

Captions For Almost Everyone!

- by Pat Gardiner

Sermon on the Wall – a catchy title, and it certainly caught my attention as I read the article in front of me on my desk. But why did this sound so familiar? Of course.

Sermon on the Mount! How interesting ... and I read further.

The article was about Anne Messineo, RPR, and she has been reporting for over 22 years and has been a New York State Supreme Court Reporter for 20 years. Five years ago Anne realized she could provide captioning for her church, both because of her skill and because of the technology available at the church.

After reading the article, I contacted Anne in the hopes that she would share her experience with us, and she very graciously shares the following.

When Anne first approached her Pastor about captioning, the demo didn't take but 10 seconds. "As I stroked his first words on my machine, with only the computer hooked up in his office, he was sold."

Some churches provide captioning for a small group, perhaps for one person, but Anne provides captioning for almost everyone at Believers' Chapel in Syracuse, New York. The church seats 1,500 with an average of about 900 attending a Sunday morning service.

The captions are projected onto a huge wall just left of the altar and are clearly readable from almost anywhere in the sanctuary except maybe the lower right side looking at the stage.

Why not display the captions just in one area of the church? Anne explains, “I guess I really feel that being able to sit anywhere and not be singled out is so important to the user.” Anne tells us that perhaps a user doesn’t want to sit in one particular area, and maybe their family or friends don’t want to either. “This way they can all sit together. This way they can be a participant just like any other church goer.” Anne adds, “Isn’t that the way it’s supposed to be?”

The software/reporting equipment belongs to Anne. Then she purchased the character generator box , a church donation, “and the tech guy at church is a real “techy”, so they supplied the two monitors, small Sony televisions (used a lot in captioning), plus they rigged the connection from me in a private room off the main master control room over the ceiling to a rack that houses the decoder. With the help of my good friend, Valerie Waite, we accomplished the mission and all that was left was writing the church sermons.”

When I asked Anne if there were any obstacles she encountered when first starting to caption for her church, she replied: “My only problem starting back in 1998 was just perfecting my writing. It’s amazing because at any given time anything comes up – sports, politics, government, world events and, of course, the Bible and its contents.

“In the beginning the Pastor would give me notes, but that stopped a couple of years ago. So now I have no idea what he is actually going to preach on. What’s nice, though, is that when he refers to a scripture, i.e., Romans 2:31, and then he reads it, I’ll write Romans 2:31 and in the main booth they will put that particular scripture on the wall and I get a slight break.

“I have really grown accustomed to Pastor Paul Wagner’s manner of speech and have created a few briefs for common phrases. He was a college anthropology professor before he became a Christian and, boy, when he gets going about tribes in Brazil and his travels around the world, it’s quite challenging. So I have to be on my game. He also uses Greek words, so I’ve learned those but usually fingerspell them. It’s easier.”

Anne tells us that sometimes with a guest speaker, this is all new. “They find it fascinating and want to engage me in conversation, so I talk back in lower case.” She continues, “We have had many guest speakers who try to constantly stump me. Immediate fingerspelling. Usually they try to get me with ‘supercalafragilous’ -- I have a brief form for it now!”

Anne has done plays at church, “Scrooge” at Christmastime and other times an Easter production. She usually does those events scripted and pops the captions instead of writing it live. If the script is changed during the performance, she will jump in and write in realtime.

Who are some of the people, besides the obvious, that Anne captions for? Anne has had foreigners follow along finding it easier to read English than translate in their own heads. Also, she has received feedback from her Pastor that there are many older folks who use the captions, perhaps not for every word, but they find it extremely helpful.

Frieda Heckman, supervisor of deaf/hard of hearing social work services at Aurora of Central New York tells us, “Churches should be willing to add captioning as a line item in their budget. That expense could easily be offset by an increase in numbers of the congregation who might want to become members of an ‘accessible church’. Senior citizens often stop going to church because they cannot hear the sermon and benefit.”

Being the sole captioner for a church can be a challenge when the captioner wants a Sunday off for whatever reason. Anne has no backup, so she came up with the solution. “I basically know in advance when I will not be there and have them publish in the bulletin, as a special announcement, that on such and such a Sunday there will be no captioning.” This solves the problem easily.

Any practicing for a while before hooking up on a Sunday morning? “Oh, my. No way! I hook up, run “test test”, and usually the first 25 minutes is worship and the main booth puts the words on the wall. I love when they forget, because I get to write the music. It’s like playing the piano. I have musical notes come up, then the words will appear in lower

case, and with each stanza I end with a musical note, and then it starts all over again.
That is my FAVORITE thing to do is to write the words to the songs. I LOVE IT!”

To sum it all up, Anne says, “It truly is a blessing. Whether it helps one person or 10, it is a way to give back.”

Anne, we think you are amazing! Five years of providing captioning for almost everyone at your church, and doing it all on your own. You are accomplishing something we all cannot help but admire!

You can contact Anne at messineo@twcny.rr.com. JCR Contributing Editor Pat Gardiner is from Milton, Ontario, Canada. For more information on providing CART/captioning for a church, go to www.captioningtheword.com.

Outlines:

cherubim KHER/PWEUPL

maranatha PHAR/TPHA/THA

consecrate KOPBS/KRAEUT

Melchizedek PHEL/KEUZ/TKEBG

Crete KRAO*ET

Zacchaeus STK-S

covet KOFT

Zacharias STKABG/RAOEUS

David and Goliath TKA*ET

Zephaniah STK-PB

David and Bathsheba TKAEBEBS

herald HERLD

Ishmael SPHAEL

liturgy HREUT/UR/SKWREU