

Draft of April 6, 2004

Archdiocese of Boston
Pastoral Plan for Ministry
With The Deaf and Hard of Hearing
April 2004

I. Introduction

We have given considerable thought to Deaf and hard of hearing ministry in the Archdiocese of Boston in light of the reconfiguration of parishes and Archbishop Sean's challenge to Rebuild my Church. We believe that the situation presents a wonderful opportunity to enhance our ministry with the Deaf and hard of hearing in a way that could become a national model. This plan presents our thoughts thus far.

The ministry with the Deaf and hard of hearing in the Archdiocese is composed of three principal elements. First, there is the work of the Office of the Apostolate for the Deaf that serves as the Archdiocesan agency for ministry to the Deaf and hard of hearing. Its responsibilities include the coordination, support, and promotion of that ministry as well as ensuring the inclusion of the Deaf in the greater life of the Church. Second, we have a parish model of ministry that serves a large number of Deaf persons, separated today into three distinct communities: one led by Fr. Michael Medas, one led by Fr. Jack Fitzpatrick, and one led by Fr. Charles Murphy. Third, we have significant social service programs principally centered in the activities of Deaf Community Center (DCC). This plan addresses each of those elements.

II. Office of the Apostolate for the Deaf

The Office of the Apostolate for the Deaf should continue its work of coordination, support, and promotion of all ministries and outreach to the Deaf or hard of hearing throughout the Archdiocese. The responsibilities of the Office include:

- Advocacy and support for ministry with the deaf, including:
 - Oversight of efforts to make Archdiocesan programs and planning processes accessible to and inclusive of the deaf.
 - Development of educational workshops in areas including ministry with the Deaf, marriage preparation, liturgical ministries, religious education, and religious interpreting in Catholic settings.
 - Development of programs through which the deaf offer pastoral visits to other deaf at home, in health care settings and in prisons.
 - Assisting the Office of Worship in making renovation and construction of church buildings inclusive of current technologies that make such space accessible to the deaf.
 - Scheduling and coordination of interpreters for BCTV and other needs. (Archdiocesan guidelines for the payment of sign language interpreters are provided through the Office.)
 - Promotion of closed captioning programming by BCTV.

- Continued development of the Office's web site as a resource for all members of the Deaf community.
- Continued participation in regional and national organizations ministering with the Deaf.

The Office should also promote and coordinate Masses for the deaf at different locations across the Archdiocese together with related religious education, pastoral care and Sacramental services. These activities should include:

- Evaluating, over the next six months, all ministry to the deaf and rationalizing pastoral services in light of resources available and location of need. This would include Fr. Murphy's ministry in the south region and other parts of the Archdiocese.
- Identifying priests and seminarians who would be candidates to learn sign language and deaf culture so they would be equipped to do outreach and offer welcome to the Deaf at their local assignments. Their assignment to *welcoming parishes* would enable regional presence to the Deaf.
- Offering American Sign Language classes at St. John's Seminary, Brighton
- Assisting regional *welcoming parishes* in developing regular Mass schedules for the deaf, together with religious education, pastoral care and administration of the Sacraments for the deaf.
- Continuing regular Masses, and other Sacramental services, at the New England Home for the Deaf in Danvers.

The Office should continue its work with the Deaf Catholic Council, the advisory board to the Director of the Office, under bylaws approved by the Archbishop in the spring of 1999.

III. Parish Based Ministry and Social Services

Both Fr. Medas and Fr. Fitzpatrick have sizeable communities coming from across the Archdiocese who think of themselves as parishes. For each of these communities, the priest is considered their pastor and the community offers many of the ministries found in a traditional parish setting, including a regular Mass schedule, religious education and social outreach.

In general, these ministries have been very effective. However, they separate the deaf from a hearing parish community. We believe the present reconfiguration process presents a unique opportunity to raise up a new model of ministry with the deaf that will be of great benefit to this local Church and to Deaf ministry and life through out our nation. A parish that is neither identified as primarily hearing or deaf oriented, but rather Catholic, offers the opportunity to foster the unity that our faith calls us to. The Deaf chaplaincy, led by Fr. Medas, has had to move six times over the last seven years and its need for facilities and resources have been subordinated to the needs of the host facility. While Fr. Fitzpatrick and DCC was blessed with a home at Bethany in Framingham for

30 years, they lost that home recently and were always isolated from the hearing community.

Given the scale of Deaf parish ministry provided by Fr. Medas Deaf chaplaincy, Deaf Community Center, the success DCC has had in moving into a hearing parish, and the reconfiguration process under way, we believe that this is an opportune moment to take a new approach to deaf parish ministry. We propose that the parish communities of the Deaf chaplaincy and DCC be combined with a hearing parish as an integral part of the community. We envision a dynamic parish that would integrate both Deaf and hearing members of the community. This would provide a truly unique opportunity for the deaf and hearing members of this parish to experience and be transformed by each other's culture and unique experience of God, life, and Church.

Although the consolidation we are proposing would be new, it is not without precedent. Since DCC moved to a hearing parish one year ago, we have seen clear evidence that this plan will work with the right parish. We have seen a clear and growing interaction between the hearing and Deaf members of the community. Parish facilities are shared on a cooperative basis with parish leadership (both Deaf and hearing) working together to address all of the needs of the community. Indications that integration is possible and life giving to all members of the community include:

- Regular interaction between Deaf and hearing lay leadership in person and by e-mail;
- Hearing members of the community receiving instruction in sign language;
- Friendly coordination of the use of physical facilities;
- Combined liturgies for Deaf and hearing members of the community with full participation by Deaf ministers in the Mass (choir and Eucharistic ministers);
- Participation by hearing members of the community in Masses scheduled for the Deaf; and
- Joint social activities (in February, we celebrated a dinner in the church hall with over 80 Deaf and 120 hearing members participating and interacting.)

