

## A joyful noise from Shores Deaf Church

### Pastor works on the cutting edge

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The Rev. Ronald Dettloff helped found the Shores Deaf Church in 1987 to spread the word of God in a language that hearing-impaired people could understand.

What he didn't foresee was how that language would change in the next 20 years.

What sets the St. Clair Shores church apart from the 10 or so other deaf churches in metro Detroit is the extent to which it uses SignWriting, a series of printed symbols that represent signed languages, in this case American Sign Language.

Through use of a computer software program, Dettloff is working to translate the entire Bible into SignWriting. The church began using it about six years ago.

"We're very successful with teaching people through SignWriting," Dettloff said. "We're the only church in the world that translates the Bible to SignWriting."

During services, Dettloff speaks and signs simultaneously. He uses the SignWriting on a projector in lectures at the church throughout the week.

"Seeing people understand and get to know God," said Dettloff, 56, who lives in St. Clair Shores. "That is the most rewarding thing."

Dettloff, who began studying sign language in college, said he felt a calling to start a church for deaf people. But it wasn't until after he was a pastor at the Shores church that he researched his family tree -- he was adopted -- and discovered one of his grandfathers was deaf.

Christian churchgoers come from as far as Romeo to attend services at the Shores church, an Assembly of God affiliate at 10 Mile and Harper. The church, which has about 50 parishioners, uses a bus to pick up those who don't have rides to the Sunday service.

Annette Usher, 44, has been attending the Shores church for more than three years. Although Usher also worships at other parishes with her family, she has grown fond of the Shores services.

"I like to sit and pray in sign language so I can worship God myself," said Usher, who lives in Detroit. "At the hearing church, I can't understand the service because there is no interpreter."

Through the church, parishioners can participate in games, movie nights and an annual trip to FaHoLo deaf family camp in Grass Lake.

After the Sunday service, the church hosts a meal and social for all attendees.



The Rev. Ronald Dettloff uses sign language in a hymn Sunday at the Shores Deaf Church in St. Clair Shores. Dettloff, 56, is not hearing impaired, but studied sign language in college and helped found the church in 1987. (JERRY S. MENDOZA/Special to the Free Press)

For some, like St. Clair Shores resident Bob Doyle, 63, church-related activities are the main instances of social interaction during the week. Doyle is deaf and partially blind.

"We have a great time," he said. "It's a wonderful way to get out and meet new people."

Clinton Township resident Nicole McReynolds, 18, has met many new friends through the church, including her boyfriend, Clinton Township resident Ken Benando, 32.

"In the fellowship, there are many different people to meet and we've all come to worship God," McReynolds said.

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