Imagine yourself as a person with hearing loss attending your place of worship. As you struggle to hear, which of these two hearing solutions would you prefer?

1. To take the initiative to get up, go locate, check out, wear, and return special equipment (often a conspicuous headset that is incompatible with your hearing aids)? Or,

2. To simply push a button that transforms your aids or cochlear implant into a wireless, in-the-ear loudspeaker that broadcasts sound customized to your own hearing loss?

Solution 1—the hearing aid incompatible solution—has been the prevalent assistive listening technology in America’s worship places and theaters. Solution 2—the hearing aid compatible solution—has spread throughout the United Kingdom, across the Nordic countries, and now is being adopted in several states, including by several hundred Michigan churches.

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Let’s Loop Worship Centers

By making assistive listening hearing aid compatible, churches are leading the way to doubled hearing aid functionality for people with hearing loss

by David G. Myers

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Get in the Hearing Loop National Campaign

The Hearing Loss Association of America (hearingloss.org), “the nation’s voice for people with hearing loss,” and the American Academy of Audiology (audiology.org), are collaborating on a “Get in the Hearing Loop” educational campaign. The campaign’s purpose is to educate consumers and hearing professionals about the benefits of telecoils and hearing loops, thereby improving accessibility for close to 40 million Americans with hearing loss.

Testimonials:

“I am home now and I can’t stop smiling. The system went way beyond meeting my expectations. I was in awe. From the very first words [spoken], I could understand every word. It was wonderful!” (CP—hearing aid user in Oshkosh, WI)

“The experience of actually hearing such clear sounds was thrilling and hard to describe. One has to experience the improvement. It seemed overwhelming.” (DV—hearing aid user in Holland MI)

“I experienced a bone crushing hug from a lady at St. Patrick’s Catholic Church in Lodi, WI. She was crying and said I changed her life. FM hearing assistance failed to help her. She attended Mass faithfully despite the fact she could not hear.” (MM—audio engineer)

“We have a man in the congregation who took a bullet to the head in Vietnam. It has impacted his hearing to the point that he is nearly deaf. Through the VA he received hearing aids to access the loop system. One day coming out of church, he was filled with joy because he could hear every word. He was like the deaf man in the gospel healed by Jesus.” (KF—Senior Pastor, Holland, MI)
needing hearing assistance). The telecoil also serves as a receiver for magnetic signals transmitted by "hearing aid compatible" phones, which include all landline phones and designated cell phones. (For any without suitably equipped hearing instruments, portable receivers and headsets are available.)

Thus when one worships at Westminster Abbey in London, or in virtually any church with a PA system in Holland or Grand Rapids, MI, all you need do when the preaching begins is to activate your hearing aid telecoils. (Local church members will likely notice, few people with hearing loss take the initiative to do.)

from the American Academy of Audiology (the world’s largest association of hearing professionals) announced a joint "collaborative public education campaign Get in the Hearing Loop." The campaign aims "to enlighten and excite hearing aid users, as well as audiologists and other professionals who dispense hearing aids, about telecoils and hearing loops and their unique benefits." Hearing loops are coming to America.

The move to making future assistive listening installations hearing aid compatible is gaining momentum.

The California, Michigan, Wisconsin, and New Mexico hearing loss associations are now advocating hearing loop systems. "In all new and extensively remodeled buildings, wherever there is a public address system, a loop should be permanently installed," clarion declared the California Hearing Loss Association. "When there is a loop, all a hard-of-hearing person has to do is to be able to hear is click on the T-switches on their hearing aids." Local hearing loop initiatives are underway in Albuquerque, Tucson, Silicon Valley, central Wisconsin and elsewhere.

Michigan’s second largest airport, in Grand Rapids, now offers the technology throughout both its concourses and in all gate areas.

A national service organization, Sertom ("SERVICE To Mankind") announced in 2010 that it will be promoting the installation of hearing loops through its 540 clubs nationwide.

