

Just a Phone Call Away

- by Pat Gardiner

It was in the spring of 2006 when Caroline Sebastian knew for sure she would be moving miles away to an apple farm in Kelowna, British Columbia.

Caroline is part of a team of captioners that at that time had been captioning for seven years for a church in Milton, Ontario. Friendships were strong and she would be missed dearly. Caroline wanted to stay part of the team, but how could this happen when she would be living 1,725 miles away?

We discussed options, prayed many times about it, and then knew the answer. Remote captioning. This would enable Caroline to still be a part of the team and she could continue to use her skill and church dictionary that she had spent so many years building.

As we thought about this and planned, what had originally seemed like a negative soon turned into an exciting positive! We realized that this would raise the captioning at the church to another dimension, and there were many possibilities.

Where to start? From Caroline's end, she bought Eclipse captioning software. She got an extra phone line installed so she now had two lines, bought a Plantronics amplifier and headset, an oldie but goodie 28,800 fax modem that she found on ebay, and several cables to connect her equipment together.

From the church side, we started with the phone lines. Some churches use two dedicated analogue phone lines, some use one dedicated phone line and one line that is not used at all on Sundays. We already had a phone system in place that, by using commas along with the church phone number in the telephone number field in the captioning software, Caroline could call in easily, and then call the same phone number again, press an extension number, and she would also have access to the church live audio on her second phone line.

The church bought a Comrex auto coupler, Link portable encoder, and an external modem for the encoder. Link was excellent with their support, guided us all the way through, and gave us a discount because the encoder was being used in a church. We had two jacks installed in the wall of the video booth in the sanctuary, near where the encoder and auto coupler were going to be placed.

Several tests were done over the months getting this ready. Denise Agard, Joanne Anderson, Phyllis Doel, Diane LeBlanc, and Terry Wood on the team helped Caroline get her captioning software and equipment set up and working, while our Pastor was very helpful with the phone lines and equipment at the church. Then, a final test was done a few days before the Sunday Caroline was to caption from Kelowna, testing one last time to be sure everything worked.

Well, the Sunday to put this all together finally arrived. We were nervous and excited. Would this really work? Kathy Toy was hooked up at the church as the backup captioner, just in case. We all know how it is, don't we? Plan A, Plan B, Plan C, etc., etc.!

We are pleased to say it worked perfectly! It brought tears to our eyes as the captions flowed onto the monitors in the sanctuary, and we realized that Caroline was sitting in her new home in Kelowna, her mom helping at that end, captioning over so many miles for the precious people at New Life who need to "hear" the voice of the Pastor. This was another first for a church in Canada and, as one of the people we caption for said to his daughter on that Sunday, "We are very happy!"

What does remote captioning mean to Caroline? We asked her, and she explains, "Remote captioning is a wonderful way to lend a hand even though I've moved. I had enjoyed captioning for the church very much and really didn't want to stop. I knew technically speaking there was a way to continue from afar, so was glad the church was agreeable to help this work by buying the encoder and getting their end set up to receive the captions. Now I'm just a phone call away and still feel connected to my colleagues, and to the church family I have moved away from."

There are many possibilities now. We discovered that we can have a captioner captioning remotely and have a captioner at the church, both hooked up to the encoder and, as long as they don't write at the same time, both can participate and share captioning the service.

This opens up the possibility of students practising captioning perhaps the songs, while the captioner would caption the faster portions of the service, such as the sermon, one captioning remotely while the other one is using the captioning software and equipment at the church. Then, after the service, the captioner and student can share ideas, as the student learns hands-on what it's like to caption for a live audience, and a very forgiving one at that.

A benefit perhaps to some of you is that, if you are the sole captioner for your church, this may be a way for you to share the captioning with someone else, whether they live close by or far away. Or maybe when you're on vacation another captioner would be able to caption remotely, filling in for you while you are away, without the concern of having a Sunday with no captioning.

The possibilities are endless. And how does New Life Church feel about all of this? Well, the captioning team, the Pastors, and the congregation are thrilled! Caroline is very dear to us and, despite the miles, we are delighted that she is now only a phone call away!

JCR Contributing Editor Pat Gardiner is from Milton, Ontario, Canada. For more information on church captioning go to www.captioningtheword.com.

The following outlines are submitted by Caroline Sebastian. For several, there are suggested short forms. For the rest, please use your steno theory to write them.

Alleluia AL/KWRA	Good Friday
Ash Wednesday	Halleluiah H-L
Calvary	holiness
Canonical Gospels	Holy Saturday
Church of the Holy Sepulchre (SEP/-L/KER)	Hosanna H-PB
Consecrate	Lent
Crucifixion	Liturgy
Crucify	Lutheran HR*UT/RAPB
Disciples TK-PLS	Matins
Easter Sunday	Maundy Thursday
Easter Triduum (Latin for "three days")	Pascha
Ecumenism	Paschal
Eucharist	Passion PAGS
Exsultet (Catholic hymn of praise)	Passover
Exult	Pasyon
Forgiven FR*EUFPB	Resurrection
Garden Tomb	Risen R*EUFPB
Gloria in Excelsis Deo	Simon of Cyrene
Golgotha	Stations of the Cross
	Via Dolorosa