

Episode 19

Legacy

HISTORY OF DISABILITY SERVICES

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NATHAN WRIGHT: One of the most remarkable aspects of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is its unique history. Throughout the world great stories from faithful Church members have only added to that history. This program shares some of these incredible stories of faith, perseverance, hope, and inspiration. You're listening to Legacy. I'm your host, Nathan Wright. [END MUSIC] We are broadcasting from the Mormon Channel studio in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City. This program is being heard on HD radio and on the internet. Broadcasting has become a powerful and effective means for communicating the gospel message throughout the world. General Conference is heard on every continent, in numerous languages. But what if you couldn't hear? Or what if you were unable to read the scriptures or lesson manuals? Today, we are talking about Disability Services and its history in the Church. And joining us today are Doug Hind and Brent Meisinger, employees of the Church's Curriculum Department who work with Disability Services. And if I could just ask both of you brethren to kind of introduce yourself to our audience. Brent, why don't you go first?

BRENT MEISINGER: Well, I've been at the Church for two years now. And I am Doug's assistant.

DOUG HIND: Well, my name is Doug Hind. And I've been working in this area for the Church for about twenty-eight years now. I was asked to serve on a committee many years ago to help develop a dictionary of sign language for the deaf. And once I was on that committee, they asked me if I would be willing to come and work full-time for the Church. And that's basically how I got started. And my parents are both deaf and so I have background in deafness. And when I came to work for the Church, I thought that that was the only thing I would be working on. But within three to four weeks, all of a sudden I was asked to do stuff and help create materials that would bless the lives of the blind and other disabilities as well. And so it has basically evolved from that to what we're doing now.

NATHAN WRIGHT: What are some of the other things that the Church does for Disability Services other than ASL and the, what you mentioned for the blind?

DOUG HIND:

Well, of course there's the standard products that are simple to do in a way where we create American Sign Language. Recently the sign language translation that we took care of in our department. But fortunately, there was a need that we move that to the Translation Department where I certainly feel like it needs to be. And I felt at that time more stuff could be done if we had more help to do that. And then of course, so we're providing American Sign Language on the internet as far as translation of General Conferences, any broadcast, those types of things. The other things, of course are audio recordings which we have done ever since I've been here. And we provide the Ensign magazines, the Friend, the New Era on audio recordings so that the blind can use. And many times people will think that audio recording is basically only for those who are visually impaired but there's many other disabilities, like maybe learning disabilities or individuals who have a very difficult time reading that it has blessed the lives of those individuals as well. Then, of course, what is really exciting is we do provide a lot of material in Braille. And we, at this time, are doing two languages in Braille. We do English Braille and also Spanish Braille. And Brent works on that quite a bit. That is one of his big responsibilities is to be able to organize and make sure that things are running smoothly. And what is really exciting is that we're able to put these three items that I just spoke of on the internet where people can go and download those, and especially Braille. When I tell people that Braille is on the internet, they are kind of confused on how are blind people going to read. Ok, do they put their fingers on top of the screen and do the Braille cells pop out of the screen? How does it work? And it is really interesting. I think technology, especially in the area of disabilities. I have a strong feeling that our Father in Heaven has put a lot of this material and equipment here upon the earth for those who have disabilities. And Brent had an opportunity, just a couple of weeks ago, maybe a month or so, to attend a technology convention back East. And I'd like him to take a minute too, and talk about technology and some of the things that he learned. And hopefully in the future, the Church will be able to take these new technology devices and allow those things to reach the members of the Church who have disabilities who might have a difficult time reading or understanding or seeing or whatever so they'll be blessed and receive the gospel as well. Another thing, really quickly, and then I'll give Brent a second. Another big thing that has happened over the last couple of years is we were able to develop a web page on lds.org for disabilities. And there, that page is blessing a lot of lives because first of all you have those with disabilities. And if we can give those individuals opportunities to learn that way, it makes it great. But then we have to look at leaders who don't understand how they might be able to provide services or understanding to individuals with disabilities. And the third one, of course, is family members who have individuals in their families who have disabilities. You don't realize how difficult it is, often, to maybe have a child or an adult who has a disability. And not having understanding, it can really hurt. And myself, as a child of deaf parents, and my parents had seven children. Often we had some struggles to deal with because, again, my parents were deaf. And we had to learn how to deal with those issues. And, of course, we got away with murder sometimes, as far as doing things that they couldn't hear us doing. And I don't think I should get into that. But again, technology, I think, is something that we are excited about and see what we can do. Again, I think, Brent, maybe you can explain about, you know, the new DAISY format that's coming out and those types of things.

