

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

XXIV INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

EPHATHA! THE DEAF PERSON IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

19-20-21 November 2009

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In organising this conference on the deaf person in the life of the Church, the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers wanted to send a strong message in order to emphasise the attention that the questions and issues connected with handicap at the level of hearing of deaf people, as living members of the Church, deserves. As the Holy Father, at the audience granted to those taking part in this twenty-fourth international conference, stressed: “you are not only recipients of the proclaiming of the message of the Gospel but you are also, to the full, those who proclaim it because of your baptism.”

Indeed, the novelty of this conference, as compared to the others organised in the past on various kinds of handicap, lies in having wanted to emphasise that handicap at the level of hearing which is purely sensorial should necessarily be treated separately from other physical disabilities when one speaks about faith and religious practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to achieve the full integration of deaf people into the life of the Church, this assembly proposes:

- 1. That there should be a central office of the Church at national levels which attends to and coordinates pastoral care for deaf people.**
- 2. That every diocese should have at least one priest with the necessary skills and training in this specific field so that he can be the point of reference for deaf people for the sacraments (penitence in particular), the liturgy and catechesis.**
- 3. That there should be for seminarians a course to direct them towards this special form of pastoral care and that they should be encouraged to deepen their knowledge about the world of deaf people and also that those seminarians who are interested in sign language should, possibly, increase their knowledge of it.**
- 4. That greater attention should be paid by bishops to the question of deaf people and they should ensure that in the pastoral and catechetical programme of their dioceses there is also space for catechesis and pastoral care for and with deaf people and that some deaf people should also belong to this group.**

5. That in the large cities a church/parish should be identified where the liturgy allows the active participation of people who have hearing problems.

6. That in the planning of parish and diocesan pastoral care especial attention should be paid to deaf people and their families. The presence of a deaf person would be advisable as well as parents who could contribute to such planning.

7. There should be a Catholic website that addresses the current questions of our faith. In this website it should also be possible to follow Holy Mass and homilies and, when the occasion arises, to have a better understanding of ethical questions of political relevance.

8. That deaf people should also be given an opportunity to take part in courses on the religious sciences organised at a diocesan level.

9. To meet the needs of deaf people who do not know sign language and those who have become deaf or adults afflicted by deafness, it is recommended to pastors of souls that places of liturgy be equipped with video screens.

10. At a national level structures should be identified for the promotion of vocations and the formation of deaf candidates for the religious and priestly life.

11. That dioceses should have a register of certified interpreters who can work in churches.

12. As the Holy Father emphasised, every obstacle to the full social integration of deaf people should be removed through the implementation first and foremost of appropriate laws, conventions and protocols that seek to create those juridical conditions that are designed to favour the integration of deaf people in educational, training and work environments so that they can make their talents bear fruit (Mt 25:14-30) and contribute at all levels, each according to their own talents and capacities, to the good of society as a whole.

The experience of these three days, while on the one hand they have given us joy and hope, on the other they have led us to work increasingly and always in a better way to ensure that the cry, indeed the cry of Jesus – *EPHPHATHA!* – Be opened!, echoes in the hearts of all deaf people who are near to us or who are to be found throughout the world.