Scientific American, reported on the move to hearing loops in its January, 2010 issue:

"The first international ‘Hearing Loops’ conference, hosted in late 2009 by the European Federation of Handicapped Hard of Hearing People (www.hearloop.org) for attendees from 15 countries, adopted a resolution recommend- ing that where sound is broadcast shall offer assistive listening, such as induction loop systems designed to the IEC 60118-4:2000 standard, which broadcast sound directly to hearing aids and cochlear implants, enabling them to serve as customarily, wireless, but also less loudspeakers (without the need for extra equipment)."

**FAQS ABOUT HEARING LOOPS**

- **Hearing rings hrmans ring easily?” Hearing aids interfere preliminarily?** Generally not. Stelton trounced sound and telecoils, and minorities of hearing aids in hundreds of West Michigan homes and thousands of Scandinavian and British users in that interference-free installations are nearly always possible.

- **Is this a new technology?** Like electronic computers, induction loop technology began more than a half century ago, and now is extensively developed forms both new and filter and tailored technologies, and new computer-optimized designs for computer installations and ever increasing applications.

- **Will wireless convinces new technologies won't be heard?** New wireless technologies, including Bluetooth, do some useful things, such as enable visual phone listening. But Bluetooth is not an assistive listening answer (it requires significant battery power and has limited range). An alternative future assistive listening option using one that the hearing loops, a hearing aid interface circuit likely avoids the need for electromagnetic interference.

- **Is this equipment difficult to install?** Installation requirements (including the number of listeners and the maximum levels for electromagnetic noise) are technical. It is necessary to ensure that the installation is not installed without a; but for power: the product! One would expect at least some naysayer in a group that large! The installation is not installed without a. One skeptic from another state undertook due diligence.

- **What I experienced last Sunday was nothing short of a miracle! For the very first time in many many years I was able to hear every single word said in church along with every note of music. I cannot express my thankfulness in words. It was truly one of my most memorable moments in my life and I felt normal." I took my mother to Mass. In her words, ‘I could hear every word, and this is the first time that’s happened in years.’ She went on to say how much more she got out of the service and realized how much she had been missing.”

- **One skeptic from another state undertook due diligence to assess the suitability of a hearing loop for his own church.**

- **I can certainly attest to the spread of the loop system in Michigan. Before we installed our [church’s] system I telephoned a number of facilities listed by a loop vendor and received a number of facilities listed by the service and realized how much she had been missing.”

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- **As we approach a tipping point where hearing loops become the accepted user-friendly assistive listening technol- ogy we can take satisfaction in knowing that churches are leading the culture. As they enable their people to better hear, worship centers are also enabling people to glimpse a future in which hearing impairment has doubled functionality, not only microphone amplifiers, but also as customized, wireless loudspeakers.**

- **Hope College social psychologist David G. Myers has written seven books advising advocating the coming trans- formation to American assistive listening. He has also created hearingloop.org and authored A Quiet World: Liv- ing with Hearing Loss (Yale University Press).**

There are many advantages to hearing aid compatible loop systems. For example, many hearing aids now come with a mic + telecoil (MTD) setting that enables one to hear sound from nearby people singing or speaking while simultaneously receiving direct PA system input. Additionally sound broadcast by one’s own hearing instrument is contained in one’s ear, without bothering others nearby. Moreover, there is no need to juggle between headsets and hearing aids. (Church, says a very wise person). There are no longer concerns about putting in or on one’s ear, what has been around others’ ears. And most importantly, when not hearing well people need only activate their telecoils. There’s no need to get up, seek out, and wear conspicuous equipment (which, as TFW readers have likely noticed, few people with hearing loss take the initiative to do).

Wisconsin audiologist Juliette Sterkel and her engineer husband Max Wheatfield have recently installed hearing loops in 30 Wisconsin churches, with gratifying responses, sometimes spoken through tears. The following is a list of testimonials they have heard.

**2016 update on right?**

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*This article was first published in 2010. As of August 2016 nearly 300 churches in Wisconsin have been looped.*