

# ***Ephphata! The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church***

**19 November 2009**

**Morning Session**

**Opening Greetings:**

*Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, President of Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers*

- Greetings for a wonderful and profitable conference in Rome
- Introduction of dignitaries Present
- Naming of countries represented
- Naming of sign languages being used by the interpreters at the conference
- 1,300,000 deaf persons world-wide
- Need to identify, respond to causes of deafness; hearing-aid technologies (internal & external), psychological effects
- Need to prepare & train sufficient priests, religious, pastoral ministers to serve deaf persons
- Rooted in Mark 7, which gives name to conference; the parable of Good Samaritan reminds us need to be close to people, breaking isolation which many Deaf people live in.
- The Conference is a seed, which can grow into a tree, which will bear fruit.
- Invoke our Lady of Silence, to improve the Deaf person's life, especially in the Church

*Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragán (per Bishop José Redrado)*

- Greetings for a successful conference
- Commendations to Archbishop Zimowski, new president
- Commendations to Archbishop Kelly for pastoral solicitude & dedication to ministry to Deaf persons

*Italian Deputy Minister of Health*

- Social interaction largely dependent on hearing – therefore, an important sense
- Deafness significant in language development, communications, family life
- Government response: early testing (now even neonatal); monitor hearing during life; appropriate policies (re: exposure to potentially damaging noise); standards for hearing aids; concern to respond to individual needs; need for greater integration of deaf persons into society: recognition of sign language, support for deaf education (technical committee established to address these issues)

*Archbishop Patrick Kelly, Archbishop of Liverpool, Chairperson of International Catholic Foundation for the Service of Deaf Persons*

- “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God ...” better translation: “Word was *towards* God” -- a living Word, a dynamic Word, a journey
- 35 years ago, was asked by his Bishop to evaluate theology of proposed Eucharistic Prayer for the Deaf. Ultimately, the Eucharistic Prayer was approved
- Named Bishop of Manchester (Salford) and continued his predecessor's journeying with Deaf people
- Journey has brought us to Rome. The Holy Father will strengthen this family

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*Dr. Silvio Mariotti, United Nations WHO Representative for Prevention of Deafness and Blindness*

- Dispensing w. technical parameters, world wide: hearing-impaired people are approx 4% of world -- 278m. persons w. severe hearing impairments (equivalent of fourth-largest country in world), 68m persons with profound hearing loss (population equivalent of 28<sup>th</sup> largest country). Hearing loss is more prevalent > age 40; more than 50 % could be prevented or treated. More than 80% of Deaf people are working class to poor
- < 10% of those with hearing loss have access to hearing aids; < 1% in poorest countries
- Isolation affects most of those who are hearing-impaired, yet there is no trend to change this stigma
- Work of Agency: 1) continue to try to describe the problem; 2) policy development and recommendations; 3) system development, including economic, for countries trying to address this issue

### **Deaf People in the World, Past and Present**

*Fr. Gerard Tyrell, Dublin -- Moderator*

- When Bishop appointed him to work with the Deaf community, he told him: 1) learn the language; 2) learn the culture
- Thus far, we have heard about a medical model; we will now consider a more cultural model

*Fr. Savio Catiglione*

- *Little Mission for the Deaf*, founded 1872 with mission to serve Deaf community
- Deaf person: normal person; medically cannot hear; hearing provides constant flow of information (source of 80% of our information), social interaction; deafness cuts off interaction with environment, people – isolation
- Causes: meningitis, intermarriage (genetic), toxic chemicals/medicines, birth traumas, German measles
- Since 1900's, medicine has been able to address many of the causes of deafness & have developed aids to assist deaf persons (miniaturized hearing aids, cochlear implants, texting) all have provided more interaction with surrounding world
- Throughout most of history, deafness unaddressed: deaf persons were considered unteachable, completely uneducated, shunned.
- Deafness and muteness considered two separate conditions. Legal prejudice: deaf persons considered incompetent.
- Religiously, deaf persons were considered incapable of being taught faith. Benedictine Br. Ponce de Leon first taught deaf children of nobility.
- \_\_\_\_\_ set the basis for modern audiology by working with his deaf son. Had insight that "by reading, a deaf person can hear; by writing a deaf person can speak." First schools – seventeenth century. Oral & signing educational systems.
- World Federation of the Deaf established 21 Sept 1951 at First World Congress in Rome. 1957: 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Sept established as "World Day of Deaf." 5<sup>th</sup> World Conference in Paris: "Rights of Deaf People", recognition of Sign Language as Language. *Gestuno*: universal sign language;

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- 328 AD: first recorded use of signs -- monastic sign language
- Religious prejudice against deaf people – follows society. Religious attitude also influenced by the mistaken Scriptural interpretation of St. Paul “Faith comes from hearing (Word)” (Romans 10:17) – therefore deaf persons cannot have faith, remain spiritual infants, cannot receive Eucharist – this despite contrary opinions of saints, Popes
- Ordination of deaf priests (13 world-wide), other deaf persons work in ministry. Ministry to deaf persons refutes this notion. Pope Pius IX: appointed St. Francis de Sales as patron of Deaf persons. North America: St. Rene Groupil. English: St. John of Beverly

### *Deacon Patrick Graybill*

- “The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed” (ps. 126:3) Today is proof of a new Pentecost for all of us in the universal church. One church with many languages, spoken and signed.
- We rejoiced at the news of this conference – thank God for Bishop Redrado. Hope for our church to become more alive.
- As a Deaf person, I am coming from a different center: I am not worried about not being able to hear. I am happy being a Deaf person. I don’t believe “ephphatha” is about our ears to be opened, but our hearts and our minds and our other brothers and sisters, especially those who are in need.
- I believe my 4 Deaf brothers & sisters are God’s gift to my hearing parents, 2 hearing sisters, to Church, to world
- One challenge for me as a Deaf person is not to be worried about how hearing persons think about me or what I have to say. Only God can make people happy
- Deaf people are Eye People, depend on eyes, not hearing.
- Dim lighting in churches is very difficult for Deaf people.
- At Mass, there often is a problem caused by interpreters being asked to stand far from altar, forcing Deaf people to move heads back-and-forth to watch interpreters and yet follow action of the liturgy.
- U.S. & Canada 28m deaf and hard-of-hearing persons; a much smaller number are part of Deaf culture, sign language (ASL for U.S. and Canada; other countries have own sign language). Need to learn national sign language, learn Deaf culture.
- ASL not a simple language, but sophisticated, three-dimensional, complex language: use hands, face, mouth, lips, facial expression, body. My first language = ASL. It is my true language. ASL is not well accepted in world, U.S.A. Without knowing my language, my culture, you cannot know who I am: a Professional actor (10 years touring around the world), College Professor, Permanent Deacon (27 years), Professor at St. Thomas University graduate program.
- There are 11 deaf priests in U.S., 1 deaf seminarian: a small number, but progress. Feel like Moses looking over Promised Land.
- Hard for many Deaf people to go into church: often face discrimination
- In the U.S., there is a committee to translate Mass from Latin text into ASL. Want Mass in ASL, catechesis in American Sign Language, pastoral visitation of sick/pastoral care in ASL. There are many Deaf professionals in various professions – why not in our church: Dare we dream of our first Deaf Bishop? Cardinal? Pope?

