



ONS KENMERK --
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Biennial Report about the Activities of the Teaching Chair for Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf, Academic Years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010

1 Introduction

This report regards the Academic Years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. Last year, I decided to make biennial reports. Biennial reports might make developments in the work of the Chair more visible. My main activities during the last two Academic Year 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 were:

- Lectures
- Participation in conferences
- Publications
- Ongoing research

1.1 Lectures

Like in preceding years, five courses were given, four of them in alternating years.

Two courses were given about Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf and Partially Hearing, two hours weekly, in 2008-2009 in the international programme, and in 2009-2010 in the Flemish programme. Both courses were attended by groups of about 15 students. In the international programme, in which there are more students with a preceding experience in pastoral praxis, there some students who had met Deaf people as a pastor, but none of them had been appointed specifically to pastoral ministry with the Deaf. In the Flemish programme, there was one student who is Deaf herself, two students had been professionally involved in Deaf education, one as a part-time teacher of religion in a school for deaf, speech impaired and autistic children.

The number of Deaf students in the course is extremely low – one students in 9 years. I discussed this point extensively with this Deaf student and with other persons involved in the Deaf community. One of the reasons is, that in Flanders, it is still exceptional that Deaf person follow a study at university. An additional reason is that actual Deaf culture in Flanders is rather secular. There are groups of elderly Deaf people who are in contact with a Catholic centre for the Deaf at Ghent, but younger generations, especially Deaf people from Deaf families, the core of the Deaf community, consider themselves "Catholic without the Church". They marry in the Church, have their children baptised, and have a Catholic funeral. This is partially in line with general secularisation in Flanders, but is possibly also a consequence of oralism in traditional Deaf education in Flanders. This seems to be different from the situation in the French-speaking part of Belgium, where there are faith groups of Deaf people and where there is a Bible translation project ongoing. Catholic faith, pastoral work, theology find themselves clearly outside the realm of Deaf culture.

The topics were partially the same as in other years, but accents were different in the international course and Flemish course, and results of my ongoing research were added to the course:



- Deafness made visible: history of deaf people in several parts of the world, not only in the Jewish, Greek-Roman and Western culture, but also in Southern Asia, Islamic culture and Africa; the role of the Churches in the early emancipation of the deaf; lessons to be drawn from missionary experiences of the Church (*conquista* versus *kenosis*).
- An enabling view on deafness: about three different views on deafness, the medical-audiological view, the social view and the cultural view; deafness as a world view, a cosmology; life histories of some deaf persons; consequences for pastoral ministry.
- Deaf people's personal functioning: communication, social function, religious development; deafness and literacy; visual orientation; religious experience of deaf people.
- Deaf people and their language: about a view on language for pastoral ministry, language as instrument of dialogue and encounter or as crystallisation point of alienation; aspects of conversation from heart to heart; sign language as a religious and liturgical language; translation of the Bible into Sign Language.
- Deaf people, their selves and their God: What do deaf people tell about themselves and about God? Is God a hearing God?
- Models of pastoral ministry with the deaf: the place of deaf persons in the community of believers: deaf Churches; pastoral ministry with the deaf as contextual ministry; the role of deaf lay people and deaf leadership.

For the evaluation of the course, students had to write a paper with six statements, as a fruit of personal reflection about the content of the course. The examination was about two of these six statements, chosen by me. These statements make visible which barriers there are in different cultures against full acceptance of a Deaf way of thinking and a Deaf cosmology. The heaviest barrier is against the acceptance of Deaf people as pastoral ministers and in Church leadership.

Several theses were written, about the hearing Church's attitudes towards and prejudice about Deaf people, the influence of communication method in school education on catechesis of Deaf children, and deaf people in the life of the Church. I was promoter of two theses that had not directly to do with Deaf people, one thesis about pastoral ministry with people with disabilities in Nigeria, and one thesis about pastoral care and pastoral psychotherapy.

In both Academic Years, I gave a course of one hour weekly, "Religion, Meaning, and Philosophy of Life", was given in the third year of the Bachelors' programme in the Department of Audiology and Speech Therapy. Obligatory courses of "Religion, Meaning and Philosophy of Life" are given in all faculties of the University, as an expression of the Catholic identity of the University.

