

4-1981

The Nature And Work of Pastoral Workers Serving Deaf People: A Report of A Limited Survey

Nancy A. Grandel

Frank R. Zieziula,

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Grandel, N. A., & Zieziula, F. R. (1981). The Nature And Work of Pastoral Workers Serving Deaf People: A Report of A Limited Survey. *JADARA*, 14(4). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara/vol14/iss4/5>

THE NATURE AND WORK OF PASTORAL WORKERS SERVING DEAF PEOPLE: A REPORT OF A LIMITED SURVEY

Nancy A. Grandel and Frank R. Zieziula, Ph.D.

Very little is known about a group of professionals who traditionally have provided valued and continuous service to deaf people, that is, pastoral workers. Almost all religious denominations, through unique individuals within their communities, have exhibited concern for deaf people. Yet, no surveys have been reported that would elucidate the kinds of individuals providing pastoral assistance to deaf people and the services they perform. This article will address these questions and go one step further by presenting recommendations from pastoral workers on needed training to increase their effectiveness in service of deaf people.

In the fall of 1979 a survey questionnaire entitled "Pastoral Workers in Ministry to Deaf People" was developed by the authors and sent to 285 pastoral workers of the deaf throughout the United States. The survey included questions regarding pastoral worker's personal and professional background; geographic information; background information on deaf people served; unique functions of pastoral workers; and recommendations for future training program.

The major sources for names and addresses of pastoral workers were national directories of pastoral services for the deaf published by the Lutheran and Catholic churches. No published directories could be obtained from other religious organizations. In addition to names obtained from printed materials, specific individuals of other denominations identified through contact with

the Office of Campus Ministries at Gallaudet College were sent questionnaires.

Of the 285 questionnaires sent, 173 were returned and appropriately completed. This represents a 61% return rate.

Demographic Characteristics of Pastoral Workers

Respondents were equally distributed by sex with 41% males and 59% females completing questionnaires. As expected, only 10% of the respondents indicated a personal hearing impairment. The age range of pastoral workers varied with the majority (45%) being from 30-50 years of age; 12% of the respondents were from 20-30 years of age; and 23% of the respondents were over the age of 50. The sample studied was a highly educated group with 97% holding a B.S. or B.A. degree and 71% having attained a master's or doctorate degree.

In terms of geographic location, most of the individuals were located in the northeast (41%) and the midwest (36%) compared to 5% in the northwest, 10% in the southwest and 8% in the southeast. Given the geographic distribution of respondents, it is not surprising that the majority of pastoral workers practiced in cities of more than 100,000 people (62%) with only a few respondents (5%) providing services in rural farm areas of the country.

In terms of religious affiliation, the overwhelming majority of individuals were associated with either the Roman Catholic (69%)

Ms. Grandel is the Director of Christian Education, Office of Campus Ministries and Dr. Zieziula is an Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling. Both are at Gallaudet College, Washington, D. C. 20002.

THE NATURE AND WORK OF PASTORAL WORKERS SERVING DEAF PEOPLE: A REPORT OF A LIMITED SURVEY

or Lutheran (28%) churches with the remaining 3% representing the Episcopalian, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. This distribution is not representative of all pastoral workers of the deaf. The percentage distribution is due to the unavailability of a national listing of Baptist, Episcopalian, Methodist, and Jewish Churches. Given this limitation, the information received through the questionnaire can still provide us with a partial perspective on the work of this professional group. Given the large number of respondents from diverse personal backgrounds, there is reason to believe that denominations not represented in this survey are similar in personal and professional backgrounds and perform similar duties with deaf people.

The breakdown of present pastoral positions of the respondents is presented in Table 1. Because of the skewed religious denomination distribution, the majority of people

Table 1. Breakdown of Present Positions of Pastoral Workers

Type of Position	Number	Percentage
Nun	55	32
Priest	53	31
Protestant Ordained Clergy	38	22
Lay Minister	6	3
Seminarian	5	2
Teacher	4	2
Pastoral Worker	2	1
Deacon	1	1
Other	9	6
Total	173	100

held positions as Roman Catholic nuns (32%), priests (31%), and protestant ordained clergy (22%). The settings where respondents worked is presented in Table 2. Many pastoral workers of the deaf provide their services in more than one setting. Most respondents provide service to deaf people within church/parish environments and schools for deaf children. Very few of the pastoral workers responding to the questionnaire provide services to deaf people in correctional facilities (N = 1) or through existing rehabilitation programs (N = 6).

Table 2. Settings in which Pastoral Workers Work

Setting	Number	Rank Order
Church/Parish	117	1
Public/Private School for the Deaf	77	2
Public/Private Regular Education Schools	43	3
College/University Programs	23	4
Community Agencies	20	5
Rehabilitation Programs	6	6
Correctional Facilities	1	7

Lastly, most respondents indicated many years of experience providing pastoral services to the deaf. Approximately 78% of the respondents noted that they had five or more years of experience working with deaf people and 15% of the respondents reported over 25 years of experience in this special ministry.

Deaf People Who Are Served

As reported in the prior section, most deaf people served by this sample of pastoral workers were from the northeast and mid-west areas of the country in urban cities of over 100,000 people. Yet, the breakdown of primary ethnic background of deaf people served was reported as overwhelmingly white (80%) compared to the provision of pastoral services to black (7%), Hispanic (9%) or Oriental (4%) deaf people. Most respondents are presently serving from 1-200 deaf people (61%). A fair number of respondents (18%) report serving deaf congregations of over 500 people.