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## **The Psychological World of Deaf People**

*Maryann Barth PhD*

- “Psychology of Deafness” – medical model, something “wrong” that needs to be fixed; psychological testing: based on written responses, not valid for d/Deaf persons; “audism”
- “Psychological World of Deaf People:” cultural model, Deaf as a way of being
- Many aspects & perspectives: We will focus on 3 perspectives = 1) Deaf people’s perspective of Deaf people; 2) Deaf people’s perspective of hearing people; 3)
- D – Deaf (cultural model) vs d – deaf (medical model) – deaf persons tend to focus on hearing loss, medical diagnosis. There is great diversity and complexity in this population: Hard-of-hearing people, hearing-impaired persons, deaf-blind persons.
- Many ways of communication; hearing people tend to focus on spoken language

*Consuelo Manero Soto PhD (cand)*

- I am representing the Latin world: Spanish-speaking
- “Deaf” implies much more than decibels. They are *persons*, complicated human beings. So often treated as ill people, who have to be treated. I am a member of a linguistic minority. We are all on the same level, persons of different language, culture.
- During & after World War II, there was a movement to eliminate deafness. Then came the perspective of “disability,” which has an effect on the individual – one feels less. As a woman, I was taught to feel lesser, lower. Why should people need special education in separate places – “special” means "different." "Integrate" means “let us come together, let’s learn from each other.” Working “with” vs working “for.”
- Labeling: “dis-abled” person believes labels, incorporates into sense of self.
- Psychological Well-being for a Deaf Person: “normal” vs. “abnormal” None of these include deafness. Deafness does not imply cognitive limitation.

*Maryann Barth PhD*

- Linguists have studied many sign languages throughout the world: phonology, morphology, temporal aspects, classifiers, non-manual markers, body shifts, pauses, facial expressions. Proved ASL, other sign languages are valid languages. Not mime, but pictorial, iconic. Not universal. Not limited to concrete ideas. Not “English on the hands”
- Recognize the health of Deaf people by removing the medical perspective. Many Deaf children truly have no self-worth because they are taught they are lesser: they must learn to speak; their writing is no good; their speech is not clear – negatives continue to pile up. St. Rita School in Cincinnati, Ohio serves students from age 6 wks – 21 yrs. One transfer student – met first Deaf adult (and was relieved, because thought they would die after High School, since they had never seen an adult Deaf person)
- deaf persons who sees self as “disabled” will have difficulty in succeeded, because that is how person sees self
- Deaf person wants to feel
- Bat-Chava has researched deaf people and self-esteem. Self-esteem is connected with 3 significant keys: 1) having Deaf parents 2) Family who uses sign language; 3) School that uses sign language

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*Consuelo Manero Soto PhD (cand)*

- Characteristics of Deaf person who is psychologically healthy: 1) positive self-concept and self-esteem; 2) accept deafness as something positive; 3) consider deafness as something effective; 4) ability to cope with negative responses, ability to be assertive in a positive way; 5) ability to place residual hearing, signs, etc. in proper perspective; 6) ability to seek help appropriately, but also be independent; 7) learn how to laugh; 8) continue to be updated, learning, growing.

*Maryann Barth PhD*

- Mutual respect: learning from one another as normal way of being together. God does not make mistakes.

### **Discussion**

- Recognize limitations of this conference, including inability to provide subtitles, other technology
- Giovanni Binnomi: deaf parents; dissertation on education of deaf persons: Are there deaf teachers in Italy? What is the training of interpreters? [Response: There are deaf teachers in Italy, but at a lower level. There are many interpreters.]
- Center for Volunteers for Suffering: I represent a different type of deafness – I became deaf at age 34; problems are different. "There is a loss of identity which perhaps is even greater than for a child." There is a risk of regressing without great effort. Sign language is not the only thing that needs our attention. I know deaf people who do not know Italian, cannot text message. It is not only "not understanding;" must also be with deaf people. We are also talking about spiritual growth. Teachings of church must be tailored to reach deaf people, so they can receive spiritual food. World is to be seen in a different way. Must take into account the feelings of deaf people so they can feel well, feel fulfilled. [Response: (Consuelo) There are a large number of late-deafened persons. One of the first tasks is to go through a type of mourning, to come to acceptance with deafness. Learn to communicate anew. Cochlear implant can help; closed-captioning will help. Late-deafened persons live between two worlds. Former President of Gallaudet, himself deafened: "Deaf people can do anything, except hear."]
- Matthew: In school, why is not some time allocated to getting to know people who are Deaf, so everyone can know and meet Deaf people? [Response: It is something people should learn in elementary school. Also parents to teach.]

### **End of Session: Archbishop Patrick Kelly**

- "Never let the optimum be the enemy of the good." This is not perfect, but it is a miracle, and I think miracles are better than perfection.
- "Patrispneumopsychosomatic": Father (God)-spirit (relating to the other as other)-psyche-body Heaven will not be the place where the barriers are broken, where I can relate to the other as other.

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## **Afternoon Session**

### **Moderator for Afternoon Session: Ms. Frankie Berry**

#### **Medical Aspects of Deafness**

*Dr. Maria Antonia Claveria Puig*

- Overview of anatomy and physiology of the ear – variations among individuals
- Normal hearing: 500-8,000 hertz; 0-20 db
- Hypoacusia: 10-20 db loss at all frequencies; hearing losses are classified as “mild”, “moderate”, “severe,” “deep” (90 db loss or >)
- With hypsacusia in inner ear, we cannot speak of treatment, but about aids. These have varied across the years.
- Central hypoacusia in the inner auditory pathway, treatments thus far are unknown
- Age of onset is also critical: prelingual, lingual, postlingual
- Cause is also important consideration: hereditary, acquired. Perhaps most frequent condition is Usher’s Syndrome, which can take place at birth or at a later date. Other syndromes are also significant. A number of illnesses also cause deafness. 40% of deafness is acquired: e.g. illness, injury/accident
- Hypoacusia can be stable or progressive, which may or may not include periods of stability.
- Cochlear implants are most well-known surgical interventions, but there are other forms (incl. middle ear, and even brain stem). Rehabilitation required. Not all persons with hearing loss are eligible for implantation – assessment required. Cochlear implant: an electronic device which translates sounds to electric signals, which stimulate the nerve receptors in the inner ear, which the brain interprets as sound. Hearing rehabilitation required, also speech therapy.
- Deaf person with hearing device will never be able to hear the way a hearing person can; the hearing will always be distorted

*Prof. Marcel Broesterhuizen*

- Various studies have shown there is no difference between deaf people and hearing people regarding incidence/rate of psychoses, autism,
- However, there are social maladjustments. There is no direct relationship between deafness and acting out behavior.
- Most important factor in the adjustment process is threat to attachment between parent (other family members) and child. In 2/3cases, attachment is secure; 1/3 experience insecure attachment: 1) too much 2) too little exploration. Differences are not significant between hearing & deaf infants 6-9 months, (time when attachment is visual).
- When the attachment is secure, a young person receives clear expectations and needs to communicate feelings and personal thoughts. Appropriate response = mutual confidence in self, between parent/teacher & child. Where there is lack of communication, the more powerful person takes control of relationship. Thus, parents become more directive, commanding toward deaf children. Deaf child does not learn to express feelings, have confidence in self or others (parents seen as unpredictable; unsure that parents will be available or will be of help).

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- This can result in attachment disorders. Can be accompanied by not feeling appreciated. Irene Taylor (coda -- child of deaf adults): relates that deaf child felt like “pet” in family, no good communication between self and other member of family. Wondered: why I was different? Why didn’t they communicate with me like they did with each other? I felt very angry, but couldn’t talk about my anger. The only thing I could do was quit & move away. Still grow sad, sometimes get angry when I think about past. I think my parents did what they know best. I think that if my mother then knew what she knows now, she would have learned sign language, so she could communicate with me.
- Parents acknowledge importance of deaf people being with other deaf people. Can lead to deaf persons being closer to friends, teachers than family. “Hearing people know nothing. They are no help to us. Hearing people think they are educating people, but they are only educating each other.”
- Images of God often depend on relationships with family (e.g. God as father connects with relationship with father.) (DeSales study: God as powerful, distant, don’t know sign language. Church images reopen old wounds).
- True participation of deaf person in church depends on family, the domestic church. If family experience is successful, it will be successful outside family.
- It can be said that Deaf people and hearing people live in a different world. They experience world differently. Deaf people will make different choices than hearing parents, siblings will make. For physicians, family members, treatments/technological advancements are not welcomed in same way by Deaf persons (e.g. Deaf opposition to cochlear implants). More young deaf people have been choosing to have cochlear implants. Many deaf persons in Europe who were educated orally, choose to have cochlear implant – but also learn sign language and associate with deaf persons. (Story of deaf woman who had cochlear implant, did sociological research about Deaf community in other countries – won prize as a “cochlear implant success” & accepted only on condition that they provided sign language interpreter for award ceremony.)
- Among Deaf people, great suspicion about genetic research, especially regarding identifying causes, genetic treatments for deafness. Only group of deaf persons who seem to support genetic research & treatment seem to be those who do not identify or associate with Deaf community.
- Research among Deaf person indicate they do not like to be associated with disabled people. Deaf people identify themselves as members of a minority group with their own language and culture. Seem to be consistent across many countries and cultures, not only West.
- Sense of Deaf identity begins with youth, early education.