The following topics were treated:

- Who do people with functional impairments view themselves? The deconstruction of the concept of disability. The views of theologians with a disability were discussed, like Nancy Eiesland (physically disabled), John Hull (blind), Cyril Axelrod, the Dutch theologian Jacqueline Kool, and Peter McDonough.
- What is language and communication from the viewpoint of religion, meaning and philosophy of life?
- Ethical aspects of choices made in the field of deafness: the language debate, cochlear implantation, mainstreaming or special education, genetic research.
- The religious life of deaf people; deafness and liberation theology.

In the theme about ethical aspects, I tried to explain why Deaf and hearing people come to very different ethical evaluations of these four controversial topics. I explain that Deafness is a world-creating condition that leads to an own worldview and cosmology, different from hearing people's view on life. A way of dealing with this difference cannot be found on the basis of competition, persuasion and power, but only on the basis of a view on the human person in which personhood is essentially relational and dialogical. This theme resulted in an article published in the journal *Ethical Perspectives* (see below). These students too, had to write a paper with six statements, from which I chose two for a discussion during the examination. For many of them, this was not an easy assignment, because there are very few topics in their programme that elicit personal reflection and the formulation of a personal opinion. The content of the statements show, that since the official recognition of Sign Language in Flanders, a growing number of students follow Sign Language courses and visit information events organised by the Flemish Deaf Association.



In the third semester of each year, I give a course of two hours a week, together with my colleague Axel Liégeois, "Pastoral Work in Care Services", one year about Fundamental Issues, and one year about Practical Issues. Both courses, given in English, are followed by all students of Pastoral Theology in the international and the Flemish programme.

In the course about Fundamental Issues (even years), I give six lessons about the following topics:

1. "Impaired versions of human beings?": the awkward relationship between religions and disability; the deconstruction of the concept of disability; the concept of disability and the rejection of difference in Western culture.
2. "Able theologians": the ideas of several theologians and pastors with a functional impairment, like John Hull (blind), Nancy Eiesland and Jacqueline Kool (physically disabled), Cyril Axelrod (deafblind), and the formulation of a more human view on diversity and human contingency.
3. "Between what and who": whose deafness is it? Whose blindness is it? Expropriation and appropriation of disability.
4. "Collaboration in pastoral ministry": who can people with a functional impairment be involved on an equal level with other people in the life of Christian communities?

These themes, especially themes 1, 2 and 3 resulted in an article that was published in *Gregorianum* (see below).

In the course about Practical Issues, Prof. Liégeois presents the viewpoint and the identity of the pastor and the institution within which the pastor is working, whereas I present the viewpoint of the client, the identity of the client, and my perspective is clients' emancipation and empowerment, and I speak clearly from the viewpoint of working with deaf people. The following topics were treated:

- Conversation with people in their actual life situation. Functional impairment is a world-generating condition that makes that people live in a different world than most pastors do. Is it possible for such a pastor to enter into a real dialogue with his clients? Many aspects of the lives of his or her clients are outside the realm of Christian tradition; by consequence a pastoral ministry that focuses on correlation of Christian tradition with elements of people's own lives and culture, fails.
- The language of presence. Speech, hearing, language, words play a central role in Jewish-Christian tradition, and for some people they are even the core of that tradition. This risks to make Christian tradition *logocentric*, and inaccessible for people with problems with speech, hearing, spoken/written language. A different view on Christianity is presented, more in line with low verbal people's experience and postmodern culture, in which communion and belonging are central. For pastors, that means that their main tool is not language, but being present to people and the capacity of building up community.
- Ways towards participation in life. The movement for the emancipation of people with disabilities has led to better accessibility of education, labour, social services and Churches. Accessibility, however, is only a first step. Physical presence and integration do not guarantee full participation. Integration may be based on normal standards that see an *ableist* perspective as the only perspective that makes sense, whereas the perspective of so-called normal people is only one of the many possible perspectives. Participation respects people's own culture and perspectives.

In the Academic Year 2009-2010, it was possible to invite the Dutch female theologian Jacqueline Kool in this course. Jacqueline Kool is physically disabled herself, studied feminist theology at the State University of Utrecht, worked for a short period as a pastor in the Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PKN), and gives now trainings and workshops to companies and non-profit institutions about how to deal with employees with a functional impairment. She was invited to give a presentation about her work for students and staff members of the Faculty. Her presentation was commented by Prof.dr. Patrick Devlieger of the research unit of Cultural Anthropology and expert in the field of the relationship between culture, religion and disability. Patrick Devlieger has published some articles about Deaf culture, in cooperation with H-Dirksen Bauman of Gallaudet University at Washington D.C..

