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Religious Sisters “Get in the Loop”

Chance Encounter in Oregon Leads to Grateful Sisters in Iowa

By Jody Iler

The hearing loop is close to a miracle It is a joy to peacefully participate in the liturgy, listen to the homilist, and appreciate the total experience,” said Therese Frelø, BVM, reflecting the gratitude of the retired Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Mount Carmel in Dubuque, Iowa.

A serendipitous turn of events enables the resident sisters to listen to a homily with clarity for the first time in many years—thanks to a hearing loop now in place in the Motherhouse Chapel. Hidden under the newly-installed carpet, the loop has opened up a new world of sound for them.

The loop technology uses a feed from the PA system, transmits it through a wire loop surrounding the worshippers, and projects magnetic signals to an inexpensive telecoil (t-coil) receiver in the listeners’ hearing aids. The result is clear sound with no background noise. Most hearing aids can be equipped with a t-coil; some might already have them installed but not activated. Once activated, they can be easily and discreetly turned on by pushing a button on the hearing aid. While this assistive listening technology is not new, it had not been widely used in the United States because hearing aids were often not equipped with t-coils or people didn’t know how to use them. This trend is changing and hearing loops are gaining momentum across America, especially in places of worship where the Americans with Disabilities Act does not apply.

BVM Radiates Passion for Ministry to All People with Hearing Loss

For most of her religious life, Linda Roby, BVM, has ministered with deaf

The retired Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Mount Carmel in Dubuque, Iowa, have a lot to be thankful for. The sisters with hearing loss can now participate thanks to a hearing loop.

people—a passion ignited within her as a novice during a summer spent tutoring deaf children in Chicago. Linda has served as director of deaf ministry in Portland, Oregon, since 1992. “Together we are making God’s word visible and alive through sign language, through our care for each other, and in our reaching out to serve those in need,” she says.

In September 2013, Linda attended the fall workshop of the Hearing Loss Association of America—Salem, Oregon, Chapter where she heard a presentation by keynote speaker Juliëtte Sterkens, Au.D. Formerly in private practice as an audiologist, Juliëtte now devotes all her time to serving as the HLAA consumer and hearing loop advocate. Her focus is on education of consumers, audiologists and hearing health care professionals, clergy, and audiovisual (AV) professionals.

“As a hearing loop advocate, I am working to fuel the hearing loop movement that is on the increase in more and more places around the country,” she says. “Hearing loops double the usefulness of hearing aids and cochlear implants.”

“At the workshop,” Linda recalls, “one of Juliëtte’s slides showed a map of the United States, noting the location of hearing loop installers. My first thought when seeing it was, ‘There’s one right across the river from Dubuque! How perfect this would be for our Motherhouse Chapel.’ When I approached Juliëtte in my excitement, I was amazed that she could give me the contact information for that particular installer from memory.”

Timing Right for Installation of Hearing Loop

“Knowing that we were in the process of recarpeting the Motherhouse Chapel, which would make loop installation easier, I immediately contacted our BVM leadership with the information,” Linda continues. While the leadership team was intrigued by the hearing loop concept, the next challenge was being able to support this unforeseen and unbudgeted technology.

“Our prayers were answered,” Second Vice President Kate Hendel, BVM shares, referring to a call she



Margaret Mollan, left, participates in the Mass.



Therese Frela,
BVM



Paul Francis,
BVM



Geraldine Moorman,
BVM



Motherhouse Chapel in Dubuque, Iowa, is now looped.

Couple Making a Difference in Retired Sisters' Lives

Cathy and Bob Everhart were raised with principles of honesty and integrity fostered by their deeply religious families. Cathy recalls the BVM teachers who also influenced her as strong religious women role models.

Though she had always wanted to be a registered nurse, Cathy felt called to religious life and entered the BVM community at Mount Carmel in 1963. "It was a fulfilling and spiritual experience for me, but ultimately I discerned that religious life was not my calling," says Cathy. She enrolled in nursing school, receiving her RN in the same year that she met and married Bob, who was serving in the U.S. Navy.

While raising their son and daughter, Cathy worked as a nurse child-birth educator and Bob advanced in the telecommunications field, eventually establishing his own company. Over the years Cathy continued to work as a nurse in office and hospital settings. Both were active in scouting and parish activities. "The BVM philosophy of reaching out to help others whenever and wherever we can has been a solid belief for both of us," says Cathy.

In July 2013 the couple attended the jubilee weekend at Mount Carmel. "It was wonderful to see how Mount Carmel has been renovated and what loving care is given to the sisters in retirement," Cathy shares. "It was inspirational to hear about the current BVM ministries!"

After their visit, Cathy and Bob decided they wanted to help with the sisters' needs. In October, Cathy spoke with BVM Vice President Kate Hendel and learned that the BVMs had discussed the need for a hearing loop in the Motherhouse Chapel. After reviewing information about the technology, Cathy and Bob offered to fund the project. Cathy says, "We've been thrilled to hear that it is making such a big difference in the sisters' lives, and feel blessed that we were able to 'give back.'" **HLM**



received that same week from Cathy and Bob Everhart—friends of the BVMs who were interested in helping the retired sisters). When they heard about the hearing loop technology, the Everharts offered to fund the project, and the hearing loop was installed in the Mount Carmel Motherhouse Chapel before the new carpeting was laid. Linda says, "The timing was perfect ... it was meant to be!"

Mike Mair, of Platteville, Wisconsin, installed the hearing loop in the chapel for the BVM sisters. Mike is an AV engineer with nearly a quarter century of experience in the field. After seeing the results of hearing loop technology and the enthusiastic response from users, he has become a passionate hearing loop advocate as well.

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After the installation, help from a local audiologist was needed. Dr. Dionne Klauer, of Medical Associates Clinic in Dubuque, offered to activate the hearing aid telecoils, at no charge, for the sisters whose hearing aids were equipped with them. A pamphlet distributed among the residents at Mount Carmel helped to explain and educate the sisters about the new hearing assistive technology. "The sisters are so very appreciative of the new loop system," Dionne says. "Many of them had difficulty following the readings and homily and now can do it with ease. They feel much more fulfilled after Mass and much more a part of the Mass."

First Vice President Mira Mosle, BVM adds, "We are so pleased with the hearing loop that we are planning to install another one in a large meeting room at Mount Carmel."

Sisters Sharing Appreciation and Gratitude

After experiencing the new system, Paul Francis Bailey, BVM, says "I cannot

laud the loop sufficiently to express how truly wonderful it is. I hear the homily distinctly, grasping every little nuance and inflection." Geraldine Moorman, BVM adds, "I used to use the hearing aids provided for us in the chapel. They had to be inserted each time I came. I had to hold them tightly in my ears to get the full benefit. Since the new hearing loop was installed, I have not missed one sentence of the homily."

Other sisters are eager to share their enthusiasm. "Before the hearing loop, I was not able to hear what anyone at the microphone was saying," says Louise Marie Levandowski, BVM. "After the installation, I was able to hear every word clearly. I am truly grateful for what has been done to help all of us with hearing aids."

"One of the things I really appreciate is the fact that I can hear the names of the deceased sisters whose anniversaries are on that particular day," BVM Sr. Carmelina Myers explains. "I can also share in the laughter when the homilist slips in a humorous remark."

The Sisters of Charity, BVM are grateful for the coincidental (or perhaps divine?) sequence of events that has enabled them to wholly immerse themselves in the joy of hearing the liturgy again—lifting their hearts and spirits with the clear, sweet music of sound. **HLM**

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