### **Roundtable: Experiences from the World of Deafness**

*Prof. Marco Radici (St. John of God Hospital)*

- Deafness represents 120m people world-wide. Statistics come from Western world only, where many services are developed to meet these needs. The world of the deaf is world close to us, but world we only partially understand.
- Culture of world of Deaf is culture that Deaf want to keep to themselves. Parents sometimes reject cochlear implant because they want child to be part of culture of Deaf.
- Contemporary culture is becoming more visual. Technology gives us more time for ourselves, but increased pace of life gives us less time to ourselves. Social system that

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should welcome deaf persons in our cities does not exist much any more. Society made up of strangers which make things effective

- Need to promptly rehabilitate at earliest possible time. Also need to address integration to society, a world that does not completely belong to them.
- 1/1000 children born deaf; 1/100 babies may have had problems during pregnancy. 1/1500 in Italy need some form of rehabilitation. Many efforts at diagnosis at prelingual age. There is plasticity for language at this age; early diagnosis critically important for this reason. Screening can take place w/in first 5 days after birth; follow-up testing can take place where indicated. Provide opportunity for early rehabilitation. In Sweden, implants of both ears take place at young age.

*Prof. Frans Coninx*

- Symposium is bridge between past and future, as is each day.
- Diagnosis, treatment of hearing impairments have changed greatly over last 20 years. In the past, there was late diagnosis of deafness (2 yrs. +); hearing aids were simply amplifiers, not adjustable; cochlear implants just beginning. Now, neonatal screening in place; digital hearing aids adjusted to individual needs; cochlear implants as young as 8-12 months
- Treatments can take place during linguistic plasticity. Children can learn language, pronunciation casually by hearing it (pronounce according to dialect). Included in family, school, church, society. Follows UN Convention on Inclusion(?). Gives them real choice about how they want to live. Many perhaps will choose to be truly bilingual – speech and signing.
- Advances seem to make old distinctions obsolete (e.g. hard-of-hearing/profoundly deaf). With few exceptions, people will have real ability to hear, speak, enjoy music. Frequency-shifting hearing aids, electronic devices (e.g. increasingly sophisticated cochlear implants), implants to compensate for missing/deformed middle ear.
- Summary point: Need to be careful about transplanting experiences from past into the future.

*Sr. Antoine Ardatin*

- Deaf student asked: if Jesus is still alive, why are we still deaf? Why didn't Jesus cure us? My answer is Spirit of Jesus is still working in you.
- 70 schools for deaf in Indonesia; partnership with deaf school in Netherlands; Jawa Tengah: first school for deaf girls (second oldest in country). 12% of population Christian; mostly Muslim. School has religion curriculum also for Buddhist, Muslim. Since 1975, Government founded schools for children for disabilities. Democracy does not mean freedom of religion: few vocations to priesthood, religious life, education of deaf children. People must marry w/in their religion. Our school is private school, so we must pay the salaries. Parents rarely can afford to pay school fees. Teachers sent from government teacher training rarely have needed skills; must provide in-service training to help them become effective.
- Catholic, Muslim have a social gathering after prayers together. There is a good interreligious relationship, e.g. credit union founded by mosque, technical expertise of school open to all the deaf (often seek loan to buy sewing machine, set up business).

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*Fr. Jaime Gutiérrez Villanueva, St. Mary of Silence, Madrid, Spain*

- About 100K deaf in Spain.
- Currently, I am 35 yrs. Working on PhD. Working with new lay movement focused on families. Became deaf at age 12; received cochlear implant at age 28. Have never worked exclusively with deaf people; always have worked also with hearing people. Sees both groups as complementary.
- Has shared marginalization, suffering, sorrow experienced by deaf with hearing people. As priest, seek true integration between deaf & hearing. I believe this is possible. It will be a mutual advantage; deaf have much to contribute to hearing & vice-versa. Deaf cannot remain isolated, on an island in society and in the church.
- Many deaf people are totally integrated in the church, movement, society
- Greatest challenge: total evangelization (social, cultural, religious) integration of whole person
- Authentic development is integral, involving whole person (cf. Pope Benedict)
- First effort: develop awareness of possibility of integration; develop solidarity including all deaf people, throughout world. Recognizing that most deaf persons live in poor persons, where even basic resources are lacking.
- Requires a lot of time, great will power. People must be protagonists, not spectators in life. Deaf must be engaged in integration of other deaf people; cannot be done without deaf people. Deaf people have capability of making their voices heard.
- Need for human resources to make this possible. Must commit to pursuing this. Faith will make this possible.
- Young deaf people will be able to accomplish what they want to in life, but only together, in union, hearing and deaf, with services, programs. This international conference is a important step forward.

*Mr. Sander Blondeel, Belgium, Deaf Artist*

- I was born deaf (due to blood complications) in 1958; I have 1 hearing brother, younger deaf brother w. multiple disabilities. I attended Deaf Catholic schools; Brothers taught independence. My father was a stained-glass artist. Attended Academy; received MFA (w/o interpreter). Then studied photography w. interpreter. Studied English, art in US at Rochester Institute of Technology for the Deaf (RID); have stain-glass studio in Ghent and have done work for churches, government buildings, schools.

*Ms. Jennifer NG Paik Yeng*

- I was born hearing, became deaf; received a cochlear implant; work as volunteer for REACH at St. Francis Xavier church.
- We serve only about 20 deaf people: deaf awareness, sacramental preparation, arrange for signed Mass. Limited because all activity takes place w/in parish. Many deaf are unaware of services. Neighborhood-based BEC (basic ecclesial communities) established in local neighborhoods are not helpful to deaf, who are isolated across many neighborhoods.
- There is little awareness, support for outreach to deaf community.
- Interpreters are often considered a distraction to hearing members. Signing priests are sent far away from deaf community. We have no resources for recruitment, training, upgrading, of interpreters. Many interpreters prefer to stay only in role of interpreters and

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to not involve themselves in any other way. Many interpreters serve only when they are free/available – sometimes, we can go for months w/o interpreters.

- Deaf ministry should be set up in diocese/archdiocese. Full-time pastoral minister needed.

