

# Catholic Courier

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## Church enriched by Catholics with disabilities

Since health problems last summer made it difficult for him to walk, retired priest Father Neil Miller has been celebrating Sunday Mass at Rochester's Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish with the aid of a cane and sometimes a walker.

Eneida C. Roman knits clothing for the poor and has begun transcribing sacramental records for Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church in Rochester — using a computer designed for those who are blind.

David Russell, who lives at a Catholic Charities residence for people with developmental disabilities, sings in the choir and belongs to the men's club at Irondequoit's St. James Parish. His fellow Catholic Charities resident, Daneile Schreib, said she distributes "a lot of bulletins" at the parish.

Blind since she was a baby, Judy Weidenborner serves as a lector at Rochester's Ss. Peter and Paul Parish, reading Scripture from Braille texts.

Father Raymond H. Fleming, who lost most of his hearing in childhood, shepherds a community of Catholics with various types of hearing impairments as pastor of Emmanuel Church of the Deaf in Rochester.

Ann Kurz, who has cerebral palsy and uses a walker, writes prayers of the faithful for Masses at Rochester's St. John the Evangelist Parish and has participated in various parish activities.

All of these Catholics belong to a church led by a pope who has become increasingly dis-



Judy Weidenborner, a parishioner at Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Rochester, prepares to serve as a lector by reading Scripture in Braille at her Irondequoit home Nov. 12.

abled in recent years.

In November 1978, the same year Pope John Paul II was elected, the "Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities" was released. The document discussed ways in which the church should minister to and with people who have disabilities. The letter called people with disabilities "equal partners" in the faith and noted that much of Jesus' ministry was focused on people like them. The document called on church members to remove barriers, both physical and emotional, that impede people with disabilities from fully participating in church life.

"It is not enough to merely affirm the rights of people with disabilities," the bishops wrote 25 years ago. "We must actively work to make them real in the fabric of modern society. Recognizing that individuals have a claim to our respect because they are persons, because they share in the one redemption of Christ, and because they contribute to our society by their activity within it, the church must become an advocate for and with them."

### YOUR NEIGHBORS

People with disabilities — and those who work with them — acknowledge that the Diocese of Rochester has made great strides in implementing both the letter and the spirit of the 1978 pastoral letter. Yet they noted much remains to be done, particularly in the area of making people with

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