For the evaluation of the course students had to write for my part of the course a paper with six statements, of whom I chose two for discussion during the examination. Statements are revealing about the cultural barriers that have to be overcome in thinking about people with a functional impairment. In some cultures, the idea that functional impairment is just one of the aspects of the created reality of the



human person, created by a good Creator, and an aspect of the normality of human life, raises anger and indignation. For some students, it was rather difficult to accept that the American theologian Nancy Eiesland's idea that the risen body of Christ is a broken body, is not a heresy. This topic resulted, however, in a thesis by one of the African students about pastoral ministry with people with disabilities in a Nigerian context. Pastoral ministry with categories of people that do not meet normal standards, means empowerment and is counter-cultural within most cultures.

1.2 Participation in conferences and lectures given

A presentation and a paper on Deaf Liberation Theology was given on the conference, "Deaf and Other Lives: Living in Multiple Cultures", organised on September 25 - 26 at Amsterdam (NL), by the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research (ASSR) of the University of Amsterdam, at the occasion of the Deafness Visibility Week.

In November 2008 and 2009, I gave a lecture for students of the Erasmus Mundus Master of Bioethics at KU Leuven, within the course about ethics of reproductive technology. Students from various parts of the world, Asia, Africa, Islamic countries participate in this Master programme. In my lecture, I try to give a view of the inside perspective of Deaf people as to reproductive technology and genetic research. I describe the high sensitivity of European Deaf people as to genetic research, which is associated with the excesses of and the traumas caused by eugenic policies in the past. As a case, I use the reactions of the British Deaf Association and other Deaf people on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill in the UK, which might exclude Deaf people from reproductive technology.

In March 2009, I organized a conference about pastoral ministry with the Deaf at Leuven, at the occasion of a meeting of the board at Leuven. The title of the conference was "Community and Dignity", community in order to stress the central role of the Deaf community in the lives of Deaf people, and Dignity because one of the goals of pastoral ministry of the Deaf in many places is spiritual, Christian and social empowerment of Deaf people. The goal of the conference was to inform interested people about the work of ICF in various countries. Presentations were given by Mr. Terrence O'Meara (hearing) from USA, Executive Director of ICF; Rev. Peter McDonough from Manchester England, Deaf and chaplain to the Deaf; Mrs. Mary O'Meara (hearing), director of the programme for Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf in the Archdiocese of Washington D.C.; Mrs. Frankie Berry, Deaf and chaplain to the Deaf in Ireland; Mr. Josef Rothkopf, Deaf and deacon in the diocese of Aachen, Germany; Bro. Maurice Buyens (hearing), who is very active in behalf of the Catholic Deaf community in Flanders. Sign Language interpreters were present for Flemish Sign Language, American Sign Language, German Sign Language. Participants were from Flanders, among them a small group of Deaf people, Germany and the Netherlands.

From 19 to 21 November 2009, I participated in the conference "Ephpatha: The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church", held in the New Synod Hall in Vatican City. The conference was organized by the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, whose secretary Bishop Redrado had been present in the thematic meeting of the international Deaf pilgrimage in June 2008. Bishop Redrado had been impressed by the importance of this meeting and had proposed to the President of ICF, Archbishop Kelly of Liverpool, England, that the Vatican itself would organise a conference about Deaf people in the Church. The Pontifical Council took care of the logistics of the conference, whereas the contributors were proposed by ICF and the Italian congregation Piccola Missione dei Sordomuti (Small Mission of the Deaf). There was a participation of 500 persons from various countries, not only Western countries, but also from Latin America, Africa and Asia. Slightly more than one third of the contributors were Deaf themselves, from Italy, USA, Ireland, Belgium, Malaysia, South-Africa, Spain. Hearing contributors were from Italy, Poland, Belgium, USA, Germany and Mexico. Although the hearing element in the conference was still predominant, the conference was a historical event, because it was the first time that the Vatican itself reflected explicitly about the presence of Deaf people in the Church. Highlight of the conference was surely the private audience in which the participants were received by Pope



Benedict XIV. The conference was concluded with a series of recommendations to the dioceses in the Catholic Church regarding the involvement of Deaf people in the life of the Church and in pastoral ministry.

I gave a plenary contribution in the afternoon of the first day of the conference, within a part of the programme oriented on medical and psychological aspects of deafness. My contribution, "Aspetti medici della sordità: psicologia", was about two topics, at first the importance of parent-child attachment in the development of deaf children, and secondly deaf people's own view on a medical approach of deafness (deafness seen as disability, cochlear implantation, and genetic research). My contribution was published in the journal of the Pontifical Council of Health Care Workers, *Dolentium Hominum*.