### **Discussion**

- Malta (pop. 400,000) has provided weekly interpreted Mass at the Jesuit University – using Maltese sign language & sign-writing. Preparing Christmas story in sign-writing.
- Rector of Cathedral: Small pastoral group of hearing & deaf people, with pastoral activity of catechesis, charitable work. Has goal of hearing people becoming involved with evangelization work. Questions: 1) Should deaf children be prepared for Sacraments separately or with other (hearing) children? [Response by Italian Sister: depends on preparation they have. Often parents do not want children to be separated. If deaf children attend mainstream school, there should be no problem – they want to be part of group. Deaf parents usually want their deaf children to be prepared in sign language.] 2) Resources available for catechesis of young people and adults? [Response by Frankie Berry: resources are available through ICF (International Catholic Foundation for the Service of Deaf Persons), spoken and written English & Spanish. Italian Sister: we do not have resources available in Italian] 3) Hearing & Deaf people fall in love – what pastoral advice can you offer? [Response by Fr. Jaime: needs 3-4 sessions for couples; none have dropped out. Pre-marriage preparation has been quite successful. Although most deaf people marry other deaf people, we have had successful hearing-deaf marriages.]
- Priest from Equatorial Guinea: We need to have different viewpoint than what have had had before (i.e. deaf people need to be cured). Perhaps time has come for the Church for create within the Dicastery a separate unit that attends to the need of Deaf people. This could be a way for prompting the attention of our Bishops. [Response from Frankie Berry: there are catechetical resources available from the ICF (International Catholic Foundation for the Service of Deaf Persons). One purpose of ICF is to promote greater awareness of deafness, promoting support for deaf ministry.] [Response from Bishop Holley: begins one-on-one, by personal invitation.]
- Conception, Chile: we have a vibrant Deaf community, catechesis of deaf children, gatherings of deaf community. [Response from Fr. Jaime: Deaf people are not ill, don't need to be cured. Working with Spanish Episcopal Conference, they have been very interested & supportive. I don't know whether there is a department within the Vatican, a website, a way to share experiences, resources, networking with each other.]

### **End of Session: Archbishop José Redrado**

- We gave focused on 3 maps: medical map, social map, shared many experiences. In particular, we began with prayer to Our Lady of Silence and gave voice to more than 1M persons in the church. We must discover Our Lady of Silence: Mary speaks only four times in the Gospels (Annunciation, Magnificat, finding in temple, Cana “do whatever he tells you.” Otherwise, she is silent: a presence, a contemplative silence, a praying silence, an attentive silence.

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**20 November 2009**

**Morning Session**

**Chairperson of Session: Fr. Savino Castiglione**

**The Family and Deaf People**

*Mrs. Maura Buckley*

- I am deaf child of hearing parents & deaf mother. Degree from Catholic University (US) in Sociology & Education. Married Deaf man, Hugh, 3 hearing children. 30+years teaching
- Parents intimidated by oldest child being deaf, but wanted what was best. Mother was teacher & researched best educational opportunities for me. Mother discovered oral method & believed it best for me. I was lucky – I adapted well. Communication with parents improved. Books important at home. Parents often bought religious books: Christmas, Easter, all became real for me.
- Role of parents is crucial: relationship, education, transmit values & faith. Choices in Ireland today: mainstreaming or a specialized school for deaf. Falling enrollment for the specialized schools often means boarding away from home. However, in mainstream school, child may not have full access to teacher; aides may not be trained to meet special needs of deaf child; not have full access to sign language. Academically, may do ok, close to home, with siblings, but socialization may suffer. In specialized school: small classes, trained teachers, sign language can open child's mind – less time struggling with language & more time grasping concepts. Deaf children have done well with both options. In my time, oral education imposed on all children, whatever suitability was. Today, focus is on what is best for child.
- Most schools are Catholic schools, but have more children from other religions and cultures. Teachers deal with education and religion differently. Parents are primary educators of children in faith, but if parents have limited communication ability, this leaves religious education in between: parents cannot share values effectively, teachers are spending less time on religion. Schools have Chaplains, who come for Mass, prayer services regularly. Better opportunity to be involved in liturgy (more than hearing children)
- Schools are source of Deaf community. Deaf people scattered around the community. Deaf people gather: socials, birthdays, funerals, sporting events (very popular).
- New Catholic Deaf Village Project in Dublin for people to gather, relax. Residence for elderly deaf/deaf-blind, educational opportunities, services. Core will be chapel and national Chaplaincy for Deaf. Will operate within local community in integrated manner. Will help encourage participation, address concern about deaf community shrinking because of mainstreaming.
- Deaf people usually marry other Deaf people. Pre-marriage course organized by chaplains annually in Dublin in Irish sign language to prepare Deaf couples for marriage and raising family in church.
- My experience: being Deaf didn't make raising children any more difficult. At the time, there was much new technology available – now commonplace. I noticed that the issues, challenges were the same as for hearing families. Introduced faith early on, center of life & values. Re-reading notes of a talk I prepared from 20 yrs. ago about my experience as a deaf parent, I realized my children had a happy childhood, lived a normal life: joys &

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sorrows of life, good days & bad days, always loved, “on loan” to us, encouraged them to bring friends home. I feel we did our best to lay good foundation for lives, faith.

- Today parenting is more difficult: alcohol, drugs, music, internet, cell phone, preoccupation w. electronic devices, damage to church’s reputation because of scandals (esp. school abuses, clergy sexual abuse) and people have been horrified & turn away from church.
- Often Deaf parents do not fully understand rituals of church, meaning (“what you are supposed to do”). Opportunity for adult faith formation. This is why chapel is at center of Village Project. Deaf people prefer to go to Deaf church, where there is opportunity for full participation. Not all Deaf people have an opportunity to Deaf church. Local parish limits access – feel excluded, w/o getting information about what is happening. Often local churches do not feel responsibility for providing interpreters, not aware of all information that Deaf persons are not getting. As a result, many Deaf people are not involved at local church.
- Death of youngest son from cancer – age 31. Turned to church for spiritual strength, support during illness, facing & preparing for death. Great support by Deaf Community, presence at funeral. Since his death, my local hearing church has not been very helpful – perhaps believe that the Deaf Chaplaincy is providing care.
- My 3 grandchildren are hearing, but learning to sign. I look forward to being able to share my values, my stories, my faith with them.

### **Roundtable: Experiences of Married Couples**

*Mr & Mrs. Albiero, deaf couple; hearing son Matteo*

- Deaf couple of Deaf parents. Must travel to participate in faith activities. Having a hearing child has rooted them more in local community. Son translates for them at Mass, but other hearing people disapprove, which upsets him. No pastoral services for us; hard to participate in local parish w/o interpreters. No priests available to help Deaf couples having marriage problems, so many marriages break up. Many Catholics go to other religious groups (e.g. Jehovah’s Witnesses), who welcome and try to help Deaf people. Now, monthly gathering for Deaf people.
- Parable of net thrown into sea: bring in everything. Ask Church for help. Need interpreters. Want courses.
- Proposals for church: 1) encourage seminarians to learn sign language, Deaf culture, prepared to welcome, serve Deaf people; 2) many Deaf people with problems with spouses, marriage prep, confession. Diocese has priest who can sign to serve needs of Deaf people; 3) theology course with basic principles for Deaf, so they can evangelize others; 4) websites where Deaf people can learn Bible, Liturgy, Mass translated in sign language, including readings & homily for the next Sunday. Could also caption to help deafened people. 5) other initiatives on parish level to encourage participation by Deaf person. 6) Bishop with qualified interpreter who knows religious signs responsible for catechesis: marriage, Eucharist, confirmation. Deaf people also have responsibility to evangelized. St. Paul reminds us that each person is called to do what he/she can do.

*Mr & Mrs. Lamano (husband deaf, wife hearing; 2 hearing children, expecting third)*

- Husband attending Deaf residential school. Family shared faith; also priest at school. Felt marginalized & I rejected Church. Met wife teaching sign language class. She is involved

## ***Ephphata! The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church***

in Neo-Catechumenate. Faith was a major source of contention. She raised issue of how to raise children, which was an "ephphata moment" for me – renewed my faith.

