Technology

TAKING YOUR PARISH LIVE

At least five parishes across the diocese now stream their services to parishioners. In each case, it has helped to build parishioner involvement in unexpected ways.

The rapid changes in video technology and social media have created a new opportunity for parishes to use video to expand the audience of a parish. In Southwest Florida, at least five parishes are now regularly streaming their worship services over the Internet. “Once you start using the equipment you just become really cognizant of the wider community that is worshipping with you and how you are impacting that community,” says Church of the Ascension Parish Life Coordinator Alyce Goldsmith, who is in charge of streaming all services at the Clearwater parish. Ascension was the first parish to regularly stream its services in the diocese, a project begun by the Rev. Mike Branscome before he returned to his native Britain.

At St. Andrew, Boca Grande, about 10 people regularly tune in to their AngelCam live feed, either homebound parishioners or those who are traveling. As opposed to others who stream just the service, the feed in Boca Grande is always on. In the summer, viewership is about 25. Weddings, concerts and funerals are much higher. At St. Boniface, they average about 30 views a week; holidays around 75.

Using the technology as a lure for youth to participate in church works. At Church of the Ascension, Goldsmith has trained high school students to assist when she is not able to run the cameras. “That’s great until they go off to college. When they come back, I can use them during the summer.”

The streaming at Ascension uses three cameras, which is a more complex process than the one camera stream that other parishes use. “I try to do a quality streaming. It’s like watching TV. I use the pan in and pan out. We have three cameras. I am begging for one more. Once you have a great idea, you want to make it a better idea,” said Goldsmith.

A Wider Parish Audience

The cameras have made for new opportunities. Ascension is beginning to use the video feed so that people who are present in the congregation can see what is happening in the service. One particularly useful time is during Baptisms, where the camera can show the baby’s expression to the

CHURCHES THAT STREAM

Cathedral Church of St. Peter  spcathededral.com

Church of the Ascension, Clearwater  churchofascension.org

St. Andrew, Boca Grande  standrewsbocagrande.org

St. Boniface, Siesta Key  bonifacechurch.org

St. Michael & All Angels, Sanibel  saintmichaels-sanibel.org
rest of the parish, who then can see it on monitors in the nave.

At the Cathedral, large services such as ordinations and Christmas services have had over 500 views. Church of the Ascension has not yet started streaming on Facebook Live or Youtube Live. Nevertheless, the streams attract about 35, with significantly more at Christmas and Easter.

Streaming a service is not about doing things just to be up with technology. It has particular benefits with our demographics and worship styles. As parishioners age, the streamed service can reach them when they cannot get to church. With a simple $79 tablet computer, an elderly person can receive both the video and audio of Sunday services. The audio is a key part of the benefit; each parish that streams has a strong choir program, and delivering those voices via high-quality audio gives our music programs much-deserved attention.

Special events are also good ways to build audiences for the parish with streamed services. Funerals, when streamed, not only provide a permanent record of the service for family, but they enable family who cannot attend to be a part of the service.

The addition of Facebook Live and Youtube live to the streaming mix makes the services suddenly available on web television services such as Roku, Google Chromecast or Amazon Fire. This adds audiences in new ways. In the annual migration of Southwest Florida parishioners heading north for the summer, parishioner Jenny Grimmke listened as she drove through the mountains of Pennsylvania. She later said about the service, “Thank you St. Peter’s! Family together electronically.”

Goldsmith has learned much about the audience from doing the production each week. “There are a number of regular viewers who watch intently and text me when I screw up,” said Goldsmith. “It’s actually a great problem to have. Then I know they are listening.”

Meeting People Where They Are

“At first, we averaged 37 views of our usual Sunday 10:15 service” says the Cathedral’s John DiPietro. “It took a long while to teach our parishioners how to view it directly from our website, with a lot of help from some very patient volunteers. The numbers remained flat for some time and then increased to 50-60 views on average. As we started using Facebook Live, we saw the average numbers increase instantly; threefold, fivefold and so on. Our February 2018 Choral Evensong has been viewed 593 times with 120 people physically attending (on average). By combining with social media we reached 700.”
10 ESSENTIALS TO STREAMING

Define your audience. Decide who you want to reach, but don't obsess over it. While a streaming program can reach shut-ins, new parishioners and Episcopal music lovers, who actually sees it is sometimes serendipitous.

Start small. It is not necessary to record and stream all the services. Try recording a rector’s Bible study or coffee hour talk.

Jump In! Technology is an iterative process. That means that while you can make a plan to do it, you won’t know how to do it until you start. There will be problems and issues.

Scrounge Equipment. If you want to start a video program, you can do it with a cheap camera and video files that you upload to YouTube. Experiment with what you have, and think about camera angles, audio and such as you practice.

Enlist your youth. A program of streaming is really about using new technology to bring the Gospel to new audiences. Advertise in your bulletin that you are going to start a program, and recruit for volunteers.

Music is the secret sauce. The Anglican music tradition is our Episcopal ace-in-the-hole. While larger non-denominational churches sometimes have large praise rock bands, our hymns are easily sing-able, well known and dependably executed, even in the smallest churches. In addition, most parish music programs have strong choirs and repertory that are popular around the world.

Capture the motion of devotion. The worship in an Episcopal Church is physical, and involves elements that are visually interesting, from the procession to the individual motions of the parishioner and priest during the service. This means that there is something to actually see, unlike most non-denominational streamed services which include a praise-band song set and a long sermon from the preacher. Position the camera so you can catch this.

Plan ahead. Do you have Ethernet in your church? While every parish has wifi and internet, to stream you need a hard-wired connection to the internet that will not be interrupted by bandwidth issues.

Consult with others. Go visit or call on churches that are streaming, including Church of the Ascension, Cathedral Church of St. Peter, St. Boniface, St. Michael and All Angels and St. Andrew, Boca Grande. See what they do and adapt it to your space.

Think of it as part of a larger whole. What you do with video should be part of a larger process of your parish’s social media profile. Use this opportunity to consider new ways to share your parish with the world.

NEED HELP?

The Diocese is available to see if a streaming program is possible at your parish, and help you with details; we also offer regular training in social media at Annual Convention and in our Word Out conference in January. Contact Director of Communication Garland Pollard at 941-556-0315 or gpollard@episcopalswfl.org.