

# on the MOVE



Cora Murphy, 13, watches her father, James Murphy, and her brother, Casey, 14, respond in sign language at Emmanuel Church of the Deaf, at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Rochester.

## Family takes dad's hearing loss in stride



Cora rests her head on her dad's shoulder during the homily.

Story by Mike Latona  
Photos by Andrea Dixon

Casey and Cora Murphy enjoy normal weekend activities with their father, James. Beginning with a ritual of a pizza party on Friday, James also entertains his children by driving them to shopping malls and Rochester-area festivals.

Sunday-morning Mass, too, is a staple for this trio — at Emmanuel Church of the Deaf in Rochester.

There, Father Raymond Fleming, the parish pastor who is also deaf, celebrates the liturgy by signing while an interpreter speaks into a microphone for those who can hear.

Casey and Cora speak the prayers while also praying in sign language with their father.

Although Casey and Cora can hear clearly, their father cannot hear at all. James Murphy lost most of his hearing when he was 2 years old due to a severe illness, and was fully deaf by age 15.

For as long as they can remember, Casey and Cora said, they have treated their father's hearing loss as a normal part of their family life.

If her father is at an assembly, he needs an interpreter, said Cora, 13. "But other than that, he's just a regular father."

The siblings "learned sign language when we were babies," Cora said. "You just start with the same words you would if you're hearing," Casey, 14, explained.

That sign language is often put to good use. Casey and Cora translate information off the radio for their father, and also let him know, by signing, if the car sounds funny or if the smoke-alarm battery has died. Casey added that he helps his dad set up closed-captioning hearing for various television programs.

"He's real handy," James Murphy said through an interpreter.

James gets plenty of assistance in the community as well. He can request an interpreter for many events with a public speaker, and Casey also noted that "a lot of department stores have at least one out of three workers who know sign language, and that's helpful."

The ratio of people using sign

language is much higher at Emmanuel Church of the Deaf.

Casey and Cora said they enjoy the friendly atmosphere at Emmanuel; Cora said she blends right in because "there'll be other deaf parents and they'll have hearing children." Casey added that he likes Father Fleming's homilies, remarking, "He makes the Gospels pretty easy to understand."

Father Fleming, Emmanuel's pastor since 1985, speaks highly of the Murphys, commenting, "They're wonderful, wonderful people. They're wonderfully faithful."

On a recent Sunday, the Murphys mixed right in with the approximately 100 other worshipers during the sign of peace, walking up and down the aisles greeting numerous people.

The community's festive atmosphere is furthered by Father Fleming, who enjoys singling out members celebrating their birthdays. So that means Casey, who turns 15 on Oct. 24, will likely be spotlighted so that parishioners can extend both the sung, and signed, versions of "Happy Birthday" at the end of Mass.

The Murphys' involvement in this community dates back to the days of St. Mary's Church of the Deaf, when Masses were held in the basement of St. Mary's Church in Rochester. The parish changed its name to Emmanuel in 1991. Also at that time, Masses were moved to Rochester's Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, where they are still held.

Cora is an eighth-grader at the city of Rochester's Monroe Middle School; Casey is in 10th grade at Rochester's School Without Walls. Their parents, James and Alexia, divorced several years ago. The children spend every other weekend with their attentive father.

**"I just want them to have a successful future, the same as any other parent," James stated. "I will always be there for them."**

Asked if that meant helping his kids maintain their faith in God, he replied, "I love them and cherish them. So, yes. I think it's appropriate to come to services here. My parents had a tradition of taking me to church, and I want to pass it on to them."

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