- Husband: We come from 2 different worlds, perspectives, experiences of life. I had to accept her and she accept me, my perspectives, my imperfections. The Lord keeps us together. Both participate in Neo-catechumenate – wife is my interpreter. If she is not available, I have no way to understand. Has to drive 50km to go to priest who signs for confession (really possible only once/year).
- Wife: 2 cultures married. Combined with struggles of Christian marriage. Being wife of Deaf person is great honor, which I don't deserve – it means someone really loves me. I'm not his interpreter; I become the tool for his participation in life of church. I feel alone in supporting this mission. It does not provide much for my growth.
- Husband: I was concerned about my ability to share faith w. children. At dinner time, child reminds us if we forget to pray

*Mr. & Mrs. Comazzetto (hearing couple, parents of two deaf children, one hearing child)*

- First challenge: harmonizing many needs of marriage and Christian marriage. With deaf children, even more needs to address. Trying to harmonize everything is difficult. Hard to have time to attend Sunday Mass. Deaf children do not understand what is happening at Mass; hard to keep appropriate behavior, not disturb other parishioners. Have not felt supported by church, other parishioners. Little help in all the practical decisions about hearing aids/cochlear implants/education/sign language vs oral/ speech training. Many couples have divorced because of strains.
- We have gone to another school, which means we have to commute. Parish has not offered support. Was not able to provide religious education to for deaf children, because limited language. Since meeting Fr. Silvio, have learned religious signs. Now easier with third child (deaf). Have chosen bi-lingual setting (Italian & sign) for religious education, which is working well so far. Have deaf educators involved. Concerned for families who are isolated. Appeal to Church for qualified priest who can serve deaf people properly. Oliver Sacks: "this is a journey which makes the familiar strange and the strange familiar."

### **Audience with Pope Benedict**

Introductory Comment from Archbishop Zimowski: "The Church wishes to engage itself with people who are deaf so they may be properly formed so they can be a bridge for more than 1M Deaf people."

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the 24th International Conference organized by the Pontifical Council for Health-Care Workers on a theme of great social and ecclesial importance: "*Ephphata! The hearing-impaired person in the life of the Church*". I greet Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, President of the Dicastery, and thank him for his cordial words. I extend my greeting to the Secretary and to the new Undersecretary, to the Priests, Religious and Lay People, to the Experts and to everyone present. I would like to express my appreciation and my encouragement for your generous commitment to this important sector of pastoral care.

## ***Ephphata!* The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church**

Indeed, the problems that beset deaf people, who have been made the object of attentive reflection in these days, are numerous and delicate. It is a situation on different levels, which ranges from the sociological horizon to the pedagogical, from the medical and psychological to the ethical and spiritual and the pastoral. The reports of specialists, the exchange of experiences among those who work in this field, the testimonies of the deaf themselves have offered the possibility for an in-depth analysis of the situation and for the formulation of proposals and guidelines for an ever more specialized attention to these brothers and sisters of ours.

The word "*Ephphatha*" as the beginning of the title of the Conference's theme, calls to mind the well-known episode in Mark's Gospel (cf. 7: 31-37) which is paradigmatic of how the Lord works for deaf people. Jesus took aside a deaf mute and, after making some symbolic gestures, raised his eyes to Heaven and said to him: "'*Ephphatha*', that is, '*Be opened*'". At that moment, the Evangelist says, the man's ears were opened, his tongue released, and he spoke plainly. Jesus' gestures are full of loving attention and express deep compassion for the man who stood before him. The Lord showed the deaf man his concrete concern, drew him aside from the confusion of the crowd, made him feel his closeness and understanding by several gestures full of meaning. He placed his fingers in his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. He then invited him to turn his interior gaze, that of his heart, together with him to the heavenly Father. Finally, he healed him and restored him to his family, to his people, and the crowd, marveling, could only exclaim: "He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak!" (*Mk 7: 37*).

By his way of behaving which reveals the heavenly Father's love, Jesus does not only heal physical deafness but points out that there is another form of deafness of which humanity must be cured, indeed, from which it must be saved: it is deafness of the spirit, which raises ever higher barriers against the voice of God and that of one's neighbor, especially the cry for help of the lowliest and the suffering, and closes the human being in profound and ruinous selfishness. As I had the opportunity to say in the Homily during my Pastoral Visit to the Diocese of Viterbo last 6 September: "we can see in this 'sign' Jesus' ardent desire to overcome man's loneliness and incommunicability created by selfishness, in order to bring about a 'new humanity', the humanity of listening and speech, of dialogue, of communication, of communion with God. A 'good' humanity, just as all of God's Creation is good; a humanity without discrimination, without exclusion... so that the world is truly and for all a 'scene of true brotherhood'" (*Homily, Mass in Faul Valley, Viterbo, 6 September; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, pages 5-6, 9 September 2009*).

Unfortunately experience does not always testify to acts of prompt acceptance, convinced solidarity and warm communion for people who are unable to hear. The numerous associations that have come into being to protect and promote their rights, highlight the existence of a discontent society that is marked by prejudice and discrimination. These are deplorable and unjustifiable attitudes because they are contrary to respect for the dignity of the deaf and their full social integration. Far more widespread, however, are the initiatives promoted by institutions and associations, in both the ecclesial and civil contexts, that are inspired by authentic and generous solidarity and which have contributed to improving the living conditions of many hearing-impaired people. In this regard, it is important to remember that in the 18th century the first schools for the religious instruction and formation of these brothers and sisters of ours were being founded in Europe. From that time on charitable institutions in the Church increased,

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impelled by priests, men and women religious and lay people, whose purpose was to offer the hearing-impaired not only an education but also an integral assistance for their complete fulfillment. However, it is not possible to forget the serious situation in which they still live today in the developing countries, both because of the lack of appropriate policies and legislation and because of the difficulty in obtaining access to primary health care treatment. Deafness, in fact, is often the consequence of illnesses that can easily be treated. I therefore appeal to the political and civil authorities, as well as to the international organizations, to offer the necessary support in order to promote, also in those countries, a proper respect for the dignity and rights of deaf people, encouraging their full social integration with adequate assistance. Following the teaching and example of her divine Founder, the Church is continuing to accompany the various pastoral and social initiatives for their benefit with love and solidarity, reserving special attention for those who are suffering, in the awareness that it is precisely in suffering that a special strength is concealed, a special grace which brings the human being inwardly closer to Christ.

Dear hearing-impaired brothers and sisters, you are not only recipients of the Gospel message but also legitimately heralds of it, by virtue of your Baptism. Thus you live every day as witnesses of the Lord in your living contexts, making Christ and his Gospel known. In this Year for Priests, you are also praying for vocations, so that the Lord will inspire numerous good ministries for the growth of the ecclesial community.

Dear friends, I thank you for this encounter and entrust all of you who are present here to the motherly protection of Mary, Mother of Love, Star of Hope, Our *Lady of Silence*. With these wishes, I cordially impart to you the Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to your families and to all the associations which actively work at the service of the hearing-impaired.

### **Afternoon Session**

**Chairperson: Archbishop Patrick Kelly**

#### **Pastoral Care for Deaf People**

*Prof. Kazimiera Krakowiak* (summary of written presentation)

- Priests who have served deaf in Poland developed educational methods for the deaf in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, for religious education, catechism.
- Deafness does not restrict the call to holiness, but may impoverish them in making it difficult for them to understand. First effort is to overcome the barriers to receiving the Word, thus, receiving the language of faith and full access to the sacramental life of the church.
- Priestly assistance and care followed uniform method. Sense of belonging to a community. Deaf who did not attend school were socially isolated.
- Recognition of special needs w/in priestly ministry. Important to identify the special needs for reflection, action.
- What is needed is good relationships with others. Begins in family, which has common language. Parents encounter difficulty sharing language with their child. Child is at risk of being pushed aside, losing his roots, including religious roots. Corresponding difficulty learning/access to reading and writing. Need to assist parents in this effort, to determine best methodology for educating child.