BRENT MEISINGER: Sure, Doug just mentioned the DAISY format and DAISY is actually an acronym. And I won't try to explain the whole acronym lest I'd embarrass myself. But DAISY, what it does is actually format audio files and text files together. And it puts them into a navigation so that a person who is blind can download this formatted audio file. And then they can navigate, either chapter by chapter or section by section. So, for example if we send them an audio file with all of the Church magazines on it, it might have the Ensign, the Friend, and the New Era on it. Then they can navigate between the three magazines. And then also they can navigate further down to article by article. And that allows them more freedom to jump back and forth within an audio recording instead of fast forwarding or rewinding within that audio recording. So it gives them the chance, the blind the opportunity to study just as everybody else does when it comes to the gospel. And the great thing about the DAISY formatting is the audio can be connected with text files also. So if somebody has a learning disability then they can use DAISY reader software on their computer. And they can look at the text of the audio and then listen to the audio at the same time. And that way they are given that additional help to understand what the text is actually saying. Whereas if they were just trying to read it, they would only be getting a small percentage of what was there. Some of the other things that we learned at the technology conference, there are a lot of tools available for those that need to communicate. And so a lot of them are tools used with, it is kind of hard to explain without a visual, but it is a board that has symbols on it and words on it. And the person is trying to communicate can either touch that symbol or that word and that will communicate that word to whoever they are speaking with. Because they can't verbally talk but maybe intellectually, mentally they are fully capable of communicating. They just don't, maybe they are paraplegic or maybe they vocally can't speak. But this allows them to communicate with other people using symbols and words that are on a board. Now some of these are very high tech boards that allow them to communicate. And some of them are very low tech, just cut out pictures that a child can take and put in a row to maybe say a prayer or explain that they need to talk to their parents or something of that sort. But having people understand that they have something to contribute, that they have something to say, gives them the opportunity to be involved in what is happening in the Church and in the gospel. Whereas otherwise they wouldn't have a chance to communicate.

NATHAN WRIGHT: That sounds amazing and quite fascinating. Sounds like, perhaps, those little translators that you're able to get for other languages only it is with symbols that are able to allow these people to put these symbols into conversation. It is astounding.

DOUG HIND: I think some of these things we are looking at, you know, such as symbols to be able to create some material that we can put on our website, on lds.org so that, you know, teachers or whatever have some extra materials that would be able to help involve children or adults in opportunities to give a talk, for example, in Primary, Young Women's, Young Men's, or even in sacrament meeting. Just so that they can feel

included and not left out. So some of these devices, you know, we hope we can provide or give assistance, again, on our webpage. And, you know, you can go to lds.org and just go to Family Resources and there will be a button there that says Disability Resources. Or else you can go to www.disabilities.lds.org and you'll see that page as well. But again, it is just in the beginning infancy stage of the development of that but there is quite a lot of material there now that can be helpful. And we're always looking for additional ideas and thoughts that we can create there to, again, bless leaders, families, and individuals who have disabilities.

NATHAN WRIGHT: I tell you I went to that site right before we came into the studio and was reading down the list of things and actually read through most of a talk that President Packer gave years ago called, "The Moving of The Water". And it is a very, very moving and very telling talk of how we should better deal with disability in the Church. And there is just one thing I wanted to read here. Right at the beginning of his talk he says, "I must first, and with emphasis, clarify this point: It is natural for parents with handicapped children to ask themselves, 'What did we do wrong?' The idea that all suffering is somehow the direct result of sin has been taught since ancient times. It is false doctrine. That notion was even accepted by some of the early disciples until the Lord corrected them." And I kind of wonder if that is still a feeling among parents or siblings or people within and without the Church.

