

Henrique Rio showcases his new religious education class materials in Braille provided by the Xavier Society for the Blind.

# Serving God and the blind for more than 120 years



**BY FRANCISCO VALDEZ**

*Reporter, Catholic San Francisco*

**T**he Xavier Society for the Blind, based in New York, is the only Catholic organization that actively provides reading and audio materials to the visually impaired for free. The Xavier Society exists because in 1900 a young blind woman, Margaret Coffey, wanted to make sure that the visually impaired children she taught had access to the same reading

materials that their sighted classmates had and for them to feel fully integrated in the classroom. No one else was doing anything at the time to help visually impaired children, so she teamed up with her co-founder, Jesuit Father Joseph Stadelman, to raise money to create the needed reading materials. This tradition of service continues today. The main purpose of the Xavier Society is to integrate those who are visually impaired into situations that

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**MAFALDA RIO**

St. Raymond’s Catholic Church parishioner

sighted people take for granted. When we attend Mass, it is easy to take the option to participate in worship for granted because one can read the words on the page. What if a vision-impaired person wants to be lector for Mass? One could bet there are not any Braille worship aids in your local pews!

“Our patrons tell us that having the readings, prayers and responses in Braille at Mass really makes them feel like a part of their parish community,” said Malachy Fallon, executive director of the Xavier Society for the Blind. “Otherwise, even though they are attending Mass, they feel a greater sense of isolation without the missalette in Braille.”

The Archdiocese of San Francisco has parishioners who benefit from the free services of the Xavier Society for the Blind. Mafalda Rio attends St. Raymond’s Catholic Church in Menlo Park with her son Henrique, who is visually impaired. Henrique is preparing for his first Holy Communion but the parish did not have any catechism materials in Braille for him to use. The parish recommended that Mafalda reach out to the Xavier Society, and Henrique was able to get the books he needed to learn more about his faith.

“Up until now, Henrique would sit down in religious education with no materials, just listening,” said Mafalda. “He is a second grader, but they were able to help with those materials.”

Henrique also said having the materials in Braille made a difference. “I felt a little bit left out because I was not engaged at all,” he said. “I was just sitting there listening to everyone else.”

“I think the Xavier Society makes our lives easier, and Henrique can be involved and participate more in religious education and in Church life,” said Mafalda. “I just hope that other people reach out and ask for help.”

Getting help from the Xavier Society for the Blind is simple. A form on their website can be submitted electronically and the materials in Braille are shipped to your door completely free. ■



**SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION AND HELP IN GETTING CATHOLIC MATERIALS IN BRAILLE**, or visit the Xavier Society for the Blind at [xaviersocietyfortheblind.org](http://xaviersocietyfortheblind.org)

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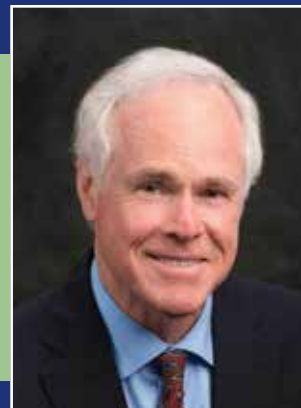


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