On 23 and 24 January 2010, I participated in a conference at the occasion of ten years of pastoral ministry with the Deaf after the fall of communism in Bratislava, Slovakia. This conference was organised by Rev. Fr. Mária Zdenko Žiška in cooperation with the Faculty of Theology of Trnava. I was invited there to give a presentation about the November 2009 conference in the Vatican. Presentations were given by deaf and hearing people from various parts of Slovakia, from Austria, and me from Belgium. A striking aspect of pastoral ministry with the Deaf in Slovakia is the active involvement of Deaf people and CODAs (hearing children of Deaf adults), and the positive affirmation of Deaf culture and Sign Language. Under communism, the State forbade the Church to be pastorally active among the Deaf, and in the schools Sign Language was forbidden, because it was seen as contrary to the unity of the culture of the workers' State. Painful stories were told in the conference about the total absence of religious education of the Deaf. After the fall of communism, it were Deaf people themselves who tried to come into contact with their former pastors. From that moment on, pastoral ministry with the Deaf was rebuilt, but in direct contact with the Deaf community, and not like in many other parts of the world through schools and institutions for the Deaf. Initially, this gave problems with the schools, that tried to keep pastors out of the schools, because school continued their strictly oral method of communication and pastors used Sign Language. Now, there is a close cooperation of pastoral ministry with the Deaf and associations of the Deaf in various parts of the country. Slovakia has officially acknowledge Deaf culture as one of the minority cultures of the country, on the same level as Hungarians and Roma.

Particularly impressive was the meeting with a large group of Deaf people on the second day of the conference, in which Deaf people were asked to express their thoughts and wishes as to pastoral ministry. It was clear that people were not used to such a question, because of two reasons: at first, under communism, people learned not to express their opinion and even not to have an opinion – because even in the Deaf clubs that was very dangerous, because even some Deaf people were members of the Secret Service. Secondly, the Slovakian Church with its large number of young priests and religious people, is still strongly priest-led, and active involvement of lay people in pastoral ministry is largely unknown. Lay people are still only spectators of faith and not actors. So, from various aspects, this was a revolutionary question to Deaf people.

1.3 Publications

In 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, the following publications were realised:

Broesterhuizen, M. (2008). A Liberating Approach to Human Contingency. *Gregorianum*, 89 (1), 150-167.

In this article, the concept of disability is deconstructed. Functional impairment, health, illness, bodily imperfection, death are an integral and normal part of the created reality of human persons. The human person's being *image of God* should not looked for in individual characteristic, but in God's covenant with humankind.

Broesterhuizen, M. (2008). Worlds of Difference. An Ethical Analysis of Choices in the Field of Deafness. *Ethical Perspectives: Journal of the European Ethics Network*, 15 (1), 103-131.



Deaf and hearing people have very different views on the ethical aspects of communication methods, cochlear implantation, mainstreaming and genetical research. These different views originate from different world views, and have their own logics within the own world of Deaf or hearing people. This article proposes to deal with this difference on the basis of a Christian view on personhood, in which personhood is seen as basically relational and dialogical.

Broesterhuizen, M. (2008). Waar taal en verhalen falen [Where language and narratives fail]. In: Knieps-Port le Roi T., Boeve L. (Eds.), *Gods sacramentele aanwezigheid in de wereld van vandaag. Hulde aan professor dr. Lambert Leijssen bij zijn emeritaat.* [God's sacramental presence in today's world. Honour to Prof. Dr. Lambert Leijssen at the occasion of his retirement] Leuven: Acco.

Christian religion and Christian liturgy has a strong orientation on the spoken and written word, and may be characterised as *logocentric*. Because of this logocentrism, many Deaf people imagine God as a hearing God, who has to be addressed properly in spoken language. Liberating Deaf people from this image of a hearing God cannot be attained by offering them a different, more visually oriented image of God, but by helping Deaf people to discover the image of God within themselves and within the Deaf community, helping Deaf people to learn to pray in their own Sign Language, and developing liturgies that are in line with Deaf culture.

Broesterhuizen, M. (2009). Deaf People: Community and World View. *Gregorianum*, 90 (3), 485-509.

