



6th April, 2011

37/2011

A DEAF-BLIND PRIEST VISITING MALTA - Fr CYRIL AXELROD

Fr Cyril Axelrod, a world renowned deaf-blind priest will be visiting Malta between the 7th and 16th April, 2011, as the guest of the Deaf Ministry Team within the Diocesan Commission for Disabled Persons. Father Cyril was the first Catholic priest to be born deaf and later became blind.

In his book *And The Journey Begins*, Father Cyril recounts how he was born into an Orthodox Jewish family in South Africa and found it very difficult to communicate with those around him, including his parents. He was educated by Catholic nuns who enabled him to have access to a good education through sign language. He became a Catholic in his adulthood and subsequently studied for the priesthood.

He travelled to be able to set up pastoral care for deaf and deaf-blind communities in many countries. He learnt several native sign languages in the course of his ministry. During the time of apartheid he founded a multi-racial school for deaf people in Soweto. He also set up a hostel for homeless deaf people in Pretoria as well as a training centre in Cape Town in order to teach skills to enable deaf people to find work.

Although he was devastated when he gradually lost his sight as a result of Usher Syndrome, Father Cyril did not allow his blindness to change his determination to minister to the deaf and deaf-blind. He is still very active in his ministry in the UK with the deaf and deaf-blind there.

The members of the Deaf Ministry Team met Father Cyril during an International Conference about Deaf People and the Church held at the Vatican in November 2009. In his paper Father Cyril asserted that Deaf Culture and Sign Language had to serve as the bridge to enable the Church to communicate God's message of love and hope to the deaf. He insisted that the Church should recognize sign language as another language. In using sign language to minister to the deaf the Church shows respect for deaf people enables support to be offered. The deaf would subsequently feel included within the Christian community.

What strikes anyone who meets Fr Cyril is the fact that he is always ready to smile and seems to be able to break the communication barrier effortlessly. He is always ready to share a joke too in spite of his severe disabilities.

The main activities organized during Fr Cyril's visit to Malta will be in English and include:

* A retreat to be held at the Archbishop's Seminary between the 8th and the 10th of April. The theme, chosen by Father Cyril is *Touching Jesus in Your Heart*. This retreat is open to the public but preference will be given to deaf, blind and deaf-blind participants.

* A Question and Answer evening at the University Chapel on Tuesday 12th of April at 8.00pm. The event will be open to the general public. He will share his experience as a deaf-blind priest and answer questions posed by the audience.

* On Friday 15th of April, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, Fr Cyril will say Mass at the *Deaf Club*, 45, Lascaris Wharf, Valletta at 8.00pm.

For further information kindly email deafministrymalta@yahoo.com or pastoral.secretariat@maltadiocese.org