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- Special needs of individuals with hearing impairment and pastoral care: pastoral care must be for family, not only deaf individual. Need to have opportunity to speak with priest who understands their specific situation in the light of faith. 1) need for spiritual care for parents, esp. dealing w. emotional response connected w. birth of deaf child (sense of injustice, guilt, despair). 2) support parents in their carrying out their parenting duties; 3) need for advice & assistance for religious education.
- Needs regarding formation and integration in various social situations, regarding catechisis & pastoral care. 1) pastoral care for deaf people living with hearing people; integration into parish; 2) improved methods for catechesis, esp. persons with multiple disabilities; 3) conditions that facilitate full participation for deaf children at Mass; 4) need to spread knowledge among parish community. Need for what Pope John Paul II called “imagination of mercy.” Each act is an act of solidarity with individual, which creates new possibilities for the person. Requires change – in deaf person, in ourselves.
- With people w. multiple disabilities, catechesis is needed – not watering down, but finding ways to share the faith that saves us.

### **Roundtable: Pastoral Experiences**

*Archbishop Patrick A. Kelly*

- How have Deaf sisters and brothers – the eye people -- helped me to receive the Gospel of Jesus? A Bishop is chosen, first, to proclaim “Jesus is risen!” Like Paul, “I pass on to you what I have received, that Jesus suffered ....” My Deaf brothers and sisters invite me to receive the Gospel – not with your ears, not with your mind – but with your eyes. The women come to the tomb: they look, they see. Jesus has been carried away. Look – they carry ointment. It is not from hearing, but from seeing, we receive the proclamation: “Jesus is risen!” I first received it many years ago in Spain – a pure gift. My Deaf sisters and brothers proclaim the good news, not only receive it.
- Jesus also forgave the apostles. Three times, Peter said, “I do not know him”; the others fled. On the evening of the first day, Jesus comes to them. His first sign: “peace be with you.” Then he shows them his hand and his side. Jesus says: Look! See! I am with you.” The forgiveness is to be seen, not just heard. Thomas was not there – “I do not believe. Jesus will do what I want – proud. Eight days later, Jesus comes to Thomas: “See! Put your finger in my nailmarks, your hand in my side.” Thomas sees mercy, forgiveness. This Bishop must show mercy, forgiveness that is touched. One day, Fr. Cyril, I will return to the Gospels and I will learn Jesus who touches. I promise I will do this for you. This Jesus who touches is the way, the truth and the life. Not the Jesus we think about. Church is place where mercy and forgiveness is seen, touched.
- A Bishop is called to proclaim one church, one people, one family. My Deaf brothers and sisters show me this. I need all of you; you need each other. One body, but we are many. This journey was strengthened today by Pope Benedict. In all this, I have seen a new life, a new way, a new loving of Jesus. I tell you, my Deaf sisters and brothers: this is the best blessing God has given me.

*Fr Cyril Axelrod*

- I have been a priest 39 years; international preacher for Deaf people all over the world. They teach me. This enables me to pass the message of the Lord; this happens through touch. All over the world, many deaf people have said the same thing to me: ask them to

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learn from us. There are 5 points to share: 1) Deaf sign language & Deaf wisdom. Important to be given to the church and so passed to deaf people everywhere. Important for the church to have that language to be able to communicate to everyone, as Jesus did. 2) I would like the Pope to use sign language, even basic sign language. This would show the support of the church all over the world. 3) Many Deaf people and religious people (priests, sisters, etc.) work through the day with their community & work alone. Church should encourage more Deaf people to become priests, sisters, brothers, so they can be encouraged to become part of the community of the church. 4) Key that Church, Pope encourage bishops to encourage and welcome Deaf people to become priests and provide support w. interpreters, etc. and feel they have support of church. 5) many priests, sisters work alone, independently. All depends on wisdom & experience of that person. This knowledge must be given to the church so they can develop some kind of international pastoral training to serve the Deaf community. Jesus said, go and teach the people what you have learned from me. This is what I have learned and shared with you. I hope the Pontifical Council can think about how to create this bridge to link Deaf people to the church.

- Regarding Canon Law: this is very difficult. Canon Law says that in words of consecration that must hear the voice. Some adaptation for priest who signs should be made. For confessions, if priest doesn't know sign language, he needs interpreter. Should be included so Deaf people can use their language. Sign language is part of our Deaf culture. Law needs to be made more clear, so Deaf people can feel supported. [Archbishop. Kelly: I have a meeting scheduled with Congregation for Worship regarding worship with Deaf people. Fr. Axelrod's points come at an opportune moment.]

*Mrs. Nicole Clark*

- Deaf community in Australia is small: 15,500. Ephphatha Center works like parish – all lay staff. Support the Deaf community. Deaf Mass, not w. hearing people.
- Re: Leadership. 5 yrs ago Cardinal Pell appointed a Deaf director for Center. It made a huge difference; much greater empowerment, self-determination. Deaf leadership has also impacted Archdiocese – recognized need for deaf interpreter. All have seen Deaf people in their midst & interpreter worker with them. No one will fight harder for a Deaf person than another Deaf person.
- Re: Access. “All Catholic language I have heard, I need to understand to be able to sign it.” My desire is to have the Church support this incredible work. Interpreters love the church, love the deaf community. We need support of the church
- Re: Self-Determination. This has been in the forefront for the Deaf community for hundreds of years. Last year during Lent, we decided to try all different forms of prayer: traditional (Rosary), reflection, active prayer (working with Catholic indigenous people. Worked all weekend & wanted to go back). The active prayer led them right through Pentecost because Deaf were giving with their hands, not hands out. This year, we are working with homeless people. These decisions are being made by Deaf people; it is the result of natural growth.
- “The body of Christ presumes a place for everyone. The Gospel of Jesus Christ demands a place for everyone.”

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*Sr. Vittorina Carli*

- School/ Ephphatha Center: Founder in 1947 – must work to bring Deaf to God.
- Did not realize at first that Deaf did not have good knowledge of the Lord, but they have a desire for the Lord. Do not be afraid to sow your seeds. Don't worry about the growth; that is God's work. Aim: bring the Word of Gospel to the Deaf; live
- Methodology -- 4 phases: 1) current events of life; 2) kerygmatic moment – the Scripture; 3) interiorization phase; 4) liturgy & Eucharist, with sending forth.
- Use new technology: email, texting. World Youth Day in Cologne was an excellent experience.
- Catechesis takes place at monthly gathering for Mass, Oct-June. People come from 3 areas of region & neighboring regions. Many young people gather at the Center near Vincenze. Gathering, catechesis, testing, confession, Mass, lunch, cultural/social event (sometimes seminar). This year (2009-2010 year of the Priest focus on St. John Vianney).
- As a Deaf Sister, Deaf can identify with me and I can communicate more fully with them. I have suggested seminar. Also preparation for engaged couples. Gino Cortese, 2001: "God is calling you – you the Deaf. Today the vineyard has not been properly cultivated. Do not disappoint Jesus or the Church." I wonder how Deaf people can answer the call. I hope National Conference will take this up to prepare Deaf people for this work.
- There have been few people working with the Deaf. God is merciful; God's grace is invincible.

*Ian Robertson PhD.*

- Thanks to 3 groups & 3 individuals: 1) Deaf community who have enriched my life for 24 years. I have studied theology for many years; have learned most from my Deaf brothers and sisters; 2) Pontifical Council – presence of God in every contact; 3) Many who have lived & have died who have gone before us, their lives and ministry with us. Thanks to Archbishop. Zimowski, Bishop Redrado, Abp. Kelly.
- Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter "Novo Millennio Ineunte" at the end of Jubilee 2000 called out for the church "Duc in altum" – "put out into the deep" (Luke 5:4) It may come after many years. Perhaps with new idea, but concerns/fears. Perhaps after a conference when we are thinking "what next?" – put out into the deep – that is when the catch will be greatest.
- Determination to provide same training for pastoral ministry for Deaf people as for hearing people. This led to the St. Thomas Graduate Program and degree. First language of the program is sign language. Developed programs, consulted expertise.
- Social sciences have helped us develop "best practices" for university program. 5 core values: 1) Language; 2) Ability vs dis-ability. Any discussion in terms of language & culture, not need to cure/fix something. 3) Need for opportunity and access for education at all levels; 4) Family. Importance of Deaf parents, challenge for hearing parents; 5) Community.
- Theology: sense of understanding of God – theology from the margins. Hearing world, Deaf are minority community w/in a hearing community and also hearing Church. Deaf have experienced marginalization and neglect. cf. 1) experience of Mexican-American community; work of Alessandro. Inside/outside experience. 2) Miguel Diaz: God's

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preferential option for marginalized found in God-self. This is what St. Thomas program does: it seeks to use experiences, life of Deaf person.

