

LIVING FAITH AND EVANGELIZATION IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

NEW JERSEY CATHOLIC

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feature
**DELIVERING FAITH
TO THE BLIND**

special report
**EUCHARIST: THE SOURCE
OF FORGIVENESS,
HEALING AND GRACE**

A sign of faith

**INTERPRETING THE
MASS FOR THE DEAF**

DELIVER FAITH THE B

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OF THE PROPS
THE SUNDAY MASSES
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Xavier Society for the Blind is said to be one of the “best-kept secrets”—a moniker the organization would like to change. But for Eileen Scrivani, she is fully aware of the services the nonprofit offers.

“I get in Braille their quarterly review that has different prayers in it, holy days coming up, novenas,” she says. “I used to get the Mass propers from them on CD. It gave me an idea of what the readings were. It helped me follow along better when I was at church. Or on occasions when I couldn’t get to Mass, it was important to me to have them.”

Eileen, who is a parishioner of St. Joseph’s in Oradell, lost her vision when she was 17 years old as a result of a complication of juvenile diabetes. She grew up in Queens and learned how to read Braille and walk with a white cane through a program offered by Lighthouse for the Blind. “At the time I lost my sight, it was very upsetting,” she admits. “The blindness is like second nature [to me now]. I’ve lived longer in my life without my vision than at the point it started failing.”

Now a resident of Oradell, Eileen is used to getting around reasonably well on her own with some help from others. “I have access to different bus services or a friend or family member to drive me,” she explains.

One place she gets driven to every week is Sunday Mass. Although Eileen admits there was a long absence when she didn’t go to church at all, she later chose to return. “I made the decision that I wanted a connection with God. So I decided to go back. I felt I needed that in my life. And I’m glad I did,” she claims.

Eileen says it was a fellow parishioner at St. Joseph’s who helped her find Catholic materials in Braille and that’s how she was first introduced to Xavier Society for the Blind.

The organization was founded in 1900 in New York City at what was then the College of St. Francis Xavier. Its mission was simple: make writings on religion and spirituality available to the blind. The services were and continue to be provided free of charge. The nonprofit makes available books, periodicals and propers of the Mass (Old and New Testament readings and selected readings and responses) in both Braille and downloadable digital format. Xavier Society also provides the New American Bible, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* and a lending library of materials.

“Folks who are using our Braille material, they have so many obstacles in their daily life. Xavier Society helps reduce some of those barriers to participate in the Mass,” says Malachy Fallon, executive director of Xavier Society. “If we can do something to ease the burden to fully participate that’s a wonderful thing. Given their challenges, their faith helps sustain them and gives them hope. Any way we can help provide that for them is very important for us.”

The group serves the blind and visually impaired in the United States and 20 other countries.



But Malachy believes “there are still many more people who can benefit” from what they do. Xavier Society is supported solely through individual donations, organizations, family foundations and bequests.

Eileen says thanks to these materials she has been able to participate more fully in the Mass, leading to more involvement in the life of her parish. “I’m involved in the prayer shawl ministry,” she says. “We knit and crochet and work on a variety of projects in a prayerful manner. We knit prayer shawls, lap blankets, hats and scarves for different shelters and hospice programs.”

Eileen declares she doesn’t let her vision loss slow her down or prevent her from helping others. “You can sit around being a victim your entire life always expecting someone else to help you rather than taking steps to help yourself,” Eileen states. “Or you can look for the good things in life. Try to be a good person. Go forward. That’s what life is. We never know what will come our way.”

“If I encounter someone who is losing their eyesight,” she adds, “I will always try to help and give information or resources, techniques and methods for living with vision loss.” †



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—Eileen Scrivani

