

SOUTHERN † CROSS

The Official Magazine of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Savannah | Vol. 103, No. 2

March 2023

*...but the greatest
of these is love*





BRINGING LIGHT TO THE BLIND

Xavier Society Equips 8-Year-Old Girl with Braille Materials for First Communion

By Katharine R. Rose

“I WILL LEAD THE BLIND BY WAYS THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN, ALONG UNFAMILIAR PATHS I WILL GUIDE THEM; I WILL TURN THE DARKNESS INTO LIGHT BEFORE THEM AND MAKE THE ROUGH PLACES SMOOTH. THESE ARE THE THINGS I WILL DO; I WILL NOT FORSAKE THEM.”

ISAIAH 42:16

OFTEN CONSIDERED ONE OF THE HOLIEST AND most important occasions in the life of a Catholic, First Holy Communion is a truly special and joyous occasion. For Kaydence Warmuskerken, an 8-year-old girl at St. Teresa’s in Albany, it will be a particularly joyous occasion.

Born blind, Kaydence is receiving braille versions of her First Reconciliation and First Communion preparation materials from the Xavier Society for the Blind, an organization that has provided spiritual and religious materials to the blind and visually impaired for over 120 years.

Co-founded in 1900 in New York City by Margaret Coffey, a young blind woman who taught children, and a Jesuit priest, Father Joseph Stadelman, the organization serves patrons throughout the United States and twenty other countries worldwide.

It was launched with Coffey’s contribution of \$350, or the equivalent of about \$11,000 today, which was used to purchase a stereograph machine that allowed the society to produce a larger volume of books in braille.

At the time, the Xavier Society was the only Catholic publishing house to make such writings available to blind people, and all services were provided free of charge – a tradition that continues to this day.

Kaydence is one of ten patrons in the Diocese of Savannah benefiting from their ministry. Lori Leach, the Director of Religious Education at St. Teresa’s, initially reached out to them to request materials.

“I had seen [the Xavier Society] one time many years ago,” she said. “I had known for a little while that Kaydence was getting close to making her First Communion...so I had just started looking for braille curriculum and they popped back up.”

While the Xavier Society already had some of the braille materials from St. Paul family formation on hand, they didn’t have the First Reconciliation and First Communion, so their transcribers got to work after receiving a digital file of the books.

“They were just fantastic about making sure it was the type of braille she used, that it was the same information that we had in the class, that it wasn’t something different

just for her,” said Leach. “They wanted her to be able to feel like it was part of the class and exactly what we were using.”

With their materials, Kaydence will be able to follow along with her sighted peers as she prepares for her First Reconciliation and First Communion.

“I’m glad that they’re able to get the materials where she can read it and maybe understand it a little bit more because a lot of what she’s having to do is memorize,” said Kaydence’s mother, Katherine. “Because she can’t just look at the book and see what it shows, she’s having to memorize it. So to be able to read it repeatedly in braille will help her with that.”

Kaydence has been looking forward to making her First Communion for years. “Since she was about 5 or 6 she’s been asking when can she make her First Communion,” said Leach. “She’s quite a little independent spirit and is just so excited.”

The mission of the Xavier Society for the Blind is “To provide the Word of God, and the best of Roman Catholic teaching and literature, spiritual and inspirational material, to blind or visually impaired persons of any faith in whatever format best meets their needs at no charge and to continually explore ways to make that material more accessible and available to the widest possible audience of those in need. To offer opportunities for volunteer service for those who wish to help in this work through their donation of time, talent or financial support.”

Visit XavierSocietyForTheBlind.org to learn more.

Facing page: 8-year-old Kaydence Warmuskerken, born blind, who is now preparing for her First Communion. Photo courtesy of Katherine Warmuskerken.



Kaydence at St. Teresa's in Albany. Photo courtesy of Katherine Warmuskerken.

Every weekend, Kaydence attends Mass with her grandmother and always sits in the front row. “What I do when I go to church is I follow my Gigi and my Gigi is pretty much like my guide,” she said. “So I have to follow her wherever I go.”

Leach attends the same Mass as Kaydence and said she has a special connection with many members at St. Teresa's, including her husband who is a deacon. “He gives her a little blessing and if he's not there, she's always asking, ‘Where's my deacon?’”

Kaydence said she is happy to have the materials from the Xavier Society for the Blind. “It will be a great help for

me to be able to complete my First Communion.”

Kaydence has her First Communion retreat and practice on April 22, and will be making her First Communion at St. Teresa's in Albany on May 6.

“She comes to the Vigil Mass on Saturday nights, so she will actually make her First Communion at that Vigil Mass with all the parishioners who watched her grow,” said Leach. “It's very exciting and I'm thrilled to watch it.”

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