DOUG HIND: It is. I think there is still. Here in the United States we have a better understanding of disabilities. And of course, you know, there has been a law, the Americans with Disabilities law that came to be. And it brought more of an awareness about disabilities. But in other countries, I was talking to Elder Pieper who was serving over in the Russia area. And about there, they still hide individuals. They don't talk about disabilities. They still hide them away like we did many years ago here in the United States. And sometimes parents can be embarrassed. Sometimes children who have a sibling who might have autism, might they be embarrassed. But at first they might be, but gradually they learn that it is not a problem. And where the problem usually lies in just acceptance. If other family members or if other children would accept them and be involved with them, their lives would be much easier. And, you know, we have, there are all kinds, different disabilities. And, of course, on our website we have listed on the left hand column different categories of disabilities. Not all disabilities are listed there but eventually we will add more so that we can be more specific on specific disabilities. But I have a feeling, myself, that everyone loves and wants to help individuals with disabilities but they're scared. They don't know what to do. And hopefully, with a little bit of education, especially maybe from our website or whatever. It will help people understand that, you know, there's certain things you can do and certain things you can't do. But you're able to learn more about the individual. You know, there's just little things like we don't use the word handicapped anymore. But now we use the word disability. And, of course, we always talk about the individual not the disability itself. So "a person who may have autism" instead of "there is an autistic kid". And those type of things. And, of course, parents gradually, well like myself again, growing up in the situation I grew up in. You know, at first it was difficult but I look back and think, you

know, how blessed I am to be able to have that opportunity to grow up in a family such as that. Where my parents had a problem, they couldn't hear. But then also learn how to adapt to that. And I was totally proud of them because of the success that they had in life and the upbringing. And my parent who also, way back when many years ago, there was really nothing in the Church at that time for them because they were deaf. But gradually as they began and they tried to establish something that would work for them here in Salt Lake. There were only six individuals who were deaf. It kind of started as Sunday School class and then it gradually grew from there to where they were able to establish a branch. And then, of course, today you have wards for the deaf. And so there is many units throughout the United States and in other countries that have things that are established so that individuals who may have a disability can serve. And it is very hard for a deaf person to become a bishop in a hearing ward because they can't communicate sometimes with hearing members. But by having a deaf ward or a deaf branch, it gives them the opportunity to serve. And as I read some histories that some people put together about my mom and my dad. And how they were some of the first individuals that kind of got some of these things established. It just made me cry to think the joy and happiness that they have had in their lives to be able to serve in the Church. And I think that it is important for all individuals who have disabilities to serve somehow. Everyone has an opportunity to be able to give some service. If we would only be able to understand how they might do that. And we take the time to do that.

NATHAN WRIGHT: There is one other paragraph from President Packer's talk that I want to read. He continues, "You parents and you families whose lives must be reordered because of a handicapped one, whose resources and time must be devoted to them, are special heroes. You are manifesting the works of God with every thought, with every gesture of tenderness and care you extend to the... loved one. Never mind the tears or the hours of regret and discouragement; never mind the times when you feel you cannot stand another day of what is required. You are living the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ in exceptional purity. And you perfect yourselves in the process." I just think that was an amazing encouragement of people who are living with disability in their family.

BRENT MEISINGER: I have often heard Doug say, since I have been here, that we are not here to help those with disabilities. But those with disabilities are here to bless our lives, to help us to learn to grow, and to learn how to love and serve each other.

NATHAN WRIGHT: And part of what President Packer was talking about in that talk is he quoted, this is from John, "As Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." And then he says, "There is little room for feelings of guilt in connection with handicaps. Some handicaps may result from carelessness or abuse, and some through addiction of parents. But most of them do not. Afflictions come to the innocent." And so, yes, to me, like you say, it is the innocents that are helping us become better.

DOUG HIND: Very much so and I have always felt that if more people would be involved with individuals with disabilities, again, their life would totally change. And we would have many more loving people in the world today by being involved in helping. And it is just

with anybody, when we give service to people, it doesn't matter if they have a disability or not, I think I always come away just totally happy and glad that I was able to do that. Last Saturday we had the opportunity. Our family had the foundation that we have set up where we are trying to help deaf children learn more about the gospel. And we had a holiday party, a Christmas party that we gave. And it was so exciting to see these little kids who are deaf and their families come. We had about one hundred; it was probably close to two hundred individuals who came to this party. And just the joy and happiness that we saw. It was interesting to see when Santa Clause came in and he started signed to the deaf children. And, of course, many times deaf children can go to the mall or the store and see a Santa Claus. And the Santa Claus really can't communicate with them. But by seeing this Santa Clause communicate with them in sign language, their language. I looked over at my brother and he had tears in his eyes. And I think it really brought us back home of the importance it is to serve one another and to bring joy. And it was really exciting to see these young kids so happy to be able to be involved with that. And again, the more that we can give of our time and our talents and everything that the Lord has blessed us with, our life will be much easier and happier.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Thank you. Now over the past twenty-one years that I have worked for the Church, I have had the opportunity to help with Disability Services projects. And one of the big projects I remember was the Book of Mormon in American Sign Language. And now if our listeners can just imagine putting all of the Book of Mormon in video format, reading it in sign language. It took, how many years did it take, Doug?

