



IAAS Walks of Life 2009

Mary Ellen Kenneley Czelusniak

Mary Ellen Kenneley Czelusniak was born to Edward Martin and Catherine McDonnell Kenneley in Cleveland and reared in the Hough area with her two brothers, Edward Michael and James Harold Kenneley. Her maternal grandparents, Michael McDonnell and Mary O'Donnell, both came to Cleveland around 1900 and her paternal grandparents, Charles T. Kenneley and Ellen Gallagher, were born here of Irish descent.

Mary Ellen attended Alexander Graham Bell School at the age of three to learn to speak. At the age of 18 she married Boleslav Czelusniak, who also was deaf. They parented four children: Buddy, Joe, Mary Anne and Angela.

Through the years Mary Ellen has taken many night classes and attended Cuyahoga Community College for two years, receiving a certificate in its Mental Health program. She feels education is the key to success and has a thirst for knowledge in all areas. In 1972 she started volunteering at St. Augustine Church helping single deaf women and also helping to teach religion to deaf children, which she continues to this day.

In 1988 Mary Ellen was hired as a pastoral worker for Catholic Charities, the first deaf person in the U.S. to hold this position.

She is a life member of the International Catholic Deaf Association, a member of N.C.O.D. Pastoral Workers, and was instrumental in forming a first time Exposition for the Deaf to showcase their talents and qualifications for employment.

She also is a member of the Northeast Ohio Society for the Deaf and St. Augustine Deaf Seniors. She was president of Mary's Rosary Guild for many years and is past secretary for the Cleveland Catholic Deaf Center.

At St. Augustine Church she is currently a eucharistic minister, a reader for the deaf and a responder at the Mass for the Deaf, as well as a volunteer with two RCIA programs for deaf adults and children. She also takes an active role in Parish Council, Cluster and Deanery meetings. Furthermore, in addition to writing poetry and inspirational works she composes and performs in comedy skits for the Catholic Deaf Center. The Lakewood Senior Center receives her volunteer attention, too.

Mary Ellen has received many awards in recognition of her commitment to the missions and values of the Catholic Church. She feels her work is more of a ministry – God's calling – and feels blessed to be able to do all of it.

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