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ARCHBISHOP'S CATHOLIC APPEAL

St. Bernadette parishioners Thomas Metz (L) and Art Yochim (R) proclaim the Gospel through braille and American Sign Language translations.



Serving **THE** Underserved IN AN APOSTOLIC AGE



BY AMY BRYER BRUMLEY

The Archdiocese Meets its Flock Where They Are

As Catholics gathered in churches all over Colorado last year on the 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time, they listened to the Gospel of Mark — “For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

But at St. Bernadette Church in Lakewood, parishioners experienced those words more acutely through the

perceptive fingers of Art Yochim and the fervent hands of Thomas Metz as the pair of lectors uniquely shared the Gospel as they often do.

Yochim, who is blind, drew his fingers across the raised braille letters of his liturgical text, while Metz, who is deaf, stood by his side and used American Sign Language (ASL) to share the Gospel’s words in unison with



the congregation that includes fellow blind and deaf parishioners.

St. Bernadette has become a beacon for Catholics in the metro Denver area who happen to be blind or deaf because it offers this version of a multi-language community that meets its members with the method they can receive Christ.

The church's previous pastor was widely known for his knowledge of ASL, but he retired in 2020. Current pastor Father Joe McLagan is trying to carry on the church's distinct identity by learning ASL to serve his flock the best way he can.

"It's a priority for me to learn to give Reconciliation in [ASL]," McLagan said. "A person can pull out their phone and provide a confession of their sins, but it feels more authentic if a person who is deaf can confess in their language."

There are a handful of ASL interpreters at the church, but the need for more is great. It's among the top five most used languages in the United States, said Deacon

Hal Goldwire, a deacon at St. Bernadette who is also an ASL interpreter.

ASL is not a language of word-for-word translations, it comes in concepts of one or two signs that express a thought.

"There's something really powerful to watch a signed mass when the priest is doing it," Goldwire said. "When I watched the mass signed, it brought the mass to a whole new level for me — not to just hear the words, but to see it *and* hear it."

Goldwire has an affinity for the language and appreciates the beauty of it. After having a grandmother and father with hearing aids, his daughter was born with one hearing ear who became musician of the year for Regis Jesuit High School and played for the pep band at Creighton University. She now works at Madison Square Gardens.

He always wanted to learn ASL but was never presented with the opportunity until he volunteered to attend an immersive sign language retreat.

"All the parts of the body make up the body of Christ," Goldwire said.



The Archdiocese [of Denver] has made a great commitment to serve the underserved and help those who have been overlooked in the past."

"Christ the servant, was not the servant of the first class, but a servant for the whole ark," he added.

Yochim has known braille since second grade and began as a lector at St. Bernadette in 2019.

"I just think it's a very spirit-loving church...you can truly feel the Holy Spirit," Yochim said. "People are really involved, so nice and so loving."

A friend of Yochim used to type out the Bible verses for him on a braille typewriter until he began receiving his liturgical texts from Xavier Society for the Blind, a nonprofit providing Catholic braille materials for more than 120 years. (Read more about Xavier Society for Blind in the sidebar on page 15.)

A cradle Catholic, Yochim always dreamed of being a church lector. After reading more about his faith, he became a catechist and is now part of the church team who teaches the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA).

When someone experiences a mass at St. Bernadette, that person is in touch with all parts of humanity, Goldwire said. ▶

“ Our whole philosophy is that we all get to walk with Jesus no matter who we are. We will need companions on that journey and these folks who need assistance have the right to be assisted in the knowledge of who God is.”



“You see the gospels come alive at St. Bernadette, you see how God is working through people to build up the body of Christ...it pierces my heart,” Goldwire said.

Just as Jesus served all, the Archdiocese of Denver is trying to bring Christ to all. For 35 years, the archdiocese has been caring for and ministering to people with development disabilities. The Bridge Community is a residential facility that provides stability and compassion to about 6-8 residential women.

The community is part of the Office of Special Religious Education and Pastoral Care for Persons with Developmental Disabilities and is operated by Father Roland Freeman. The office teaches catechism to children and adults who range in abilities.

“Our whole philosophy is that *we all get to walk with Jesus no matter who we are. We will need companions on that journey and these folks who need assistance have the right to be assisted in the knowledge of who God is,*” said Sister Mary

Catherine, founder of the Bridge Community in 1985.

The program brings church teachings to people at whatever level they can receive it. Some participants can receive it at a fourth-grade level, others never get beyond pictures and stories, Sister Mary Catherine said.

The archdiocese is making Jesus available to everyone.

“If you ask the parents of any child, ‘do you think Jesus wants to be part of your child’s life,’ of course the answer is ‘Yes!’” she said.



American Sign Language translator Glenna Cornish signs the homily given by Father Joe McLagan.

For more information about: St. Bernadette parish in Lakewood, visit stbernadettelakewood.org or the Bridge Community, visit thebridgecommunity.net. The Office of Special Religious Education is funded through generous gifts to the Archbishop's Catholic Appeal.

Xavier Society

brings religious texts to blind Catholics for 121 years

Rita Weyler, of Thornton, was taking her college SATs in braille in the 1970s at a high school rehabilitation center for students who were blind in downtown Denver when a friend told her about Catholic literature from the Xavier Society. She soon became a client for more than 50 years.

Xavier Society provides free Catholic materials in braille text and other technologies. It has more than 750,000 pages of braille material such as the Mass Propers, magazine articles and religious books. One book can cost more than \$1,600 to produce in braille and the entire Bible can take up 45 volumes and fill an entire bookcase because of the nature of braille text, with its heavy bond paper and raised letters. The Sunday missalette is sent to clients, like Rita, all over the world in 80 countries.

Weyler was born prematurely and never had a lot of eyesight. What she had, she lost by age 5 ½. Growing up in Reno in the 1950s, she was sent to a public school and programs for people who were blind were just getting off the ground, she said.

The summer of her 4th grade she made great progress with her braille lessons by putting her dolls in a chair and reading braille stories to them such as "By the Shores of Silver Lake," by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Weyler's grandmother gave her a braille Bible for her birthday in the 1980s and she cherishes it. She receives the Mass Propers from Xavier Society regularly and saves them because so much goes into each copy and they feel important to her.

"If [the Xavier Society] didn't exist, blind people would be left out in the cold and couldn't participate in the mass," Weyler said.

Many Xavier Society patrons are lectors at mass and are able to actively participate in their parish, like Art Yochim, at St. Bernadette Church in Lakewood. [see article on page 12]

"Xavier Society helps me be more independent to get my own books," Yochim said. "It's really good to have a service like theirs."

For more information about the Xavier Society visit xaviersocietyfortheblind.org.