DOUG HIND: You know, I can't remember how many years. It must have been at least five to seven.

NATHAN WRIGHT: I think it was closer to eight years.

DOUG HIND: Eight years! It was a long process. I can still remember back when I recommended that the Book of Mormon be translated into ASL. And, of course, at the time it came back to me. And many comments were said, "Well, just give them a book and let them read it." And, again, that is where sometimes there is a lack of understanding on people who don't understand. We have to realize that many of the deaf people, their first language is sign language. It is not English. And so sometimes it is very difficult to read the English language. And so finally we were able to get the approval to move forward and do that. And, again, when you are working on something for eight years and you are using the same individual on the video, you had to keep her looking the same. After eight years, you know, she had three kids. You know, it kind of went on and on. And we had to use a wig for her hairdo so it could stay the same, pretty much. But Sister Diez who did that, she did an excellent job. And myself, personally, I would rather watch the ASL Book of Mormon than actually read the English version. I get so much more out of the Book of Mormon by just watching it in ASL, sign language. And, yeah, it took some time. But finally it came to be and it is out and it is available. And what is interesting, I can't remember how many DVDs it is on. It is probably about fifteen or eighteen DVDs for the whole Book of Mormon. And I recall when we were doing the designing of the disk and so forth, they brought it to me. And the background was gold. And I said, "Oh, great! The deaf people have the gold Book of Mormon. You know, the real plates are right here." We just kind of laughed at it. But, again, the only problem is, of course, we are hoping that someday we'll, hopefully soon, the ASL Book of Mormon will be online.

And this will give the deaf people opportunities to not to have to stick a disk in. Eighteen disks. If you want to go to Alma, if you want to go to Helaman, you'll be able to just push a button. And then on your internet, on the computer, it will just go directly to that chapter and verse. But right now, with fifteen or eighteen disks, if you want to go to another chapter, then you have to take it out. And I think it is also with the internet and what the Church is doing, there are so many possibilities in this area as well. So that individuals, if they are going through some printed text or even on a sign language project that we've done, they'd be able to push a button and it will go directly to the scripture and read it, do the sign language so that they don't have to go looking through a book and have a hard time reading it.

NATHAN WRIGHT: I will say though that since we recorded the ASL Book of Mormon, it was originally on VHS tapes. And, of course, you had to put the tape in and do a lot of fast forward or rewind to find the spot. So we've actually come a little ways from VHS to DVD where you can actually click to it.

DOUG HIND: That's true. It made a big difference.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So, as you say, let's hope the internet version is coming soon. That would be great. What are some other projects in the history of Disability Services that stand out in your mind, Doug?

DOUG HIND: Well, again, I think the biggest one for me, of course, is the ASL Book of Mormon. That is one of the biggest ones that really brought joy and happiness to me. The other ones, of course, we've talked about. The website, that's another thing. Often, when you have a small group it is difficult to prepare materials or receive approval to develop some of these materials. Because cost, you know, it is quite expensive to do things. But with the internet, again, it is like the Braille for example. When I went forward to ask for approval to begin Braille things, we were able to purchase a Braille printer so that we could print on demand. And Braille, we just finished, a couple months ago, the Spanish Bible in Braille. And that is about twenty volumes, right Brent?

BRENT MEISINGER: Yeah, it would be about twenty volumes.

DOUG HIND: Twenty volumes.

BRENT MEISINGER: If it was printed.

