



# The cost of ACCESSIBILITY

*By Linda S. Remensnyder, Au.D., CCC-A, Doctor of Audiology*

Assistive listening systems are worth their weight in gold in terms of ensuring members' accessibility and engagement in the worship service. Even so, these systems typically cost thousands of dollars.

However, I know of four different ways church clients have rallied together to raise the necessary funds. Fortunately, these churches don't usually have to strike out on their own when it comes to raising money for a hearing loop. Most doctors of audiology who endorse looping generally put on educational seminars for their patients, acquainting them with the technology. The presentation is always in a looped environment, so listeners can perceive for themselves the incredible enhancement in audibility.

In fact, I have co-led a presentation for Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) members in a looped library auditorium. Rabbis, priests and ministers were invited. Once patients hear the difference for themselves, some just pay for the [church hearing loop] installation as part of their tithe.

### 3 success stories

#### *St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church (Round Lake, IL)*

St. Joseph's sold brass pew tags representing bearing the names of congregation members who donated to the loop effort. The church is in a relatively poor area of suburban Chicago and has many Hispanic members — some of whom don't speak English as their primary language. At least one of the daily Masses is conducted in Spanish.

Additionally, many laborers among the parishioners didn't have the personal resources to fund the loop. Instead, they actively participated by donating their expertise and brawn to remove the pews and pull up the flooring for the hearing loop installation.

#### *Partial private funding*

As the founder and owner of a private practice in audiology, established in 1980, I knew my patients needed hearing loop technology for enhanced audibility in their respective places of worship.

Time and again, I asked them to sit in the front pews, with the pulpit directly in front of them, so their vision could help them interpret what they heard. (Lip reading, facial expressions and gestures all help one "hear.") My patients refused, for a variety of reasons — bladder problems that required quick departure; the need for wheelchair access; and the desire to sit with friends, or in areas where they were the designated ushers (a common practice in Roman Catholic Churches). The unassailable fact was that they wanted to sit in certain places because they'd always done so — and they weren't about to move now.

So, I paid for the loop drivers in several churches as a gift to my long-term patients, and to leave a legacy that would outlive my practice ownership. The churches were responsible for loop installation, which constitutes the far greater expense. This posture of their need to "buy in" makes them take ownership for the decision to loop.

When teaching two loop marketing courses for audiologists from throughout the United States, I encouraged attendees to donate the loop drivers. I also paid for the loop driver at some local library auditoriums. The donations were targeted to my patient community, or sometimes to my personal community — senior citizen gathering rooms, City Hall and so on.

#### *Memorial fund raising*

When my licensed hearing aid dispenser's father passed away in 2012, the family requested that all donations be earmarked for a hearing loop. Gifts were encouraged with a simple message: "In lieu of flowers, and in fond memory of the deceased, please make your donations to the hearing loop — St. Martha's Church in Morton Grove."

My hearing aid dispenser's dad had hearing loss prior to passing. Her mom also has hearing loss, as do five of her siblings. And, her daughter has a Cochlear Implant.

By ensuring a hearing loop was installed in the church, any hearing-impaired family member who accompanies the widowed grandmother to a church service can hear the entire service and liturgy.

What a legacy for the family!

### A history of listening

To say I'm passionate about hearing loop technology is putting it mildly. Both Juliette Sterkens, Au.D. — HLAA National Hearing Loop Advocate — and I received the American Academy of Audiology's (AAA) Presidential Award for our efforts on looping.

As one of my patients (a minister's daughter) once said: "It's just not right that — at the twilight of one's life — they're deprived of spiritual sustenance." **CE**

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