

Cultural outreach: Presentation Sisters offer help for area Hispanics

BY [Scott Waltman](#)

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For most Christians, today is one of the most joyous days of the year, the day Christ rose to redeem mankind.

But, Sister Pegge Boehm said, many members of the local Hispanic population better relate to the sorrow of [Good Friday](#). They identify more with the suffering Jesus on the cross because of the struggles of their lives.

That's why a focal point of the Hispanic outreach ministry Aberdeen's Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary do, Boehm said, is to "accompany them in a spirit of hope."

The sisters help the Hispanic population experience Christ's resurrection. Meanwhile, the people help remind the sister of his suffering. And, Boehm said, suffering is important and often glossed over in today's instant-gratification society.

Through their missions work, the sisters have gotten to know many of the Hispanics in northeast South Dakota. The sisters teach Spanish and English classes in Aberdeen, have Spanish-speaking Masses at Blue Cloud Abbey every other week and visit local dairies where



many Hispanics work.

Friday, the sisters hosted two bilingual cross walks at the convent chapel. They also do advocacy work for Hispanics. That could be something as simple as translating during a dental visit or helping them find a job or work with social services.

The Spanish Masses on Sunday afternoons at the abbey draw anywhere between 20 and 80 people, Boehm said. After the service, dinner is served.

"They go for the spiritual nourishment, and there's physical nourishment that happens after with a potluck," Boehm said.

A few Hispanics from Aberdeen and the Andover area also attend the Masses. Boehm plays guitar. She expects others to help with music and do readings during the service.

Sister Myra Remily teaches both English and Spanish classes in Aberdeen. Hispanics want to improve their English, and more and more workers at Aberdeen businesses want to learn some basic Spanish, she said.

English classes are Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 10:15. Spanish classes are Monday and Thursday evenings at 7. All classes are in the diversity office on the second level of the Aberdeen Recreational and Cultural Center, which is old Central High School. The informal classes are free and open to all. But, Remily said, it's best to call ahead so she has enough materials: 605-229-8550.

Remily, who served as a missionary in Mexico and Bolivia, has been to visit the Hispanic communities in Veblen and Andover, but she does most of her work in Aberdeen. Often, she'll accompany a local Hispanic resident to a medical appointment to translate and make sure he or she gets the needed treatment or help.

Demand for such services may increase in the future. Should the beef plant being built on the south side of Aberdeen ever open, Remily said, she thinks there will be more Spanish-speaking people in the region.

Boehm agrees. But, she said, for now many members of the local Hispanic community are struggling financially and are contemplating returning to Mexico, Guatemala or the other countries from where they came.

"They're having hard times right now, too," Boehm said.

She knows because she visits with many Hispanics who live in the region. On Monday and Fridays, she visits a dairy near Andover and teaches English.

Remily said she's noticed only minimal prejudice from local residents toward Hispanics who, more and more, share the state's northeast corner. She likes her outreach work and the simplicity of the Hispanic culture.

"They enjoy life, and they enjoy each other," Remily said. "They're very social people."