DOUG HIND: Yeah, if it was printed on hard copies. But of course, because we can print on demand, we don't have to print a thousand copies of it. You know, maybe we'll print twenty-five copies and put them in a distribution center. Of course, the Spanish Braille is not in hard format right now. It is basically only on the internet. And gradually we hope that we'll be able to do some other languages in Braille. And another big thing for me, of course, my first love, of course, is deaf. And I've been able to travel different parts of the world. And about two years ago, my wife and I took the opportunity to go visit Ghana. And we met a deaf individual who joined the Church over there, a very bright individual. And his name is Marco. And, of course, that was the only deaf member of the Church that we

were aware of in the Ghana area. But as I travelled to different schools that were teaching deaf children, I just thought, you know, how wonderful it would be to be able to move deaf work into different countries. And, of course, it is just like in South America. There are individuals down there that are struggling and trying. And they are members of the Church but there are no materials or there is no help as far as interpreters or things like that. And in England is another area that there is a good group of deaf individuals over there who have joined the Church. And so there are deaf members of the Church in many different areas. But, again, there is things that we need to, just simple things that would help them. Sign language is not the same in all of the world. It is interesting though, when I went to Ghana I didn't know what to expect. It was interesting because Ghana, they use American Sign Language. And so I thought, well, that's a great area. Let's get some missionaries over there. And I did some praying on that. And I went to church to the deaf ward one Sunday and one of the deaf families came up to me and said, "Guess what? My son got called on a mission to Ghana." I said, "Well, if your son knows sign language, I bet he do something over there." And so I pray that, hopefully, something will start over there because we have a resource that is in that mission now. So, you know, there are many good things. I think right now we are in a process of translating the disability site on lds.org into the nine basic languages of the internet. And, again, I think that will help a great deal too. And that was one thing that Elder Pieper mentioned to me. He said that we need to look at other countries. There are very little resources in those other countries. And he was telling me a story about his daughter, where they were trying to find a school for her to go to. And the country was so proud that they only had one school for individuals with disabilities. And, again, that is what I am saying. They don't want to admit that they have individuals who have disabilities. But I'm from the school that if you try to hide things, you don't bring them out, you won't get the help you need. And then, of course, I also feel that if you don't let us know you've got a disability then how can we help you? And then you are really taking away my joy and happiness because I am not able to serve you. And so I think the more and more awareness that the Church can provide to, again, leaders, family members, and individuals with disabilities more things can happen. And we can bring more individuals closer. I think disabilities is also a place that we can bring a lot more members to the Church with different services. We also, in some areas here locally, there is what they call special Mutual's and special Primaries. And that is also another way that some of these individuals who need special services are receiving some of the gospel teachings from that as well. And I think that you'll see in the future maybe more of that coming to other areas to where they might have a program regionally. And, of course, that all depends on the area presidencies or the area leaders to look at that and approve something for those areas.

BRENT MEISINGER: And there is also, in addition to the Primaries and Mutual's, there are also seminaries and institutes that try to serve those with disabilities.

DOUG HIND: And that's another exciting thing, when Brent brought that up. About a year or two ago, the Church Education Department hired an individual who was deaf. And he is now teaching seminary and institute over the internet. Individuals who are deaf now, again, technology is coming into play. Way back when I was a kid, and my dad became the Branch President, I had to be his earpiece because I would have to call on the phone for

