

In the Diocese of Olympia archives, a deep connection discovered

SAINT MARK'S INTERN PAIGE FOREMAN FINDS A FELLOW DEAF MINISTRY ADVOCATE IN THE REV. OLOF HANSON

BY PAIGE FOREMAN, *Seattle Service Corps Member, Saint Mark's Intern*

Paige Foreman is a member of the Seattle Service Corps and is interning at Saint Mark's while she discerns a call to the priesthood. Before coming to Seattle, Paige earned a graduate Certificate in Spirituality and Social Change from Pacific School of Religion as well as two Bachelor degrees, in English and Philosophy, from Gallaudet University.

A roar of flying hands greeted me when I entered Kane Hall at the University of Washington, where the university's annual Deaf Studies lecture was being held. The president of my alma mater, Gallaudet University, was going to speak that night on the neuroscience of American Sign Language. Deaf people from all over the Pacific Northwest came to the university early to connect with each other before the lecture. I quietly found a seat, a little stunned—I hadn't been around many Deaf people since starting my internship with the Seattle Service Corps.

"Everybody's signing!" my best friend excitedly said to me. "This never happens!" And she fluttered around the room connecting with people. I stayed in my seat and reunited with an old friend from Gallaudet.

Soon, the lecture began and one of the Deaf Studies professors at UW, Lance Forshay, gave the audience background information on the connection between Gallaudet University and

the University of Washington. Olof Hanson, an 1886 graduate of Gallaudet College and a Deaf architect, was the chair of Landscape Architecture at UW. Olof married the first woman to graduate from Gallaudet, Agatha Tiegel, and they put down roots in Seattle. He even designed several buildings at UW that are still standing today. I wrote down Olof's name so I could look him up after the lecture.

When I did some research on the internet later that night, I discovered that Olof Hanson was also an Episcopal priest in the Seattle area. I didn't find out much else though—there was scant information on the internet.

The next morning, I took the train to Vancouver to join my fellow Seattle Service Corps members at the diocesan convention. I had missed the first day due to the lecture. When I arrived, Malcolm McLaurin, the Canon for Youth and Young Adults, was excited. "I want to introduce you to some people!" he said.



Seattle Service Corps members visit one of their volunteer work sites. From left, Patrick Kelly, Andrew Rogers, Bailey Kimmel, Karen Sargent, Paige Foreman.



We rushed over to an information table for the Olympia chapter of the Episcopal Conference of the Deaf, which was founded in 1881. The Episcopal Church has a long history of inclusion of Deaf people. The Rev. Thomas Gallaudet, the son of The Rev. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, for whom Gallaudet University is named, began ministry among Deaf people. In 1876, The Rev. Henry Winter Syle, the first Deaf priest, was ordained, one hundred years before the Catholic Church ordained their first Deaf priest. When The Rev. Olof Hanson was ordained at Saint Mark's Church on January 6, 1929, he was one of 28 Deaf Episcopal priests ordained at the time.

"Do you know anything about Olof Hanson?" I asked the women at the table.

Their eyes shot up. "Yes, yes!" they signed and pointed at a picture on their display board. "That's Olof!" They also pulled out the book *A Missionary Chronicle*, which goes into the his-



At left: The Rev. Olof Hanson in vestments, in Seattle, 1930. Middle: Family photo, (clockwise) Olof Hanson, wife Agatha Tiegel Hanson, and daughters Alice, Helen, and Marion in 1930 in Seattle. At right: portrait of Hanson in 1890. Source: Gallaudet University Archives.

tory of Deaf ministry in the Episcopal Church. “He’s in here too!”

That set me out to find more information on Olof Hanson. I looked in the Diocese of Olympia’s archives and found that when Hanson became ordained, he was only a part-time minister as the diocese could not afford him a salary. His work was pioneering and filled a great need in the lives of northwestern Deaf people at the time. He held church services in American Sign Language twice a month in the Thomsen Memorial Chapel of Saint Mark’s Cathedral and he also held church services once every two months in Tacoma and once every three months in Vancouver, WA and Portland, OR.

Hanson died on September 8, 1933 and his funeral was hosted at Saint Mark’s on September 11. The Bishop who ordained him, The Rt. Rev. S. Arthur Huston, officiated. After his death, the diocese funded a full-time Deaf priest to continue Hanson’s work. In addition to his work as a priest and

architect, Hanson was a civil rights advocate. In 1908, he wrote a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt arguing against the discriminatory ruling of the Civil Service Commission to ban Deaf people from being permitted to take Civil Service examinations for federal employment. In the letter he wrote, “I am myself deaf. My greatest obstacle is not my deafness, but to overcome the prejudice and ignorance of those who do not understand what the deaf can do.” Two weeks later, a letter from the Department of the Interior said the president had signed the following order:

Deaf-mutes may be admitted to examination for all places in the classified civil service of the United States, whose duties, in the opinion of the Civil Service Commission, they are capable of performing.

Two years after Olof Hanson’s letter led to the rescinding of the Civil Service ruling, he served a term as the president of the National Association of the

Deaf, the nation’s premier civil rights organization of, by, and for Deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

The duty of a baptized Christian is to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” Hanson lived that, and I want to live up to that legacy as a Deaf Episcopal priest. The reason I interned at Saint Mark’s was to get experience in parish ministry before pursuing my Masters of Divinity at Yale Divinity School. Rev. Henry Winter Syle and Rev. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet both studied at Yale.

I didn’t expect to find my Deaf heritage at Saint Mark’s, but I’m glad I did. When we read the story of Jesus Christ aloud in the Baptismal Covenant, we are remembering our history and traditions. Forgetting our history is a falling away from wholeness. In sharing this story, I hope that I can help to further Hanson’s dream of a robust Deaf ministry in the Episcopal Church.