to use quiet times for prayer, reading Scripture, or reading hymn texts.
13. Dress in professionally appropriate attire for interpreting. Be alert to the church's sensitivities regarding dress which shows respect for God and His house. Tennis shoes may be comfortable, but are rarely appropriate in a worship setting. Remember that as a worship interpreter, you serve as one of the worship ministry team.
14. If the church reimburses you for travel expenses, keep accurate records and turn in your report regularly.
15. Take care of yourself. Recruit help. Tend to your own spiritual, emotional, and physical health.

16. Take advantage of opportunities to receive further training.
17. Take advantage of opportunities to train others to become church interpreters.

Responsibilities of the pastor and ministry team

Service Preparation

1. The pastor/worship leader must inform the interpreter of worship changes well in advance.
2. The interpreter needs to know which liturgy will be used.
3. The interpreter must be informed about which hymns and Bible lessons will be used.
4. The interpreter needs to have printed copies of choir anthems. The interpreter should not have to tell Deaf worshipers, "I am sorry. I can't hear or understand the words of that song."

Sermon Preparation

1. Whether or not the pastor needs to give the interpreter an advanced copy of his sermon to help prepare a clear and accurate translation depends on the skill level of the interpreter. Even expert interpreters appreciate a "heads-up" on special terms, concepts, and unusual names.
2. Puns and alliteration may be humorous attention-grabbers for a hearing audience, they are oratorical techniques that are impossible to translate into another language, and are completely lost on a deaf audience.
3. If you intend to season your sermon with citations of phrases in Greek, Latin, and German, be sure to alert your interpreter well in advance, and provide him/her with an English translation.
4. Impressive preachers who are masters in the manipulation of the English language are usually the most difficult preachers to interpret.

Sermon Delivery

1. An interpreter cannot relay your message if s/he cannot hear you. Speak up, and keep the interpreter near you.
2. An interpreter cannot relay your message if s/he cannot keep up with you. In other words, pace yourself, space yourself, pause occasionally. Talk neither too fast or too slow. Help the interpreter with technical words that s/he will need to spell, e.g., "Jehoshaphat," "Harpsichord," etc.

Interpreted Bible Studies

1. When using visual aids, keep the interpreter visible. An interpreter can't be seen in the dark. The audience needs light to see the interpreter.
2. Deaf people cannot read or write at the same time they are watching the interpreter. If you ask the group to read, do not talk during the time they are reading.

3. Questions may need repeating. The question form in the sign language is very different than the question form in English. When you ask a question, allow time for the interpreter to relay the entire question and if necessary rephrase it.

Logistics

1. The interpreter must be visible to the Deaf participants. Don't hide her/him behind a lectern. Turn on the lights. Eliminate shadows. Don't have the interpreter stand in front of a bright window. If necessary, provide a platform for the interpreter so that s/he can be easily seen.
2. If possible, seat the Deaf people in front. They can more easily see both you and the interpreter. Heads and movement of heads may be very distracting to Deaf viewers.
3. Deaf people sing also. They sing in signs, but they cannot read a printed hymn and sign-sing at the same time. A processional hymn also requires that the interpreter be up front early.
4. Responses cannot be read easily. If you want Deaf participants to respond or to use responsive readings, e.g., from a hymn book or printed bulletin, remember they cannot look two places at the same time. They must copy from the interpreter. Responsive readings work best when there are two interpreters, one for the leader, and one to lead the response.

Pastoral Care

Pastor, never forget that *you*, not the interpreter, are the shepherd for Deaf members of your flock. If you are unable to communicate directly with your members in Sign, that language barrier may tend to make you feel isolated from your Deaf members, and you may begin to view Deaf members as an outside group who happens to be in your presence on Sunday. When speaking to your interpreters about the Deaf worshippers, avoid the temptation of referring to the Deaf as "your people." No, Pastor, they are *your* people.

A pastor who learns even a little Sign Language and makes the effort to use it goes a long way in earning the respect and appreciation of Deaf members of his congregation.

In matters of pastoral care, whether in counseling or shut-in visits, the nature of your visit, your relationship with the Deaf members, and your professional rapport with the interpreter will all be factors in guiding your decision on how to best serve your members.

In some instances, making a visit with an interpreter is appropriate. At other times, when the visit will not require a discussion of any depth, a notepad and pen will suffice. And for extremely sensitive meetings, it is appropriate to ask the Deaf person how they want to meet with you -- with a church interpreter, with an outside interpreter of their choosing, or without any interpreter.

In order to understand the roll of an interpreter in a pastoral care setting, the pastor should be familiar with the interpreter's **Code of Profession Conduct** (see www.rid.org). For example...

1. Never ask an interpreter to divulge confidential information about a Deaf person. An interpreter who discloses information shared in an interpreting assignment could lose his/her certification, and would certainly lose the trust of the Deaf community.

2. When utilizing the services of an interpreter, avoid asking for the interpreter's input to the discussion. An interpreter functions as a translator, not as a participant. Here, too, a working interpreter is limited by the Code of Professional Conduct from offering his/her opinions.
3. Never instruct an interpreter in the presence of a Deaf person, "Don't sign this," with the intention of telling something only to the interpreter. If what you have to say is not for the eyes of the Deaf person, then neither is it for the ears of the interpreter.

Utilizing technology

1. Learn what methods of contact each Deaf member prefers -- Video Phone (VP), TDD, Fax, Email, or Email to a text pager. Different people have different preferences. Until recent times, the TDD was the primary mode of electronic communication. Now it is the Video Phone and text cell phone (e.g. Blackberry). Deaf members of the congregation can orient church staff on their preferences in communication technology, and train them on how to utilize TDD Relay or Video Relay Services.
2. When you have a video presentation for Bible class, a meeting, or even worship, check in advance to make sure the video is captioned, and that your equipment has the capacity to display the captions.

Online Resources

www.LCMSdeaf.org

www.DeafJesus.org

www.DeafLeaders.org

Several helpful resources for Deaf ministry are available through the web sites listed above. There you will find:

- ❑ downloadable text translations of worship materials
- ❑ streaming video clips demonstrating signs for religious vocabulary
- ❑ streaming video of Deaf sermons and Bible studies
- ❑ video and printed resources for Deaf lay-led ministries
- ❑ video tape lending libraries of Signed Bible studies and training materials
- ❑ links to organizations that sell video and printed materials useful in Deaf ministry
- ❑ links to an Email group for Lutheran church interpreters
- ❑ information about
 - the International Lutheran Deaf Association (ILDA)
 - the Deaf Institute of Theology (DIT)
 - the Church Interpreter Training Institute (CITI)