The economic and educational levels of deaf people served are in line with the information received on ethnic backgrounds of deaf people being served and the settings where pastoral workers are employed. The majority of deaf people utilizing the services of pastoral workers were middle income wage earners (68%). Only 30% of the pastoral workers reported providing services to low income or unemployed deaf people. The majority of deaf people receiving services from pastoral workers are high school graduates (55%) with an additional 15% having college or graduate school backgrounds.

THE NATURE AND WORK OF PASTORAL WORKERS SERVING DEAF PEOPLE: A REPORT OF A LIMITED SURVEY

Specialized Training and Functions of Pastoral Workers

One of the major questions asked of the pastoral workers was the formal training they had received in the area of deafness. The authors did not try to identify the nature of this formal training (e.g., undergraduate or graduate courses, workshops, in-service seminars) nor the thoroughness of the training. The answers to some of these questions are explored in the following section on reflections and recommendations of respondents.

The information concerning specific training in the area of deafness is presented in Table 3. The three major areas of training received in deafness identified by respondents were in sign language (68%), psychology of deafness (65%), and deaf education (61%). Only 45% of the respondents indicated training in the area of counseling deaf people. Further, less than half of the pastoral workers had received training in audiology (40%) and only a small percentage (18%) had any training in the theory and practice of speech therapy. This data is interesting as one analyzes the specific functions performed by pastoral workers with deaf people.

Table 3. Breakdown of Pastoral Workers' Formal Training in Deafness

<i>Area of Study</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage of Respondents</i>
Sign Language	118	68
Psychology of Deafness	112	65
Deaf Education	106	61
Counseling	78	45
Audiology	70	40
Speech Therapy	32	18

The ten activities in which respondents reported being most actively involved with deaf people is presented in Table 4. As one would expect, the major activities performed by pastoral workers involve worship preparation (77%) as well as pastoral teaching (62%). Yet, as one looks further, working with a special population such as deaf people appears to diversify the roles and functions of the pastoral workers. The major areas noted by

respondents after worship preparation and teaching are personal counseling (55%), family counseling (31%), marriage counseling (20%), interpreting services (38%), and community awareness of the problems of deaf people through deaf awareness programs (35%).

With regard to counseling services, it is interesting to note that less than half of the pastoral workers stated that they have been trained in counseling with deaf individuals, yet a high percentage of these professionals are called upon to provide such service. In terms of interpreting services, a fair number of respondents indicated that they are called upon often to serve as interpreters in a variety of situations not necessarily related to church functions. In like fashion, pastoral workers noted that they participate in deaf awareness activities within their community. These functions are unique to ministry among deaf people.

Table 4. Ten Activities in which Pastoral Workers are Most Actively Involved

<i>Type of Activity</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Worship Preparation	134	77
Teaching (Bible Study). CCD, etc.)	108	62
Counseling, Personal	96	55
Church Committee Meetings	69	40
Interpreting	65	38
Deaf Awareness Programs	60	35
Counseling, Family	53	31
Youth Work	51	29
Counseling, Marriage	34	20
Senior Citizen Programs	25	14

Reflections and Training Recommendations of Respondents

In an attempt to gather information concerning the feelings of respondents about their training for pastoral work with deaf individuals, the authors included a section in the survey for comments and reflections.

The first question asked was: "What type of training have you received in the area of deaf ministry that you have found to be especially valuable to you in your work with deaf individuals?" A very large number of respondents indicated that they had not re-

THE NATURE AND WORK OF PASTORAL WORKERS SERVING DEAF PEOPLE: A REPORT OF A LIMITED SURVEY

ceived "formal" training in providing pastoral services to a deaf congregation, yet most respondents saw a need for this specialized type of training. Among those individuals who received formal training in pastoral work with the deaf, hands-on-experience interacting with deaf people was rated as the most valuable experience. In addition, the most often mentioned topics considered valuable were counseling, psychology of deafness, and sign language.

Another question asked of the pastoral worker was: "What type of training do you feel would have been valuable to you in the area of deafness?" Here, again, sign language seems to be of utmost importance. More exposure and training in the areas of counseling, psychology of deafness, and educational methods for use with deaf individuals were seen as very desirable. A number of respondents mentioned an interest in receiving training in audiology, legal implications of deafness, and an introduction to educational materials available for use with deaf people.

Summary

Although the sample of pastoral workers who participated in this survey does not by any means represent the present total professional group, the data collected does provide us with a basis for presenting some interesting facts that will remain unchallenged until a more intensive study is undertaken:

- Pastoral services are being provided by an equal proportion of males (41%) and females (59%).
- Only a small percentage of pastoral

workers with the deaf are hearing impaired themselves.

- Once a pastoral worker specializes in this field, it appears he/she remains in service of deaf people for an extended period of time.
- Pastoral services for the deaf are usually available in large, urban areas of the country where large populations of deaf people are located.
- Most pastoral workers provide services to deaf people through local churches, parishes, or in public and private schools and colleges. Very few pastoral workers provide services through rehabilitation offices or correctional facilities.
- Most deaf people served by pastoral workers are white, educated and from middle class backgrounds.
- In addition to functions of worship preparation, worship, and teaching, many pastoral workers who specialize in servicing deaf people provide counseling services, interpreting services, and are involved in community deaf awareness programs.
- The most valued types of training received by pastoral workers of deaf people are sign language instruction, an understanding of the psychology of deafness, counseling strategies with deaf people, and methods and materials used in the education of deaf people. All pastoral workers emphasized the importance of attaining this knowledge through informal and formal interaction with deaf people.