

Overview

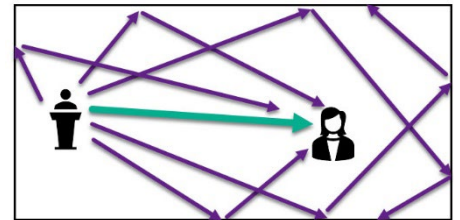
Hearing Loss is a silent disability. People wish to hear the word, engage, and stay connected for all church services: baptisms, first communion, weddings, confession, and funerals. Hearing loss interferes with or makes it impossible to clearly understand what is being said. This can lead to isolation of parishioners who are unable to hear the homily or catch the meaning of the joke, where they will either sit in silence or choose not to attend at all.

Awareness and education on hearing loss are essential. Technology is only part of the answer. Compassionate congregants and churches who plan, support, and maintain the equipment can make all the difference. Good communication, such as facing the person and speaking clearly, is a tool to include people with hearing loss.

Assistive Listening Systems Overview

Assistive listening systems clarify sound by eliminating the negative effects of distance, noise, and reverberation. These systems bring audio from the microphone to a person's ear, giving amazing clarity.

While quality sound systems help, they are not enough for people with hearing loss.



Individuals with hearing loss, as well as those with other disabilities such as autism, low vision, auditory processing disorders, ADHD, and cerebral palsy, find assistive listening systems invaluable, as they provide clarity and minimize background noise.

Possible assistive listening system locations include: confessionals, counseling rooms (private), fellowship halls, parlors, sanctuaries, classrooms for Bible study, staff offices, etc.

Make it easy for visitors, people recently diagnosed with hearing loss, and regular attendees to find and use your system. Use trained ushers, have handouts available, have signage posted with graphics and instructions on where to find the equipment and its availability, include information in weekly bulletins, and post information on the church's website. It is important to have a volunteer to maintain the charged receivers and have headphones and neckloops readily available.

Assistive listening systems are required in California, Georgia, and Texas. For other states, places of worship are commonly exempted under the ADA, but it depends on activities, funding sources, and state or local building codes or regulations.

To future-proof hearing aids purchased in the next several years, we recommend ones that have both telecoils and Auracast in the device itself.

Three Types of Assistive Listening Systems for Churches



The QR code or link has instructions on how to use hearing loops, FM/RF, and infrared systems. Each technology has pros and cons, which are available on the Center for Hearing Access website.

tinyurl.com/ALS-Intro

Hearing the Word: Including Parishioners with Hearing Loss

1. Hearing Loop

A wire that circles (or is a figure-8) in a room transmits the sound electromagnetically. Hearing loops are the gold standard and are used more by parishioners, since they can discreetly activate the telecoil in their hearing device without borrowing any equipment. For those without telecoils or without hearing aids, they can borrow a receiver and headphones.



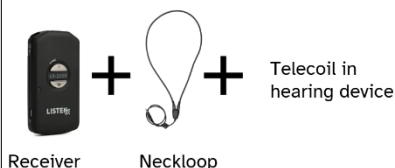
2. FM/RF Systems



Option A

- Hearing instruments **WITH** a telecoil

Switch to the telecoil program



Option B

- Without** hearing instruments
- Hearing instruments **Without** a telecoil

Borrow a receiver and headphones with the site



Photo credits: ListenTechnologies

An FM System transmits a radio frequency to an FM receiver with headphones or neckloops.

3. Auracast Streamed Assistive Listening Systems

Auracast streamed assistive listening system is an emerging technology with international specifications expected the end of 2027. It can be installed alongside an existing assistive listening system in the coming years.



Personal Amplified Devices

Personal amplification devices help at home and in one-on-one settings. One device, a WilliamsAV, Pocketalker2 includes a telecoil to enable access to a hearing loop.



Captions

Captions supplement assistive listening systems, or sometimes people prefer captions.

- Automatic captions: better for video presentations, Bible studies, videos, shorter interactions, presentations, and conversations.
- CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation): preferred over automatic captions for legal, medical, education, and select presentations for technical accuracy.

Resources

- Center for Hearing Access. Auracast, captioning, and templates for churches to adapt. tinyurl.com/worship-ALS-resources or use QR code to right
- National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD), www.ncpd.org/resources_and_toolkits/liturgical-access-people-hearing-loss
- Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), www.hearingloss.org
- Gathering Sound, www.gatheringsound.com



About the Center for Hearing Access

Founded in 2024, the nonprofit Center for Hearing Access is a national advocacy and education initiative of The John G. Shedd Institute. We champion and educate users, sites, audiologists, and hearing instrument specialists about all ADA-compliant assistive listening systems and other strategies to increase access to healthcare, theaters, libraries, conferences, government offices, courtrooms, places of worship, and other public and private spaces. Effective hearing access can be life-changing for people with hearing loss to maintain community engagement.

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