him because he couldn't use the phone. And then gradually, I can remember the day now, where there was a new technology that the deaf people were able to communicate through an old teletext machine. And you'd just take the phone and put it on the cradle. And you'd start typing and the noise would go through the phone lines to the other person who had a teletext machine. And you'd be able to type back and forth. Well, of course, my dad he didn't even know where A and B was on a typewriter. And so a lot of time, my mom would be typing for him. But then she would miss every other key and the spelling didn't look too good either. But then, just a few years ago and it could be longer than that, a new invention where you have video phones. So deaf people now are able to communicate all over the world through sign language through the internet. And so I've been looking at different ways, how this could also benefit the Church. Because in many areas there might be a deaf person in a ward or a branch that have no way to communicate with individuals there and if they had an interpreter to be able to interpret sacrament meeting or interpret different things, it would bless their lives. But it is being looked into that maybe it is a possibility for people to volunteer to interpret over the internet. So if I am here in Salt Lake and somebody is in Ohio and they need an interpreter, we can actually hook up to the internet with the video phones and I could hear what is happening in the meeting. And I could just basically interpret for them there. Deaf people need an interpreter to go and receive their temple recommends, to go in for interviews, many of the things that they are left out of. And the other thing, of course, is more training could be done in their language as well as missionary work. It was interesting; there was a missionary just recently in Florida who was deaf. And he was on his mission. And he actually started doing some video phone contacting. Not knocking on the doors but doing it through the video phone. And he actually got someone on the screen and started talking to them. And the person became very interested. And he says, "well, do you mind if we come over and visit you?" And she says, "Well, yes." And he says, "Well, what is your address?" And come to find out, he was talking to somebody in Oregon. And he had no idea. He thought they were in his mission area. And so, anyway, he at least opened the door and was able to send that referral to that mission, where that mission happened to have some deaf missionaries as well. And that lady happened to join the Church. And so, again, with these different possibilities we can expand to these areas. Another thing that I forgot to bring up and that was captioning. Many a times, individuals who are deaf and especially individuals who have gone deaf later in life will want to read. And by having closed captioning, I am sure most people know what closed captioning is, but they are able to turn on their monitors. And if the captioning is being provided by the provider, then they would be able to receive the text of that. And, again, there are many people who are deaf and maybe who are deaf later in life. And my parents lost their hearing when they were ten and seven from spinal meningitis. So they did have some English background before they became deaf. And so my mom, of course, a very fluent reader and she very much enjoys reading the captioning. And she also loves music. Believe it or not, even though she is deaf, she still has a rhythm. And it is very interesting. Even though she can't hear it, she loves "Music and the Spoken Word". And when the Church began to closed caption that, she just thought that was the best thing on earth that could ever happen. And so closed caption is another device or technology that allows people who are hard of hearing or later deaf to be able to use services as well.

NATHAN WRIGHT: I've had the opportunity, as I mentioned, doing several things which included reading for the blind magazines of the Church. A lot of people may think, well it is just for the blind, these recordings. But anyone in the Church can log in and download any of the recordings and be used that way with the scriptures and the magazines, whatever. It is very, very accessible.

DOUG HIND: Yeah, and that is one thing that has been very interesting. And I think, again, we started recording the magazines many, many years ago. It was a time that we began when they had floppy disk and provided it that way. And then gradually it moved to the audio cassette. And now it is going to go to the DAISY flash format. And so now, there is general membership of the Church are using them. I recall back before the internet. And we would produce the magazines. And they were on half speed forward track cassettes. And you could only use those if you had a machine that would play those.

NATHAN WRIGHT: A special machine, yes.

DOUG HIND: And of course the Library of Congress provided to individuals who had disabilities those machines. And so they were the only ones that could use the services. And we would receive calls all of the time from people who commuted in their car, truck drivers, whatever. And they wanted to get these cassettes because they wanted to be able to listen to it. But, of course, now with the internet and so forth, we download all of these things to MP3s. It gives everybody in the Church opportunities to have that additional help. And so it is a blessing for all of us.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Is there anything else either of you would like to add to today's conversation?

BRENT MEISINGER: Doug keeps mentioning the word "understanding". And we find that when a disability is involved that understanding is key. And it is not just understanding by the leaders or the members of the ward or leaders in a stake or even on the general level. But it is also understanding of the families of children with disabilities. Or the members themselves with disabilities that if the leaders can understand what these members are going through. If the members can understand the hesitation of the leaders, that doors are opened. And it really becomes a totally different experience for everyone involved. These members that have children with disabilities or members with disabilities, if they take the time to share what their life is like to help a Primary teacher understand what their child needs, how they best learn. Then that Primary teacher can better teach that child so they can help learn. A bishop can have a better understanding of how the ward, in general, can serve that family. They get a better understanding of, you know, how much these parents really go through. And sometimes it is really hard for families to ask for help and assistance. So if these leaders have that understanding, if the families share then the bishop has a better view in which to receive inspiration. He can see the way that they actually can help and assist these families that really desperately need help in many circumstances. Understanding. We recently attended a summit on autism and faith. And Doug and I were very, I guess pleasantly surprised to find that issues that were discussed in the summit were not just applicable to autism but to disabilities in general. If the leaders can see what these families needed, if they could understand what these families were going through then these families could have a gospel experience. A lot of families that have children with autism, they go to sacrament meeting. In the Church, sacrament is a