Community plays a central role in the lives of Deaf persons, and the experience of true community is for many of them an alley to the experience of God. That God can be experienced as present in the community and among persons gathered in Jesus' name, is an ancient heritage of the Church. Theological arguments are given that the experience of Jesus' presence among persons gathered in His name, is not just a sentiment or an emotion, but a matter of real presence. For many Deaf people, but also for other persons remote from Christian tradition, such an experience is more convincing than proclamation in words or liturgies.

Broesterhuizen, M. (2009). Faith in Search of Vision: Living and Celebrating Christian Community in the Deaf World. *Questions Liturgiques / Studies in Liturgy*, 90 (1), 44-67.

Christian religion and Christian liturgy are highly logocentric. Because of this logocentrism, many Deaf people imagine God as a hearing God, who has to be addressed properly in spoken language. Liberating Deaf people from this image of a hearing God can be attained by helping Deaf people to learn to pray in their own Sign Language, and developing liturgies that are in line with Deaf culture.

*Broesterhuizen, M. (2009). Meer dan één wereld te winnen: participatie van mensen met een handicap in de christelijke gemeenschap [More than one world to be won: participation of people with a disability in the Christian community]. *Collationes: Vlaams Tijdschrift voor Theologie en Pastoraal*, 39 (4), 413-426.

A challenge formulated by cultural anthropology is to see disability or functional impairment not as a defect but as a word-generating state, as starting point of an own experiential and cultural world in its own right. In such a view, there is a gap between the worlds of e.g. deaf or blind people and so-called normal people. In these different worlds, aspects of the Christian message, such as the healing stories in the Gospel, can be interpreted in very different ways. This gap cannot be bridged by dialogue only, since words may have different meanings in different world. There should also be participation in each other's lives, and still then mutual understanding remains an asymptotic process.

Broesterhuizen, M. (2010). Medical Aspects of Deafness: Psychology. *Dolentium Hominum*, 73 (1), 26-29.

The text of my presentation at the Conference "Ephphatha: The Deaf Person in the Life of the Church (see 1.2 in this report).

*Broesterhuizen, M. (2010). Foutje bedankt? Een bevrijdingstheologische visie op onconventionele lichamen [Oops? A liberation theology view on unconventional bodies]. In: Van Edom G., Lichaam en



levensadem: pastorale zorg voor de hele levende mens [Body and life breath: pastoral care for the whole living person]. Leuvense Cahiers voor Praktische Theologie. Antwerpen: Halewijn

In many religious traditions unconventional bodies are suspicious bodies. In Christian tradition disability was often seen as a consequence of original sin. An alternative view is that bodily imperfection is not a consequence of sin, but simply one of the ways in which God created the human person. An unconventional body completely lived through can be a source of transcendence, an counter-cultural ideal of wholeness in a culture tormented by a perfect body fetishism, and a reason for blessing God for the diversity in His creation.

The publications indicated with an asterisk (*) are still to be adapted for international publication in English.

1.4 Ongoing research

This year, there were three main topics in my research.

A first topic was good practice in pastoral ministry with the Deaf. In this research, I studied literature as to various Church models and pastoral models used in pastoral ministry with the Deaf in various countries and cultures. In my analysis, I take into account 1) the different developments and stages of development of the Deaf community in different countries, 2) developments in Catholic ecclesiology after the Second Vatican Council, especially "Communio ecclesiology" and the development of Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America, USA and Southern Asia, 3) Church models and pastoral models in the Catholic Church in general and in other Christian Churches, such as the typology given by Avery Dulles (institution, mystical community, sacrament, herald, and servant), by the Dutch theologian Henk de Roest (the Church as temple, harbour, and service institute), and the American Baptist theologian Bob Ayres, especially his ideas about the changing Deaf community, Deaf Diaspora, and the third wave in Deaf pastoral ministry. Ayres' ideas about Fun-Friendship-Fellowship-Faith seems to reflect the way in which many Deaf person feel attracted to Catholic Deaf communities.

My analysis has led, so far, to two conclusions. Especially in Deaf pastoral ministry, pastoral ministry is not the pastor at work, even when the pastor has a prominent place in the community. Pastoral ministry is the Church at work, the community at work. Stressing the role and the work of the individual pastor, whether ordained or not ordained, is a remnant of an outdated pre-Vatican II Church model. Pastoral ministry with the deaf works only when the pastor succeeds in becoming a facilitator that recognizes, empowers and brings into communion the charismas of all members of the community. A second conclusion of my analysis is that since the Church is an incarnational reality, what good practice is cannot be formulated on the basis of ideas about how the Church should be, wants to be or has been ordered to be, but only through participating observation of Catholic Deaf communities.