*Archbishop Kelly:* word “isolation” refers to “on the island” in Tiber, where the sick were sent (in isolation). When they recovered, they came back across the bridge

### **Fr. José Guillermo Gutiérrez Fernández (Pontifical Council of Family)**

- Much must be done for Deaf families. There are people with a great deal of experience presence. We need to work together.
- Great attention is being given to Deaf people, but it is still at the beginning. Much more must be done. We do not have the facilities, pastoral workers to meet their needs. This Conference is an opportunity to raise awareness.
- One challenge for our communities: become more open, more welcoming to people who are Deaf.
- Families of Deaf people are similar to families of hearing people. Deaf families must be supported; pastoral care given. Families that have gift of child who is Deaf do not always have resources in developing world. Yes, there is the challenge of prevention, but also resources for Christian education. Training also needed for workers who can provide services when child is born. Message of Catholic community to parents: you are not alone. Ministry to whole family.
- Deaf people have many needs. Greatest is to be integrated, not in ghetto.
- 2 paths of pastoral care: specific services and services provided for all families. Which is more appropriate depends on needs.
- Family is key tool for acquisition of language, which is key for person development. Need to help families in a practical way.
- Parents need support in educating their children. Help them evaluate options, methods in making best choices.
- Deaf persons need socialization among themselves.
- The Deaf Community Village being developed in Ireland is an interesting project – a comprehensive approach, but also open.
- It is important to develop activities for families themselves, promoting solidarity, community.
- Family is not only the focus for ministry. Society should also be focus on sharing their life experience. Parents evangelize their children; children evangelize their parents.
- Need to develop intense spiritual life. Reconciliation and Eucharist, especially. Parishes cannot always have a priest who understands sign language, but each diocese needs to have at least one priest who signs. Need to rely on priests and pastoral workers. Need for training. Optional courses in seminary in sign language, needs of Deaf.
- Take advantage of technology – internet, virtual communication. Most sites are not deaf-friendly.
- Purpose of Discastery of Family is to promote best ideas, practices. Would be good to include the experiences of deaf families.

### **End of Session: Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski**

- “A good humanity exists without walls.”

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**21 November 2009**

### **Opening: Bishop José Redrado**

- This is the final day of the Conference, but not the end; if this were the end, it would be a failure.
- We have seen and learned much. Unlike persons with mobility impairments, deafness and the effects of deafness are not always visible.

### **Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers**

- The “world of suffering” is the “world of liberation.” Illness and suffering do have an experience of evil; but for us as Christians, what is important is the abundance of grace.
- What matters is the enthusiasm and life that is in your hearts. This is what gives birth to saints. Often, saints are unknown to us during their lifetimes: they are hidden, obscure. It is only after death, that their gifts and holiness are
- My life as a priest has been blessed in working with those who suffer. As a Church, we must be like Christ, who was close to those who suffer. You are the noble representatives of Jesus, and you represent him with great honor.
- There is no health pastoral in the church unless there are lay people trained to do the work. The priest role is to guide them. The work carried out by doctors, nurses, volunteers must have a Christian spirit. The great cathedrals of the world are not St. Peter’s, St. John’s, St. Paul’s, St. Mary’s but the hospital, which serves suffering people and reveal the supernatural value of suffering.
- Do not speak to those who do not want to listen. The Word of God resounds here through you.

### **Report on the Proceedings of the Conference: Fr. Joseph Mulcrone**

- Our week began with two recurring themes: BEING OPEN (EPHPHATHA) and BEING ON A JOURNEY. This "Journey to Ephphatha" (Openness) began last year as over 1,000 deaf and hearing pilgrims came to Rome to remind the Church of our needs, frustrations, hopes, and dreams. The journey might have ended at that point, if it were not for the "openness" of Archbishop Jose Redrado and, later, Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski. The journey might have been delayed or postponed if not for the perseverance of Archbishop Patrick Kelly, and the combined efforts of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers and the International Catholic Foundation for the Service of Deaf Persons. In all of this, there was a powerful sense that the Lord was with us on this journey.
- During these amazing days, the dual themes of “OPENNESS” & “JOURNEY” have continually been a part of our discussions, presentations, and shared experiences. For many of those present, this was literally the journey of their lives, coming to Rome from places and pastoral situations greatly removed from well-equipped meeting rooms and professionally trained interpreters and staff. Many of us in attendance are here because others accompanied us as we ventured into pastoral ministry with deaf persons, and opened their hearts and shared their wisdom with us. For some of us, it was the experience of deafness itself or our family histories that made this journey a necessity. And when we arrived, what did we find?

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- An incredible warm and welcoming message from our first encounters with the people of the Vatican, assuring us of their openness to hear, see, and understand our concerns and challenges. We have been exposed to a number of presentations documenting the incredible journey of deaf people in so many aspects of life. The journey of deaf people seen medically as broken, limited to a new identity as people who can make their own decisions about their health needs. The journey of deaf people seen, at one time, as incapable of learning to this day when deaf people with doctorates can help us understand the depths of a consciousness both similar and unique to that of hearing people. The journey of deaf people whose language was once considered incoherent arm-waving to a recognition of a language able to express beauty, humor, and inspiration in surprising ways. The journey of deaf people once, and even up to these days, denied the right to marry or have children who now model effective, Christian parenting to the modern world. The journey of deaf people once considered incapable of understanding the Faith and therefore not able to participate in the sacramental life of the Church, now living out ministerial, pastoral, and priestly roles in the Body of Christ.
- Through all of this, there has been laughter, encouragement, frank discussion, and shared prayer in an atmosphere of open dialogue, the discovery of common bonds even as we struggle to understand each other's communications, and a lively spirit of mutual respect. EPHPHATHA indeed!
- None of this makes the serious and troubling issues we still confront invisible. 80% of our deaf brothers and sisters have almost no access to justice under the law, appropriate education, honest employment, and, in many cases, safety, food, shelter, and medical care. In many countries, even so-called developed countries, many dioceses fail to provide even for the minimum spiritual and pastoral needs of deaf Catholics, and fail to evangelize those deaf who hunger for knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. The long list of needs reported during these days are well recorded and demand a response from our Church. No one leaving here to continue this journey can believe that our few days together will tear down the barriers that continue to divide deaf people from the larger hearing world.
- Yet, our hearts have truly been opened to a new reality by everything from the smiles of the Vatican workers, the blessed weather, good food, and Gelato of Rome, to the amazing witness of our Holy Father, to his concern, and the Church's concern for our issues, our struggles, our dreams. The journey continues. We know we are not alone. We have been blessed by our being together, and the promise of our continued contact with each other and prayers for each other, are food for the journey. As we learned so well yesterday, "The Body of Christ presumes a place for everyone. The Gospel demands a place for everyone." To that end, let us continue this marvelous journey with hugs, smiles and hearts open to the joy promised by God's Holy Spirit.

### **Mr. Terry O'Meara, Chairperson of Discussion**

- The International Catholic Foundation for the Service of Deaf Persons (ICF) is a movement of communion among persons from various countries brought together by Holy Spirit out of a common conviction that Deaf people are called to the fullness of a life in Christ's Body, which is the Church.
- Mission of ICF is to support and promote the religious formation and pastoral care, of, with and by Deaf people within the Catholic Community. Support Chaplains, pastoral

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workers and catechists and seeks ways to bring the riches of their vocation with others in the Church and society so as to achieve a fuller expression of Eucharistic communion.

