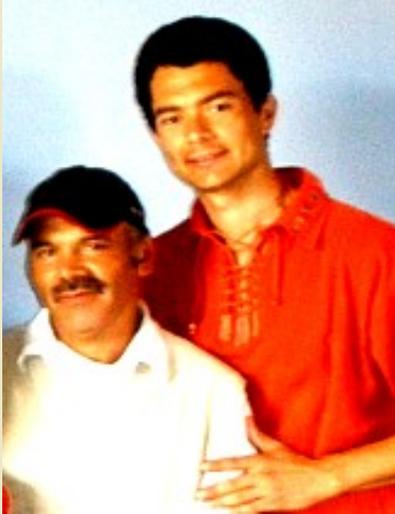


## The Deaf Community of Guatemala The Guatemalan Sign Language Community



There are two main definitions of what it means to be deaf: socio-cultural, the heart of which is sign language use and an involvement within deaf culture, and physiological-medical, which focuses on hearing loss. Forty percent of all Guatemalans with a significant degree of hearing loss are believed to use a sign language, making between 28 and 256 thousand deaf Guatemalans with a deaf ethno-linguistic identity. This profile primarily focuses on these deaf Guatemalans.

Deaf people live scattered throughout the entire country, with the greatest concentration in the capital city. The primary sign language variety of Guatemala is called El Lenguaje de Señas Guatemalteco (LENSEGUA). In areas with little access to education, such as in the northern Peten, deaf people are never exposed to a fully developed language. Because of communication barriers and lack of shared experience with hearing people, deaf people tend to socialize within the deaf community.

Marginalized deaf people have limited access to social services. Most deaf people are unemployed, and less than 50% of deaf Guatemalans receive formal education. The education they do receive is often ineffective. Of the twelve deaf schools, none offer secondary education. Deaf people who want further education often do so without interpreters.

Following overall trends, deaf people are mostly culturally Christian (Catholic or Protestant). However, there are no self-sustaining deaf churches, and less than 1% of deaf Guatemalans have accepted, let alone understood, the Gospel. There are less than 100 attendees in the seven deaf ministries within hearing churches, and only two of these ministries are deaf-led. To every 3-28 thousand deaf people, there is less than one missionary/pastor/evangelist. There is no Scripture translated into LENSEGUA and literacy in their second language, Spanish, is very low. Six deaf Christian leaders hope to plant churches in the two largest cities. Many want to know more about Christ and have an openness to cross-cultural workers of all kinds.

<b>Primary Religion:</b>	Christianity
<b>Disciples (Matt 28:19):</b>	Less than 1%
<b>Churches:</b>	0-1
<b>Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):</b>	None
<b>Population (date):</b>	28,000-256,000 (?)



## The Guatemalan Sign Language Community

### Have They Heard the Gospel?

#### **Hindrances to Scripture Use**

There is no translation of Scripture into LENSEGUA. Six deaf people know a set of 50 Chronological Bible Stories from their Bible training in Costa Rica. However, most have forgotten or are not using it in their churches. This is primarily because hearing people are the ones teaching and leading. Spanish Scripture is difficult to access because of the challenge for most deaf people to learn and use a written spoken language.

#### **Response to the Gospel**

The church though small seems to be relatively stable. Church is often a social activity so deaf Christians tend to transition among the deaf ministries available to them to maximize their social network. There does not seem to be fast church growth, although interest is expressed by many.

#### **Bilingualism**

After LENSEGUA, the most common languages to be bilingual in are American Sign Language (ASL) and Spanish. Deaf people that have traveled have had more access to ASL and have adopted some of its vocabulary. Teachers mainly use Spanish and LENSEGUA in their classes, although some hearing teachers reportedly use LENSEGUA in Spanish word order. Deaf people may also have exposure to their ethnic groups' language (e.g. Mam).

#### **Are Cross-Cultural Missionaries Needed?**

Yes! Missionaries are needed in Bible translation, pastoral training, education, church planting, advocacy, interpreting, to interface with hearing churches, etc.

#### **Number of Christian Congregations Serving Group**

12

#### **Number of Congregation Using Primarily Local Language**

1-2

#### **Language of Outside Communication or Trade**

Spanish