reverent time. But for a child with autism, they're just, they way they express themselves, the way they are because of their autism they are not reverent per se. And it is not the child being irreverent, it is not the child acting out and trying to be a problem as some people might see it. But it is just their autism speaking and the ward seeing it from that perspective. Seeing that this young boy or young girl, you know, sometimes they may have an outburst during sacrament meeting. Or they make sounds. Or they don't like to wear a suit and tie. They are more comfortable being at church wearing sweats. When wards and leaders understand this, then that family can feel embraced in the gospel. They don't receive strange stares from other members of the ward. But there are members of the ward that understand what is happening. They understand what this family is going through. And that makes it a place of acceptance for them. Whereas sometimes, they can feel that it is not a place of acceptance to be in sacrament meeting. But that understanding is key on both sides of the fence.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Sounds like if people both sides, as you say, can get past the hesitancy to find out what can be done to help or to reach this understanding that you are both referring to, then we can get to that understanding.

DOUG HIND: Yeah, I think if we could just take away the fear. And 99% of the time families want you to come up and talk to them. You won't embarrass them. But if they know by you asking a question or "How can I help?" will totally open up the doors so that there is communication there. There is hidden disabilities that are out there as well. You know, especially a learning disabilities or maybe a child comes into Primary and we say, "We're going to memorize the thirteen Articles of Faith." And this child might have a very difficult time learning how or is not able to memorize as well as other children. And there, again, we've got to be careful because many a times when these individuals feel like they are different, again, they may be embarrassed or whatever. But they are the ones that are going to stop coming to church because we don't have the understanding. There is different ways. I continue mentioning to individuals in the Curriculum Department, you know, sometimes we need to simplify some of this stuff. Simplification is very important, especially in the case of many who have disabilities. And I mentioned in a meeting just a day or two ago when we were talking about different ways of preparing manuals or materials. You know, I said, "OK, if we put something on the internet we need to make a simplified lesson that can go along with it." So if a teacher has an individual in their class that maybe needs some help. Often individuals, Primary teachers, or teachers in general may not have the ability to know how to simplify a lesson. But to give them a few ideas and those types of things and then they take the time to do that. And also individuals, bishops, whatever, have had the opportunities to call an assistant to a teacher who may have a class that has a child in it who may have a disability. And this assistant also can include that child or that adult in the same class but it needs be that assistant can assist if that individual is acting up or whatever. And take them out for a little bit and then bring them back in. Again autism is seems to be growing. It seems like there is more diagnosis of autism now-a-days. So we are seeing more and more of it. And we as member of the Church and leaders need to be prepared for this because we don't want to lose those families. And we want to be able to give them as much as we have as well. And we're just; we'll work together and be united that way. And individual families, again, will feel more welcome and more involved. And depends

on what their conviction is or what their faith is, you now, if they've got a real strong testimony, they may get through it. Maybe those who have a weaker testimony might feel like that it is easier just to stay home and not deal with it. And that is where we come in to play, is where we can help those families to be involved and help those situations.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Excellent. This has been a fascinating and enlightening conversation today. Is there anything else that you feel like you like to add?

BRENT MEISINGER: The only thing I have...

NATHAN WRIGHT: Brent

BRENT MEISINGER: ...to say is, Doug mentioned that we are translating the disabilities.lds.org site into nine internet languages. And so it is really given us a perspective, not that Doug hasn't always had it because he had always tried to work internationally. But this is really opening up the doors to address disabilities in an international scene, because it really is an international issue. And internationally, it is a bigger issue even than it is here in the United States, because it is not as addressed as it is here in the U.S. And there is a lot of understanding that we have here in the United States that it is very much less so in other countries. I served my mission in Korea. And the members, I served in the deaf branch in Seoul, Korea when I was there. And I was thinking about this earlier when Doug was talking about Ghana. But the members of that deaf branch in Korea, they were very, very strong in the gospel. They have deep testimonies in their Heavenly Father and their Savior Jesus Christ. They face fierce opposition from other religions who have deaf congregations. They really, it is very a kin to what the early saints went through as far as persecution goes. But these members many of them really have strong, strong testimonies and strive to live the gospel and do everything that they can to learn the gospel despite not having a lot of materials available to them. In Korean sign language, there are very few things available to them. But they really work hard to form a cohesive unit, that they lean on each other for strength and they lean on their Heavenly Father to sustain them in the troubles that they have. But their joy in the gospel is evident and sure. And it always makes me happy to think about them and their strength that they have and the joy that they have being with each other in the gospel.