- To promote this mission, the Foundation will:
  - Raise awareness of Deaf peoples' presence in the Church and the gifts they have to offer;
  - Serve as a resource for the development of religious formation and pastoral care the formation of Chaplains, Pastoral Workers and Catechists, both Deaf and Hearing
  - Promote appropriate international gatherings
  - Collaborate with other organizations having the same mission.
- ICF supports deaf ministry. We wish to collaborate, share, be involved
- ICF collaborates with St. Thomas University Institute of Pastoral Ministry; provides a Chair and research at Louvain, Belgium; Dr. Marcel Broesterhuizen

### **Discussion:**

- Archbishop Kelly: wonderful conversation with Archbishop Demoia. Has learned the difference between signed English and British Sign Language. Excellent conversation; the door is open.
- Matthew: What impressed me most is that there are so many people. Speakers have said wonderful things that struck me. Helps me understand more about the life of Deaf people. I will share my experience here at school.
- Why at the end of this conference, why can't we do this in the Church. Deaf people are protagonists in Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baptists. Why not the Catholic Church. I teach sign language in St. Mary, Traverse to lay people, children, elderly because they want to learn. Why can't we have an interpreter at major Papal Masses? Papal addresses? Many Deaf people are left out. [Response: Your question is really a strong recommendation. It will be presented in the Conclusions. If you do not have a chance to speak, please write your comments, so they can all be part of the feedback and considered for the future.]
- Why can't Fr. Savino become a bishop? [Response: Your comment has been noted.]
- President of Deaf Association of Poland: purpose to raise awareness among priests in Poland and provide sign language training. Major issues: 1) lack of well-prepared priests to serve the Deaf; 2) priests who know sign language are moved; 3) Jehovah's Witnesses strong in Poland, attract many Deaf Catholics.
- I would like greater attention to be paid to people who become deafened as adults. Please give them more consideration in your work in the future
- David Malloy (New Zealand): Archbishops, will you be with us, to share the discussions with us this afternoon? We need your presence. [Response: Bishop José Redrado will be present for the liturgy this afternoon. Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, who has pastoral responsibility for Poles outside of Poland must leave to go to England. Archbishop Patrick Kelly must leave to return to Liverpool.
- Fr. Cyril Axelrod: 1) I would like to keep in contact with ICF, to share my experiences and learning from my travels around the world. 2) work with deaf-blind people, which seems to be a new area of pastoral care
- Fr. Wilson: I am second deaf priest in Brazil (born Deaf). In the past, good work was being done. Now things are changing, improving. More unity throughout the world. I am

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a parish priest, Our Lady of Tenderness. There are groups of Deaf people who come to the parish. All the pastoral groups are stronger and so the work is growing, though I am the only priest. The work is growing, so we can evangelize all the deaf people of the world.

- Brian Swatek: representing the International Catholic Deaf Association (I.C.D.A.) [Vice-President]; live in Chicago, IL. I can see that we have many similarities with the International Catholic Foundation in our work and in our problems. I can see that we can work together in all of this (I.C.D.A. and I.C.F.). What has been most important for me is to be with all of you and share with all of you.
- David (Italy): During these three days, we have seen the various types of Deafness, medical aspects. We Deaf people want to be protagonists: catechists, evangelizers, announcers. We young people want to be involved in the Church. We can receive the Word God and the Lord speaks to us through his hands. If I go somewhere where there are interpreters, I can participate more. I attended a course to become a catechist, a catechist for Deaf people. I am now preparing 7 Deaf people for Confirmation. In the past this has only been done by hearing people. In Italy, Catholic Deaf people are creating a national website with a communication portal where we can share the word of the Lord – done by Deaf people for Deaf people.
- Bishop. Redrado: You are the Church.
- Fr. Savino: This Conference has been a historic moment for Deaf people in the Church. You have opened the gate. We have not answered all the questions, especially pastoral issues. We are not going to close the gates. We need to look at this Conference as a glass that is half-full. The Dicastery has understood much
- Archbishop Redrado: The proceedings will be published by the Council

### **Conclusions: Mgr. Jean-Marie Mpendawatu**

#### **FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- By organizing this Conference devoted to the Deaf Person in the life of the Church, the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Workers has intended to send a strong message so as to underline the fact that the problems linked to the hearing disability of deaf persons, living members of the Church, deserve attention as was stressed by the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, during the Papal audience granted to the participants of this XXIV International Conference, with these words: “you are not only the recipients of the announcement of the Gospel message, but are, by full right, also the agents, by virtue of your Baptism”.
- In fact, the difference in this conference, with respect to others organized in the past on various types of disabilities, lies in the desire to stress the fact that hearing disabilities, purely sensorial, must necessarily be dealt with separately from other physical disabilities even when speaking of faith and religious practice.

## ***Ephphata!* The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**For the full integration of deaf persons in the life of the Church, this Assembly proposes:**

- 1. That there be a central office of the Church, on a national level, that handles and coordinates pastoral work for deaf persons.**
- 2. That each diocese have at least one priest with the necessary competencies in this specific sector so that he may be a reference point for deaf persons for the sacraments (confession- in particular), for the liturgy and for catechesis.**
- 3. That there be a course for seminarians to orient them towards this field of special ministry and that they may be encouraged to deepen their knowledge of the world of the Deaf and possibly also learn sign language, should they show interest in this type of pastoral work.**
- 4. That there be greater attention, from bishops, to solving the problems of the Deaf so that in the diocesan program for pastoral and catechetical work room is also made for catechesis and pastoral work for and with the Deaf and that some deaf persons also be part of this ministry.**
- 5. That in large cities there be a church/parish where the liturgy allows the active participation of people with hearing problems.**
- 6. That parochial and diocesan programs for pastoral work devote particular attention to deaf persons and their families. It would be beneficial to have a deaf person and some people who are parents collaborate in the drawing up of same.**
- 7. That there be a catholic website where current topics of faith are discussed. The site should also make it possible to follow the Mass with the homily. When ethical issues of political significance arise, the site should make it possible to better understand them.**
- 8. That deaf persons also be given the chance to attend courses on religious science organized by the diocese.**
- 9. That, in order to minister to the needs of people who do not know sign language, of people who have become deaf or people who became deaf as adults, pastors make arrangements to furnish all those places where the liturgy is celebrated with video screens.**
- 10. That on a national level, there be identified suitable institutions for the promotion of vocations and for the training of deaf candidates for religious life and the priesthood.**
- 11. That the dioceses keep a register of certified interpreters that can be called to interpret the Mass or do other work required in church.**

## ***Ephphata!* The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church**

**12. That, in order to remove all obstacles to the full social integration of deaf persons, as underlined by the Holy Father, there be implemented appropriate laws, conventions and protocols that aim to create those legal conditions that will facilitate the integration of deaf persons both in the training circuits and in the work circuits so that they, too, can bring their talents to fruition (Mt 25, 14-30) and contribute on all levels, each according to his or her own gifts and abilities, to the good of all of society.**

- The experience of these three days, while it gives us joy and hope on the one hand, it must also serve as an incentive to us to work ever harder and better so the call, no, the cry of Jesus – EPHPHATA – Open! – may resound in the hearts of all the deaf, be they right next to us or scattered around the world.

### **End of Conference: Archbishop Zimowski**

- All barriers must be removed. It is not the barrier of deafness, but the barrier of indifference.
- All those who have attended this conference must bring the message of this Conference home and to the world.
- 3 Levels of Strategy:
  1. Establish a standing permanent working group within the Pontifical Council to study pastoral needs of deaf people. In the five-year *ad-limina* questionnaire for Bishops, to inquire about the Pastoral Care of Deaf persons in their respective diocese.
  2. Organize a pilgrimage in Poland to the Shrine of the Black Madonna on July 3. All are invited.
  3. Send the recommendations from this Conference to the Italian Ministry of Health and express our willingness to have them to participate in the work of this ministry.