

December 10, 2017

Faith to Discern

Acts 13:1-12

Lovers Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas, offers a robust ministry with the “deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing alike.” Because the church has a fulltime hearing-impaired ordained elder on staff, the ministry supports “pastoral care, baptisms, weddings, and funerals in [American Sign Language].” They offer Bible study and worship in American Sign Language (ASL) and “provide voice interpreting for our hearing friends and families of the Deaf,” as well as ASL interpretation at hearing worship services. Their sign choir rehearses weekly, performs monthly at the church’s traditional worship service, and has performed at the North Texas Annual Conference, inspiring the hearing community to worship in new and vibrant ways.¹

In today’s lesson, our student book writer says, “Sergius Paulus represents the conflict many people feel. They want some type of faith, or a deeper faith, but obstacles stand in their way.”² Paulus sought faith and wanted to “hear God’s word,” but his obstacle was Bar-Jesus, a false Jewish prophet who “practiced sorcery” and tried to “steer the governor away from the faith” (Acts 13:6-8).

Many, if not most, churches believe we are fully welcoming to all people, when in reality we may subconsciously put up obstacles to faith. For example, we expect people to speak and read a particular language, to have transportation to attend worship services, and to have the ability to hear the music and sermons. When we recognize the obstacles to faith, then we can think of creative ways to dismantle some of them. The Deaf Fellowship of Lovers Lane demonstrates expanding our horizons, not just to include people with different abilities but to highlight faith through and with those who are deaf and their families.

1. Why might the Roman governor of Cyprus want to hear God’s word from Barnabas and Saul? Why would Bar-Jesus attempt to thwart the governor’s intention?
2. When have you experienced someone wanting to steer another person away from the faith? What motivation did he or she have?
3. What obstacles does your local faith community put up to faith? How might your small-group approach dismantle one of these obstacles? Why is it important to recognize how churches intentionally and unintentionally put up obstacles to faith?

Reverend Katie Shockley is a licensed local pastor and serves as pastor of Community United Methodist Church in Copeville, Texas.

¹From “Lovers Lane Deaf Ministry,” Lovers Lane United Methodist Church (llumc.org/deafministry).

²From *Adult Bible Studies*, Winter 2017–2018, by Chuck Aaron (Cokesbury, 2017); page 16.