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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Sharing Life - Catholic Charities of Kansas City- St. Joseph Serves the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

KANSAS CITY, MO, June 4, 2024 (Press Release) - Rhonda Scott, Deaf Services Coordinator of Catholic Charities Kansas City-St. Joseph (CCKCSJ), shared her memories on how she became a sign language interpreter:

“I grew up assuming that all Catholics could go to church, get baptized, married, and participate how they chose to in the Catholic Church. When I was a senior in high school at St. Mary’s in Independence, Missouri a young man transferred into our school. He was Deaf. I learned some basic sign language with other classmates to welcome him and to be able to communicate with him. That was my first experience with the fact that not every Catholic had the choice of participation. That year started my interest in the church and Deaf community. It took me a few years to get it all figured out, but I have never regretted a day that I have spent on my profession as a sign language interpreter. I have enjoyed the challenges, experiences, and growth not only with my signing skills, but with the people that I have interpreted for in the church. They have become family over the years.”

According to the website of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability, 96% of Deaf individuals in the United States are not affiliated with a church. Because of this reality, the Deaf and Disabilities Department of CCKCSJ, with Rhonda’s leadership, has created multiple offerings to reach out to the D/deaf and hard of hearing communities to offer them support and spiritual nourishment.

In October of 2023, the department held a brunch, Thompson’s Table, in Red Bridge. It was a relaxed, meaningful time. Members of the D/deaf and Hard of Hearing community gathered for a good meal, fellowship, and support, and each person shared deeply about their lives. Thompson’s Table, which occurs two to three times per year, is funded by the Aiden McVicker Fund, and is named in memory of Bill Thompson, who was an active member of the ministry in years past, leading Bible studies after Masses, among other activities.

Additionally, every Sunday, an interpreted Mass is offered in a parish in the Kansas City- St. Joseph Diocese. The two interpreters, Rhonda, and Becky Turner, visit a different church each Sunday. The churches they visit are St. Elizabeth's, St. Thomas More, St. Peter's, and St. Mark's. Becky has been involved with the ministry for thirty-seven years.

David Brown attended a Catholic Mass at the Irish Fest several years ago, and Rhonda was there interpreting the Mass. David remembers this day: "I stayed after to talk to her, and she told me that they have interpreted Masses at St. Thomas More and St. Peters. (...) After attending those Masses for a few months, Rhonda, and the other interpreter Becky Turner, suggested that we start having an interpreted Mass at St. Elizabeth as well. It is really awesome having them at St. Elizabeth."

The department also teaches American Sign Language (ASL) classes. The classes are held at St. Peter's, and are taught by Rhonda and Robin Sizemore, a member of the department who was born Deaf. The students learn fingerspelling, vocabulary, and other skills needed to communicate in ASL. From Robin, they learn, firsthand, about Deaf culture. Amy Huska, who lives with auditory processing disorder, took the class with members of her family. She reflected, "My son has already started using it in our home. For example, he uses it when I don't have my hearing aids on or when I'm having trouble understanding what he's saying or what's going on. I love it."

Lastly, Becky and Rhonda also interpret for pastoral visits and special events. For example, they may provide companionship and interpreting services for individuals who are isolated in care centers or in hospice, or they may provide interpreting for special rituals/events for a family member, such as an award ceremony, wedding, funeral, or a confirmation Mass. For example, in the past, Becky has interpreted for the weddings of several of Robin Sizemore's sisters. Becky reflected: "It was so fulfilling to be part of such joyful family events."

The department is constantly looking for new ways to serve, going forward in hope, and open to new ideas and programs. To learn more and to get involved, go to <https://catholiccharities-kcsj.org/deaf-and-disability-ministries/>

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Catholic Charities of Kansas City- St. Joseph

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