

HAVE YOU HEARD?

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Deafness has many causes and can occur at any age. People can go deaf suddenly as a side effect of a virus, or lose their hearing over time because of disease or injury caused by noise. About one infant in 800 is born deaf; over two million people in North America cannot hear at all and another 30 million have serious hearing problems. Statistics show that one in four Canadians have some degree of hearing loss. Chances are that there are members in your council and/or parish community who have hearing problems.

Val Bedard (yes, related to our national president), who lives in Vernon, British Columbia, has been hard of hearing since birth. She writes, "I have a profound hearing loss and wear two hearing aids that help me 'hear' what is being said to me or around me. I rely a lot on speech reading (also known as lip-reading)...."

"There is a 'myth' out there in our society that needs to be changed...hearing aids do not 'correct' your hearing, it is an aid such as wearing glasses. For example, my hearing aids can make soft sounds of dishes rattling into loud sounds of dishes rattling. Just because I wear hearing aids, it doesn't mean that I hear what you hear. Trying to listen in a noisy environment is very difficult for anyone who wears hearing aids. All the sounds are made louder by the hearing aid and it is up to the wearer to discriminate what they do want to hear...."

"Hearing aids work best when the hearing aid wearer is in a quiet environment and the speaker is about three to eight feet away. Beyond that the hearing aid wearer will have to rely on other coping strategies such as speech reading or use technical devices. Just slow your speech down and your listener will appreciate your efforts immensely!"

"For those of us who do wear a hearing aid, we have to get used to hearing through amplification. For example, when I go to a restaurant, I hear all the sounds amplified, I am unable to filter out through all the sounds for one voice that I want to hear, so then I have to rely on speech reading. I hear dishes rattling, voices chattering, a constant drone of sounds, etc., all amplified through my hearing aid.

"After trying to hear in a noisy environment, people have been known to put their hearing aids in a dresser drawer, only to be forgotten while family members and friends are left struggling to make themselves heard to that person. Sound familiar?"

Val started a company to help people and their families deal with hearing loss, and her mobile business covers the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia. Through the use of assistive listening devices and learning coping techniques, people with hearing loss can continue to live full and productive lives.

What can members do?

- When speaking to someone with a hearing loss, face the individual, get her attention before speaking and don't turn away while speaking.
- Speak a little slower and clearly but do not over-articulate.
- Don't ask, "Can you hear me?" and don't embarrass people by singling them out in the group as being hard of hearing. Make sure any CWL members with hearing loss feel comfortable and are participants at meetings.
- Invite a speaker to talk about hearing loss; the use, care and maintenance of hearing aids and other listening systems; managing difficult listening situations; and, about specialized communication equipment, i.e., telephones, alarm clocks, television accessories and hearing aid accessories for use in meeting rooms and churches.
- Become aware of hearing aid plans and hearing aid clinics in the community.

Hearing loss can make even routine communication difficult. This may result in frustration and withdrawal from social activities.

By sharing her story, Val Bedard has taught us about living with hearing loss, and made us more aware of how we might help. Thanks Val! †

ERRATUM

On page 18 of the winter issue, Velma Harasen was incorrectly identified as the national chairperson of community life. Velma is actually the national chairperson of education and health. Our sincere apology to Velma for this oversight.