

The Deaf of the Dominican Republic The Dominican Sign Language Community



With the founding of the first deaf school in 1967 the Dominican deaf community started to become cohesive. There are now about 30 deaf schools across the country. Therefore there are more opportunities for deaf Dominicans to socialize with each other. They usually spend more time with other deaf Dominicans than with their respective hearing families. Most deaf Dominicans are said to live along the middle of the country from the capital to Puerto Plata. The capital, Santo Domingo is the major hub for deaf activity in the Dominican Republic. There are two National Deaf Associations in Santo Domingo where many deaf Dominicans from across the country come to socialize and support the Dominican deaf community.

The majority of deaf Dominicans are in search of a way to be successfully independent in their country. Many know about the deaf services that are offered in the USA and they hope for similar deaf services in the Dominican Republic. Often deaf Dominicans are oppressed by the hearing community around them and are in dire need of interpreters who can make their concerns and desires known. As of 2008 they do not have access to adequate education which is a result in their high unemployment rate.

Since the 1980's there has been a lot of outreach among the Dominican deaf community by American missionaries. Some deaf Dominicans have taken on pastoral roles in their churches and have the opportunity to travel to nearby countries to evangelize to other deaf communities. Since the Spanish literacy rate is low among deaf Dominicans they have to rely on others who are fluent in both Dominican Sign Language and Spanish in order to understand God's Word.

Primary Religion:

Christianity

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

<15%

Churches:

20

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

None

Population (date):

18,000 (2000)



Have They Heard the Gospel?

Hindrances to Scripture

There is no form of Scripture in Dominican Sign Language.

Response to the Gospel

The church in the Dominican Republic seems to be stable among the deaf community. If they had access to the Bible in a sign language they understood perhaps the church would grow more rapidly. Right now all the churches are using the Spanish Bible and many of the deaf Dominicans find it hard to understand even after putting a sign with every Spanish word.

Bilingualism

There are some deaf Dominicans who have studied in the USA and are fluent in both ASL and Dominican Sign Language. Because of the low Spanish literacy among the deaf community there does not appear to be much bilingualism. Across the country there do appear to be some regional differences in Dominican Sign Language and every one is respectful of each others' signing.

**Are Cross-Cultural
Missionaries Needed?**

The greatest need is to have interpreters across the country. With interpreters the deaf Dominicans could have access to necessary education and leadership training. The Dominican deaf community could use pastoral training and also help with creating a dictionary to aid in Spanish literacy and standardizing their sign language.

**Number of Christian Congregations
Serving Group**

20

The Dominican Sign Language Community

Group Description

Geographical/Environmental

Location:	Eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean
Climate:	Tropical with no seasonal variation except rain

Language/Linguistics

Attitude Towards Mother Tongue:	Very receptive
Second Languages:	Spanish (written)
Other Mother Tongues of This Group:	Deaf people who were raised orally (focus on speech and lip-reading)
Others Speaking This Language:	Hearing children of signing deaf Dominicans
Linguistically related:	American Sign Language (ASL)
Neighbor Languages:	Spanish
Corrections to Ethnologue entry:	Population 18,000 (2000); dialects: There are slight regional variations across the country. There is 85% to 90% lexical similarity with ASL; language use: Sign Language is more standard along the center of the country leading from Santo Domingo to Puerto Plata. There are about 30 primary schools for the deaf across the country most of which use sign language to some extent.

Literacy

Adult Literacy:	87% Spanish literacy for general population but much lower for deaf population
Literacy Attitude:	Somewhat receptive towards written Spanish
Active Program:	None
Publications in MT:	Dictionary - <i>Serie Lengua de Señas Dominicanas</i>
Comments:	Most deaf Dominicans think Spanish is very important and want to learn more

Economics

Average Annual Income:	\$6,600 US for general population and much lower for deaf population
Unemployment Rate:	15.6% of general population and much higher for deaf population
Occupation:	Hairdressing, painting, sewing, carpentry, electronics, hotels, teaching assistant, and custodial (anything that does not require a lot of communication skills)

The Dominican Sign Language Community

Modernization/Utilities: The majority of deaf Dominicans have access to very modern items (including internet café's equipped with web cameras) depending on their financial status. Many have cell phones for texting.