A second topic is an exegesis of the story about the meeting of Jesus with the deaf man in Mark 7. I put this story within the context of the whole "section of the loaves" from Mark 6:30 to Mark 8:27. I used three methods: an analysis of the narrative structure of this section, with special attention paid to style figures used by Mark, the search for references to and similarities with texts in the Hebrew Bible, and positioning the concepts that were retrieved, within the cultural context of Jewish antiquity in the New Testament era. My conclusion is that the story is not about healing, but about recognition of insight in the true meaning of who Jesus is. Within the context of the culture of that time, the deaf man and the Syro-Phoenician woman in the story just before it, are two complete outsiders, irrelevant for religious culture, more like animals than like humans, a risk for ritual purity, and yet they are presented as good examples of persons coming to insight, after Jesus having reproached to his disciples their lack of insight. The deaf man is not a symbol for unwillingness to hear God's voice, but he is a symbol for what he was: a depreciated complete outsider. It is the only place in the Scriptures that speaks about personal communication with a deaf person. This study has resulted in a manuscript that has been submitted to the journal "Louvain Studies".



A third topic is about translation of the Bible into Sign Language. Immediate cause for this study was the fact that this summer, in the French speaking part of Belgium, a DVD will be published with a translation of the Gospel of Saint Luke in Sign Language, and a project of Bible translation has started in the Netherlands. The translation of the Gospel of Saint Luke is a common project of Deaf Bible groups in several French speaking countries, under supervision of the French Bible Association: France, Francophone Belgium, French-speaking Switzerland, and Congo-Brazzaville. In my study, I analysed several Bible translation projects (USA, Sweden, Francophone countries, Costa Rica, South Africa, Australia) and I compared the difficulties met with linguistic information about Sign Language, translation theories, and theories about the development of Biblical texts. My conclusion is that the difficulties met are partially a consequence of the fact that Sign Language is a completely different kind of language than written and spoken language, but that that fact explains only a part of the problems. A fact that is not considered by translation projects, is that Biblical texts have their origin, at least partially, in "oral tradition". The most common view on the Bible is that it is a written text, and standard translations are taken by most projects as reliable renditions of an original text. The original texts we have, are, however, at least partially scripts for a performance in a living community, and they contain many aspects and "oral characteristics" relevant for good performance. Written translations often do not take into account these performance aspects of the original texts, and by consequence these aspects remain unnoticed for most Bible translation projects. A translation into Sign Language is a conversion of a text to a performance, and in order to make a good performance, it is necessary to have an imagination of the performance that lies at the basis of the original text, i.e. not to translate from text to text – making pseudo texts as some Bible translation projects in Spain, Japan and the Netherlands do, using *avatars* and animation techniques – but from performance to performance. This study resulted in an article that will be submitted to the Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education.

1.5 My personal situation

In 2009, a change has taken place in my personal situation. Next to my work for the Chair, I had been a clinical psychologist in Viataal, formerly Instituut voor Doven (Institute for the Deaf) in the Netherlands. As a consequence of my involvement in ICF and my work for the Chair, I had a special interest in pastoral ministry with the Deaf in the Netherlands, the country where I live. Since the situation of Catholic pastoral ministry with the Deaf in the Netherlands is dramatic, I discussed several times in the past the possibility of being involved in Catholic pastoral ministry with the Deaf. In 2009, I decided that I might serve the Deaf community in a more useful way as a pastoral worker than as a psychologist. The Bishop of my diocese accepted my offer to take an early retirement from Viataal and to devote myself to pastoral ministry with the Deaf. On 25 September of this year, I shall be ordained as a permanent deacon, after one year of preparation. My preparation during this year had, among others, two spearheads: at first, building up personal contact with the remnants of the flourishing Catholic Deaf clubs that had existed in the past in the Netherlands, and secondly the formulation of a proposal to be done to the Bishop regarding the organisation of Catholic pastoral ministry with the Deaf. This proposal, that was developed in discussion with Deaf people and hearing people involved in this work, amounts to the establishment of a personal parish of the Deaf and a Service Office for Pastoral Ministry with the Deaf. The personal parish should leave intact as much as possible the own structures of the Catholic Deaf clubs, but should aim at bringing these clubs into community, with a parish board and a pastoral council formed by Deaf people. The proposal was well received by the Bishop.

Leuven, 31 August, 2010
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