We believe that this plan would provide an exciting new beginning for Deaf parish ministry in the Archdiocese of Boston and a model for others in deaf ministry. It would also provide a greater depth of resources to reach out to the larger Deaf community (ninety-six percent of whom have no official religious affiliation). From a strong combined parish platform, the ministry to the Deaf would continue existing ministries and move into new areas providing the Deaf with the following:

- A complete parish environment with everything in sign language or interpreted and full lay Deaf involvement as lectors, ushers, servers, Eucharistic ministers, and choir - every pastoral element that is usually found in a national parish with no geographical boundaries.
- A beloved gathering place that in reality provides an anchor in their communal lives and contributes to their identity in a very essential way, a critical element for any ethnic group.

- A stable and permanent home in which they feel a true sense of ownership. The Deaf have demonstrated a willingness to travel considerable distance to attend events and services.
- DCC senior wellness program, including, Senior Sunday Socials, First Tuesday of the Month Wellness Sessions; Cultural / Educational Group Trips; Individualized and small group MailStation and computer instruction; Outreach to sick or lonely Deaf seniors via email, TTY, fax, letter, cards and home visits; Transportation solutions that assist Deaf seniors attend events and appointments; Advocacy on Deaf senior citizen issues; and coordination with five regional Deaf Senior Centers in Lawrence, Brookline, Quincy, Danvers and Worcester.
- Gathering opportunities for varied Deaf groups from throughout the Archdiocese, the state of Massachusetts, and from all of New England, such as Boston School for the Deaf Alumni, New England Deaf Seniors Coalition (approximately 100 of whom recently met at St. Anselm/DCC), Children of Deaf Adults (CODA), and The Learning Center for Deaf Children.
- Religious education for Deaf children and adults.
- Formation of Deaf ministers, including pastoral visitors, extraordinary Eucharistic ministers, lectors and religious education teachers.

Additionally, in the context of reconfiguration considerations, the consolidation of all deaf ministries at a single location within an existing parish would also permit improved allocation of clerical resources over the long term. Integration into a stable self-supporting parish structure would also provide tremendous savings from the point of view of overhead like building maintenance and insurance and be critically important for the financial viability of programs under the Deaf chaplaincy and DCC.

To make this plan effective, we would need to find the right parish home. A small, vibrant existing parish would be the ideal welcoming parish. The *welcoming parish* should be eager to welcome deaf representatives to its parish pastoral council, be willing and able to provide interpreter services as needed, be willing to learn basic sign language, and look forward to planning and partaking in various parish events together. The presence of these qualitative elements will ensure that the Deaf are warmly welcomed and personally valued as integral members of the parish community. The Deaf, along with their hearing counterparts, need to enjoy full and equal access to the church, the church hall, and the parish facilities for scheduling Masses, classes, socials, and educational and organizational meetings as needed by existing Deaf groups.

The ideal worship environment should be able to accommodate up to three hundred and fifty people and offer an unobstructed view of a well-lit altar space with no pillars or supports preventing a clear line of sight for sign communication. Moreover, this church needs to have small, individual classrooms for religious education and sacramental preparation, as well as large and small meeting rooms for different size groups and organizations. A church hall with full kitchen facilities is a must for the Deaf who routinely drive considerable distances and stay at length to socialize and be with each other. This long distance traveling to socialize and share a meal is a most essential part

of Deaf culture. Storage space and potential office space as needed are other requisites for a functioning home. Also important would be handicapped access to all facilities.

The rectory with this church should be a welcoming home for the priests working with the Deaf. This rectory should be capable of hosting visiting Deaf seminarians, as well as hearing priests wishing a training experience, sabbatical, or internship in Deaf ministry.

Given that the Deaf come from throughout the Archdiocese, the location of this *welcoming parish community* should be as central as possible, with easy access from the north and south and from route 128 and the Mass pike. Access to public transportation is always most desirable, and if not possible, then the challenge is for those who drive to care enough to carpool and make every effort to reach out and include those Deaf in need of a ride to religious and social events taking place at this Archdiocesan center. Seventy percent of the religious community of the Deaf chaplaincy comes from Metro-West with high numbers from towns like Framingham, Marlboro and Hopkinton. Eighty percent of this community's Deaf children attend the Learning Center in Framingham. Large numbers of Deaf seniors, who had their home at DCC on Bethany Road in Framingham for more than 30 years, and who have recently and successfully transitioned their allegiance to their new DCC home at St. Anselm's in Sudbury, come from this same Metro-West area. A Metro-West location would also permit the deaf ministry access to funding from the Framingham Union Aid Association that recently gave a grant of \$4,000 to the DCC Deaf Senior Wellness program.

There are obviously many important issues that will need to be worked out in connection with this plan, including the integration of hearing and Deaf lay leadership, coordination of Mass times, allocation of space and financial considerations. Based on the discussions we have held to date, we are confident that these issues can be appropriately addressed with the right parish.

III. Conclusion

In his address in February, Archbishop Sean said,

Take a minute to picture your dream, to consider the possibilities for a more responsive pastoral presence. Reflect on what you can accomplish to renew our parish life. Do . . . you see a vision of a parish where people are eager to gather to share how they live the Gospel? Can you picture a parish that reaches out to the community with the love and support that a strong faith community can offer? Dream and plan.

We see this pastoral plan as a genuine response to those words and as a very exciting opportunity to enhance the mission of the Church as Archbishop Sean contemplated. We hope and pray that in the reconfiguration efforts now under way, this new beginning for Deaf ministry will be a shining example of the wonderful things that can come from the challenge to Rebuild my Church.