Community Development

Clothing: Western style

Transportation: Walking and public transportation, a few may own a car

Infant Mortality Rate: 26.93 deaths/1,000 live births

Life Expectancy: 73.39 years

Society

Family Structures: Deaf people often stay with family because they can not afford their own housing or are not allowed to be independent; women tend to stay in the home and do not have many social opportunities

Social Habits/Groupings: Deaf groups are formed by religion

Identification with National Culture: Integrated – though many are oppressed by the hearing community

Self Image: Depressed

Attitude to Outsiders: Somewhat receptive

Attitude to Changes: Somewhat receptive

Cultural Change Pace: Slow

Local Lang Broadcasting: None

Comments: Receptive if the outsider is respectful of the deaf person and is willing to learn their sign language

Education/Youth

Primary Schools: 35

Primary School Enrollment: Approximately 2,200

Secondary Schools: None

Teacher to Student Ratio: One teacher for every 10-20 students

Language of Instruction: Most use TC (mixture of sign language and Spanish), a few are strictly oral and use only Spanish

Language of Textbooks: Spanish

Unmixed Schools: About 30 are deaf only schools with a few other disabilities mixed in

Problems/Needs: Communication – there is a great need for interpreters

The Dominican Sign Language Community

Religion

<u>Religions</u>	<u>Number of Adherents</u>
1. Christianity (Roman Catholic 95%)	97%
2. Other	3%
Primary Religion:	Christianity
Comments:	The above percentages are statistics for the general hearing population since there are none for the deaf population.

The Dominican Sign Language Community

Status of Christianity

Church Growth

Reached Status:	Engaged
Total Believers:	Less than 15%
Pastors:	13+
Lay Leaders:	20+
Churches:	20
Bible Schools:	15 deaf schools are run by evangelicals

History of Christianity

Year Began:	1980's
By Whom:	Robert Bell - Voz Para Sordos
Significant Events:	Yearly deaf Bible camp since the 1980's; hosted Congreso Latinamericano in 2006

Scripture/Literature/Media

Translation Status:	Possible need
Available Scripture:	None
Uncertain Need Explained:	Dominican Sign Language seems to be similar enough to ASL that they might be able to use the ASL Bible translation.
Other Literature/Video Materials:	None

Missions/Churches Working

Among Group

Organization #1:	Assemblies of God
Main Ministry:	Church planting and education
Adherents:	200-250
Number of Congregations:	At least 11
Use of Local Language:	All
Started:	1980's
Total expatriate missionaries:	2
Total national missionaries:	10
Total local workers:	2
Comments:	Most of the churches use more ASL than others

The Dominican Sign Language Community

Organization #2:	Southern Baptist
Main Ministry:	Evangelism and church planting
Adherents:	180-200
Number of Congregations:	8
Use of Local Language:	All
Started:	1980's
Total expatriate missionaries:	1
Total national missionaries:	3
Total local workers:	12
Comments:	Some of the churches may use more ASL than others
Organization #3:	Independent Fundamental Baptist
Main Ministry:	Evangelism and church planting
Adherents:	15-20
Number of Congregations:	1
Use of Local Language:	All
Started:	2008
Total expatriate missionaries:	1
Total national missionaries:	1
Total local workers:	1
Comments:	Pastor is trying to use more Dominican Sign Language than ASL
<u>Responsiveness</u>	
Attitude to Christianity:	Somewhat receptive
Attitude to Religious Change:	Indifferent
Spiritual Climate and Openness:	Deaf Dominicans appear to be responsive to their need for Christ.
Recommended Approaches to Reach Group:	Use Dominican Sign Language instead of pure ASL
Current Needs:	Interpreters, Bible they can understand, leadership training
Items for Prayers:	Pray for the hearing community to be more supportive of the deaf community in the Dominican Republic. Pray also for more deaf Dominicans to learn about Christ through their heart language.