

DVD details how to minister to deaf parishioners

How do you interpret a Mass in sign language? How do you teach a deaf child the Our Father?

Those questions and more are answered in a new DVD produced by the archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington titled “Liturgical Signs and Prayers, A Resource for Deaf Ministry.”

The DVD, which features local priests, is the only resource of its kind in the United States and is designed to be used in several ways.

It offers a glossary of religious terms in sign language, as well as common prayers. Eileen Colarusso, coordinator of deaf ministry for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, noted that 95 percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents. Even when those parents learn sign language, they don’t learn the signs for faith concepts, making it difficult to teach their children their faith.

The DVD also explains the order of the Mass, which is done with a hearing priest and a sign language interpreter, gives guidance on where the interpreter should stand, and illustrates the rites for a marriage, baptism and funeral.

Ms. Colarusso said interpreters frequently are requested for those rites.

The idea for the DVD came from Father Joe Jones, an Irish priest who created a DVD in Ireland. The Irish signs differ from American Sign Language, so the DVD for the Baltimore and Washington archdioceses follows the same basic model, using American Sign Language.

Both archdioceses have considerable deaf populations because of their proximity to schools like Gallaudet University, McDaniel College and the Maryland School for the Deaf.

Western vicar Bishop W. Francis Malooly said he recently celebrated Masses at St. Ignatius of Loyola, Ijamsville, with an interpreter and was moved to see deaf families caught up in the Mass.

“It’s just great to see the deaf ministry take off,” he said. “What I do doesn’t work without a middle person.”

The money to write, film and shoot the DVD, which is open captioned, was provided by a donation from Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick and a grant from the Koch Foundation. The DVD’s cover features stained glass windows at the Center for Deaf Ministry in Landover Hills, Md., designed and created by deaf artist Sander Blondeel from Belgium. Lumen Technologies filed the DVD at the National Basilica in Washington, D.C.

“Liturgical Signs and Prayers: A Resource for Deaf Ministry” has won the National Conference of Catechetical Leaders Technology Award for 2008.

Initially, 500 copies were produced, and the grant money paid for every parish in the Archdiocese of Baltimore to receive a copy. The DVD, available through the Division of Evangelization and Catechesis, will sell for \$20.

Baltimoreans will spot a few familiar faces: Father J. Bruce Jarboe, pastor of Holy Trinity, Glen Burnie, has a starring turn as the priest presiding over a baptism and Father Matthew T. Buening, associate pastor of St. John the Evangelist, Columbia, celebrates a marriage.

Ms. Colarusso is the interpreter in the DVD.