

St Denis Primary School Joondanna Western Australia

By Barbara Harris

What a welcome! Ms Marisa Ward's Year 3 class at St Denis Catholic Primary School in Joondanna, were so relaxed about our visit that they welcomed us in their pyjamas! They had earlier that day had a Pyjama Party with their buddy class, to help younger kids at the school get to know some of the bigger kids in their school.

The Catholic Ministry with People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (Western Australia) has a team of volunteers, who go into schools and other venues to talk about deafness and to share stories about being deaf.

'We had a very bright and curious group of kids led by a lively teacher, who listened carefully to what we shared. We talked about what we do as an organisation that was started in the Perth Catholic Archdiocese back in 1972. We shared our individual stories as people who are deaf or hard of hearing.'



Geoff Scott, profoundly Deaf and a graduate of Curtin University in Fine Arts, presented his story with the help of Susan Bates, who reverse interpreted Geoff's Auslan (Geoff signed and Susan voiced for him). Geoff is a member of Saint Denis Parish and was on the previous Parish Pastoral Council. Geoff taught the children the finger spelling alphabet and the children were so quick to learn how to manipulate their fingers around the letters.

Susan Bates, also a parishioner of St Denis, now shared what it meant to live in the country. Susan's local Catholic School felt they did not have the resources to accept Susan and so she attended the local government school. Susan went on to University and boarded at St Thomas More College. The chaplain there introduced her to the Catholic Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People. Except for a short stay over East, Susan has been involved with the Deaf Catholic Community in WA for many years.



Geoff Scott, Fr Paul Pitzen and Susan Bates with some of the class of Year 3

Fr Paul Pitzen, Chaplain with Deaf and Hard of Hearing People, talked about how people like him lose their hearing and some of the technology that deaf people use to keep in touch, such as the audio induction loop, captioning for TV and movies, the telephone typewriter (TTY) and SMS.

It was wonderful of the children to ask us lots of interesting questions – “How do we read books?”, “Are our children deaf?” and “Why don’t deaf people use their voices?” One child shared with us how he sometimes has difficulty hearing.

The day was very embracing as we learnt many things about each other, and now we look forward to greeting one another when we meet at church, in sign language!