NATHAN WRIGHT: As you say, that joy they feel in this situation could probably be duplicated or it could be seen in many locations throughout the world.

DOUG HIND: Oh, very much so.

NATHAN WRIGHT: With various...

DOUG HIND: And when Brent mentioned that, I was thinking I was asked to go and speak at an international conference in South America. And, again, it was just a joy to be able to see the different individuals down there. But it was interesting; again, different churches are trying to get in to the deaf community in those areas. I know I have a sister who is a professor and she travels down to South America quite often to work with deaf situations, bilingual education, and those types of things. And she emailed me just a short time ago and told me how that in Peru where she was, the Jehovah's Witnesses are really working hard to provide sign language interpretation, to teach sign language, and those type of

things. And so, again, the deaf people gravitate to those who accept them or who they can communicate with. Again, that is why it is very difficult for a deaf person to be included in a regular ward where there are no other deaf people in it. That is why it is so important to have deaf branches, to have deaf wards, to maybe even have regional deaf counselors or something like that. I remember just recently I was working with the Church Welfare Department. And in talking to them about they need some counselors who can counsel to the deaf people because, again, going through an interpreter is ok but it is just not the same. And fortunately, again, there is a deaf individual who is a counselor that works for Welfare Services. And, again, he is able to start taking referrals from bishops and, again, counseling over the internet and, again, through the VP phone. Because, again, deaf people are scattered to many different areas. And so, again, technology to me right now, is wonderful but just think in the next few years how much better it is going to be. And those are some of the visions that I kind of have, especially for missionary work to the deaf. I think that it can be a great asset. I think another area it could be helpful too, is teaching young children about the gospel. Many times young children who are deaf and who have been born into a family where no one knows how to communicate with them. Nine times out of ten, if a family will learn to communicate with the child, and I'm speaking of America Sign language, that child will learn the gospel much better. And, again, they will be outstanding missionaries. I, myself, had the opportunity many years ago to go on a mission to the deaf. And I think that is where I learned a lot more. Even though I grew up with deafness, I associated with deaf people and so forth; it was basically deaf people in the Church that I knew. But when I got out in the mission field, I mingled and associated with nonmembers of the Church. I taught the gospel and I learned a great deal from them as well. And I learned about different churches and what they are doing to help the deaf community. But, again, deaf people will gravitate together. And as they do, one of the biggest reasons they do is because they can communicate. They can communicate in their native language. And, you know, English and ASL are different. People think that sometimes, you know, we can just learn some signs and put them on our hands. But it doesn't work that way because the syntax and the structure of sentences and so forth are totally different than the English speaking language. And so all of these things, again, when you have a strong deaf ward or deaf branch there and you have an opportunity to bring individuals who are deaf to that congregation. Again, they feel more involved because they can communicate and those types of things. And so technology is going to bless us. There may be new things that we might be able to do, again, where we need interpreters. An individual who is deaf and needs a temple recommend. Another thing that will be exciting is I recall when I was on my mission and I had a deaf companion, the mission president needed to interview my companion. Well, he needed an interpreter. Well, guess what? He had me come and interpret. So my companion couldn't say anything bad against me because I was in the room. But he did. But again, think if a deaf person can go into his mission president and communicate with him and just have an interpreter on the screen that is coming from outside of the area. That interpreter doesn't know that deaf person. And that deaf person doesn't know that interpreter and so there is no privacy problems or anything like that. So, again, I just, every day, every morning I wake up I think of these grandiose ideas that we could do that. We could do that. It will happen. And we just have to wait for the time to happen. And so I'm totally excited. I keep telling Brent here, I say "You know, I

need to take an early retirement. I need to go out and do some of these things more so than I'm doing here." [BEGIN MUSIC] And I just have a great desire to be able to build the Church for the deaf in many countries throughout the Church, because it is time. It is time. And it will happen. And they will be blessed as well.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Thank you. Thank you very much. Today we have been visiting with Doug Hind and Brent Meisinger, employees of the Church's Curriculum Department who work with Disability Services. Thank you again, brothers, for being here.

DOUG HIND: Thank you.

BRENT MEISINGER: Thank you.

[END MUSIC]

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