

ISSUE
#15



CATHEDRAL OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS
JOHOR BAHRU ✕ 新山耶稣圣心主教座堂



*stories from
the heart...*



新山耶稣圣心主教座堂
CATHEDRAL OF THE
SACRED HEART OF JESUS
JOHOR BAHRU

1982-2022

DEAF MINISTRY OF THE CATHEDRAL OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

Our Vision: *To ensure deaf members are fully immersed in the Catholic community via active and conscious participation in the Eucharistic Celebration.*

Our Mission: *To provide catechetics, English proficiency and sign language interpreting services; to renew faith of lapsed deaf catholics; to help them grow through retreats. Developing prayer life through the rosary, adoration, appreciation of the word of God and cultivating the spirit of evangelism amongst members through the RCIA programme.*

IN THE BEGINNING

The Deaf Ministry in the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus started sometime in 2001, when with the strong support of Rev. Msgr. Sebastian Francis (now Bishop of the Diocese of Penang), a sign language class was started by Francis Kee. The 4-months course was the foundation of the Deaf Ministry of the Cathedral. Thereafter, Rev. Fr. Michael Depcik, a deaf priest from the USA and Agnes Peter, an interpreter from the REACH ministry, Kuala Lumpur inspired and encouraged us to continue with the sign language.

The Ministry was officially established in 2003 as the Hearing-Impaired Ministry (known also as H.I.M.). For a good part of the first year, the Ministry focussed on building itself and also reaching out to the whole deaf community, including non-catholics and free thinkers. With God's grace, there were a lot of support from priests and other ministries too, which was really encouraging. In those days, our activities included outings, sessions with the REACH ministry and workshops. Then in December 2003, the then Deacon Michael Chua conducted a 3 days workshop on "Signing for Mass".

2004 saw our first General Meeting which was chaired by Fr Lawrence Ng. At this meeting Francis Kee stepped down as the coordinator and Grace L. Silveo took over the leadership right up to 2008. We were then officially known as the Deaf Ministry of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Johor Bahru. Later we also formed the BEC (Basic Ecclesial Community) for the Deaf Ministry to introduce and further engage the members of the deaf ministry into parish life.

In 2005 the Deaf Ministry started interpreting during Eucharistic celebrations every Sunday morning right up till today. After the Sunday morning mass, we would gather in one of the classrooms for various activities which include English language class, signing class, sharing and fellowship. This gave deaf members a space and time to grow as a community.

During our Annual General Meeting in 2008, elections were held and Agnes Chew, a deaf member was elected as the new president of the Deaf Ministry.



After attending the "Deaf empowerment" course.

FORMATIONS/RETREATS AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Spiritual Growth has always been our mission and one of the ways to grow spiritually is through formations.

Through the years the Deaf Ministry always focussed on formation programmes both for the deaf members as well as hearing volunteers. We have attended many retreats and courses. Programmes like the religious sign language course organised by the Singapore Catholic Deaf Community (SCDC) and held at the Singapore Catholic Archdiocesan Education Centre was very helpful and empowering. This course was held every Sunday from February to April of 2006. Another very helpful course was a 2-days interpreters course held at the YMCA, Kuala Lumpur.

Fr Lionel Thomas who is our spiritual director also conducted many deaf retreats in the Cathedral and also other churches. Some of the most memorable retreats include a 3-days combined retreat with the Singapore Catholic Deaf Community (SCDC) at the major seminary in Singapore in 2008 and a week long retreat at the seminary in Penang in November 2013.

During Lent of 2010, the deaf community from Singapore and Thailand joined us at MAJODI Centre for a Lenten retreat. The retreat was an enriching and powerful experience for all members and volunteers. Some memorable parts of the retreat included Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, input sessions to prepare for Easter and Stations of the Cross where members were asked to carry a large wooden cross on their shoulders. Subsequent to that, in 2011 Fr. Lionel Thomas conducted a 2-days workshop on the new Roman Missal, in which we invited the Singapore deaf community to join us.



Other than retreats, members have also attended many other sessions and workshops which include a programme organised by POHD called City Survival Skills workshop, a talk on the BOM (Billings Ovulation Method) which was held at the Deaf Association of Johor Bahru and also here in the Cathedral and an Interpreting Skills workshop organised by RC Missions Malaysia Sdn Bhd. Further, our volunteers also conducted regular classes and workshops. Kevin Goh, conducted English language classes for deaf members as many are not very proficient in the English language, while Ignatius Wong guided them through the understanding of the liturgy and Christie Singaram taught them handicrafts.

Because most of the members are unable to understand English very well, they find it difficult to understand what is going on during Mass, especially the readings and the Gospel. Our volunteers Alice and Ignatius spends every Wednesday evening guiding and explaining to them the weekend readings and Gospel.

Many of the deaf members have also attended RCIA, with volunteers acting as interpreters while journeying with them. Many have been baptised and confirmed in the Cathedral. We have also witnessed many deaf couples attending The Marriage Preparation Weekend (MPW) in MAJODI Centre and celebrating the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Cathedral.

Subsequently their children are also baptised and their families form a part of the whole community here in the Cathedral.



Mass with our friends from Singapore.



At St Mary's Square with our friends from Singapore

PARISH LIFE

The deaf community have through the years participated in various activities and programmes organised by the Cathedral. These include Family Day fairs where members took the initiative to sell fresh vegetables, fruits and also handicrafts. We have also joined the hearing community in rosary, angelus, BEC masses and recently in the 7 sacraments walk as part of the MJD 50 celebrations at parish level.

In 2010 we participated in 2 plays organised in the Cathedral, the Passion play and also the Christmas play. It was wonderful to see the deaf working together with hearing parishioners of the Cathedral to make both plays successful and meaningful for all.

In December 2011, Fr. Lionel Thomas led the Deaf Ministry in performing a repertoire of Christmas carols at City Square Shopping Mall, JB, Conrad Millennia, Singapore, at the Bishop's Open House on Christmas day and at the New Year countdown at the Cathedral. We have also participated in the Christmas Sing Along held at Danga Bay, Johor Bahru.

In June 2012, the Deaf Ministry was invited to perform at a fund-raising event at the Church of St Anthony, Singapore.

To create further awareness and also to help bridge the gap between hearing and deaf parishioners, sign language classes were offered to all parishioners and today deaf and hearing parishioners are part of the community here in the Cathedral. They attend the same masses together, pray together and their children also attend catechism together.



Christmas play.



Children baptism.



Christmas play in a hotel in Singapore.



Baptism



Christmas play in Majodi Centre

TODAY

During the Covid 19 lockdown, members of the Deaf Ministry of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus continue to pray the Rosary and Angelus as a group. The Deaf Ministry is happy that deaf members had been taught to pray the Rosary and Angelus. We pray in our own homes and also as a group during our meetings. When masses resumed, we joined the hearing community to pray the rosary before weekend Masses. With the continued guidance of Fr Lionel Thomas, we had Gospel classes and sharing through Zoom, together with our Singaporean group of friends, at least once a month.

After the lifting of the Covid-19 restrictions, we are grateful to be back at church and also happy to continue with our weekly bible sessions as well as participate in church activities.

Deaf members have a lot less problem communicating with parishioners now as they are able to write and sign to the hearing parishioners.

The Deaf Ministry would like to encourage more parishioners who are interested to work with the deaf to come forward and offer their time. The two pioneer members, Ignatius and Alice, offer to teach and guide anyone who is interested and willing to commit his/her time to help out with the ministry's needs in the future.



Manning a stall at the Cathedral's Family Day.



Deaf and hearing parishioners working hand in hand in the parish.