

# Christianity's Impact on Deaf Culture In Latin America

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## Introduction

Christianity has been a part of Latin American culture for hundreds of years. Currently, over 90% of the Latin American population claims to be part of one of the many denominations that fall under the umbrella of Christianity. This impact reaches all the way to the Deaf community in each of the various cultures. However, this may not have always been possible for the Deaf community. Historically, Deaf people were shunned from participating in church services because some believed them to have sinned greatly. It was with the establishment of Deaf schools that the church realized that Deaf people can be educated and lead to God. Once this began to be known, this is when the shift began for churches to integrate Deaf people into their services. However, this was not an easy path for the Deaf and many churches had to produce different ways to help the Deaf. This leads to my research question: When looking at the establishments of Deaf schools and Deaf services available, how has Christianity impacted Deaf culture in Latin America?

## Method

When figuring out how to answer my research question, I decided to separate the impacts into three different categories: foreign impacts, local church impacts, and the establishment of Deaf schools. When looking at the foreign impacts, I focused on what the ministries or missionaries did for the Deaf community. For the local churches, I wanted to get a better understanding on whether they had accessible services, helped to establish any organizations, or how they interacted with the Deaf. Lastly, with the Deaf schools, I was able to determine if some of the schools were established by foreign missionaries or by local churches.

## Findings

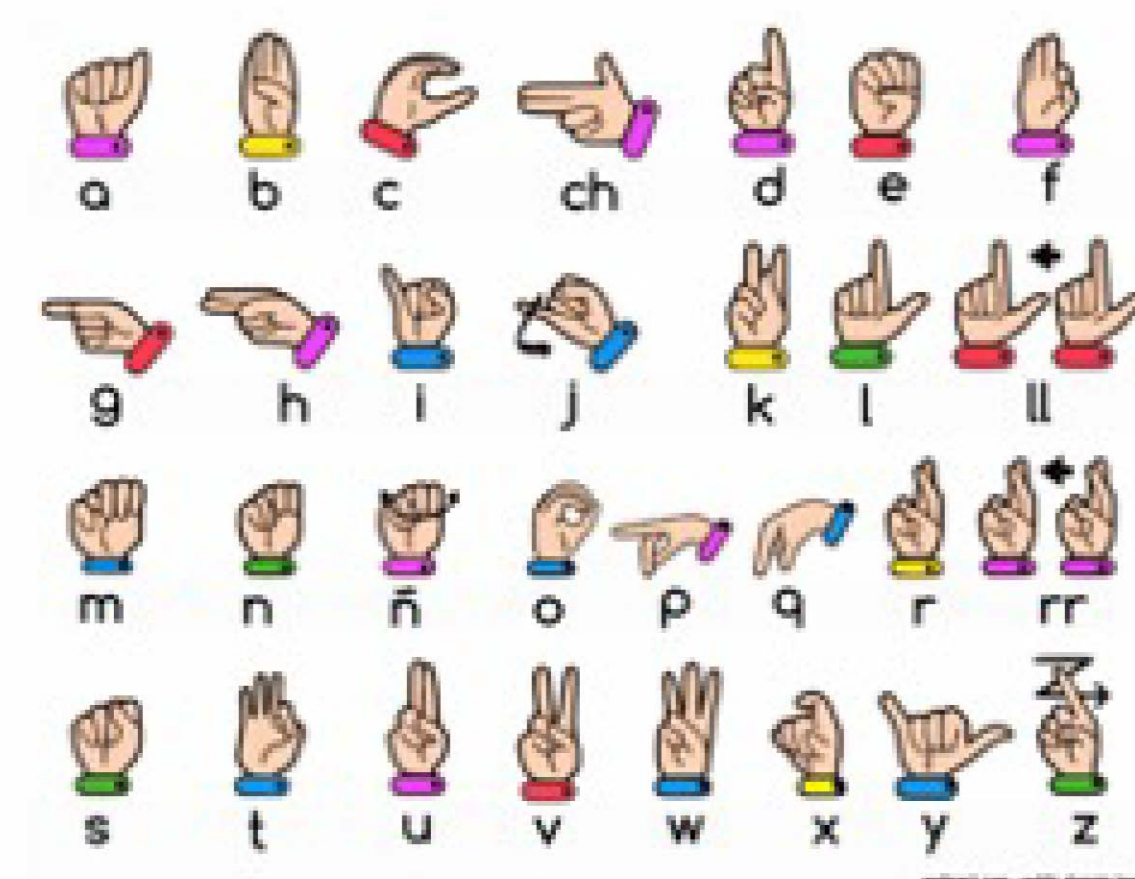
### Foreign Missionaries:

In Honduras, two major ministries helped to create a positive impact. New Life Deaf Ministry established a Deaf School, and Signs of Love helped to create a sign language dictionary. In the Dominican Republic, an American missionary established the first Deaf school. This led to more schools being started. In Puerto Rico, the most well-known Deaf ministry was established by two American missionaries. In Bolivia, missionaries came and began to teach ASL. This is like many other countries (Puerto Rico and Honduras) and why many of the sign languages are like ASL. In Venezuela, a few missionaries helped work with the Deaf to establish a church that uses Venezuelan Sign Language. This is different from other countries where the missionaries created the church or organizations. These missionaries wanted to help, and aid not lead the creation of the church.



Interpreting

Pictured above is the ASL sign for interpreter. Many other countries also use this sign, or it is at least well recognized.



Pictured above is the alphabet using Honduran Sign Language. This is an example of an image that would be found in a sign language dictionary.



Pictured above is the highlighted region of Latin America.

## Findings Cont.

### Deaf School Establishment:

Overall, the establishment of many religious Deaf schools have connections to either foreign aid or to local churches. In Honduras, a foreign ministry established a school where the curriculum is at the same rigor as their hearing peers. In Nicaragua, there was an American couple that established a Deaf school that used Nicaraguan Sign Language. This is important to note because their sign language is newly developed, and they could have used a developed sign language like ASL. In Brazil, a Catholic school was established that is currently in place to help students who live far away. In Peru, the schools impacted the sign language that is utilized. One school was established by Spanish nuns and uses an older sign language. Current schools used the standardized sign language. However, they have created a dictionary that includes religious prayers.



Pictured above is a logo of one of the Deaf schools in Peru. This school was established by Spanish nuns and uses an older sign language

### Local Churches:

In Mexico, the different denominations of Christianity has caused for there to be varieties in the sign language. This is mainly seen between the Baptist and Catholic groups. Outside of lexical variations and the establishments of schools, churches have also impacted the Deaf in how accessible they are. In Guatemala, there are rarely any interpreted services for the Deaf, so they rely on family and friends to interpret for them.

In Ecuador, by not having interpreted services present, many Deaf are not as willing to join a congregation. This is the opposite of Guatemala's view where they are still willing to go to church. In Haiti, society views people with disabilities negatively and this has cause families to leave the church or to shun their family despite the laws in place. Also, with Haiti's connection to Voodoo, one church offers healing services which may have connections to Voodoo. Many families may try these services with the hope of having their loved one be able to hear.

## Conclusions

Overall, Christianity has mainly had a positive impact on the Deaf in Latin America. With the help of foreign missionaries many schools, organizations, churches, and printed materials have been established. With churches in-country, there have been some Deaf-run churches, more interpreted services, and other services in place to help the Deaf. With the Deaf schools, they are making education more accessible for the Deaf while also incorporating bits of religion.

On the other hand, the religious communities still have room to grow regarding their Deaf people. Many of the churches need to work on having interpreted services or finding ways to include captions. Also, they need to make sure that they have a positive view of their Deaf. If they do not, they may push away the Deaf community