Diocesan Stewardship Day
Technology and Stewardship
Church of the Assumption
April 24, 2010

Q & A's

How did Assumption set up their current technology?

We started by adding a link from our website in 2004. At first we had a single webcam with streaming video of the church to make viewing of weekend Masses, weddings, funerals and other sacramental celebrations, etc. available to anyone with Internet access.

Positive feedback was encouraging, which led to:

Early 2006: four more cameras in church for multiple views
June 2008: flat screen monitors at church entrances and around the campus for additional views of streaming video and for "E-nouncements" of upcoming events to parishioners before and after the liturgy on weekends, and for the School of Religion parents during the week.
Early 2009: upgrade of video camera switching system and addition of six flat screen monitors in our "video tech room" to make the webcast and flat screen displays of liturgies more professional. This also made it easier for the 35+ volunteer video techs (22 of whom are teens) to provide high quality productions.

What does it cost to set up and run the technology?

The setup of the technology was in itself an exercise in Stewardship, as is its maintenance. Almost a dozen volunteers including two software developers, helped staff set up the initial website and webcam with streaming video capabilities. Many (35+) volunteer video techs take turns running the cameras for the streaming video at each of the 5 weekend liturgies as well as other sacramental celebrations. We regularly get help from several parishioners knowledgeable in software and hardware to help us maintain our equipment. Since sound is such an important part of the webcast, we recommend consulting an expert in order to achieve acceptable sound quality.

Parishioners and others also help us get equipment for reduced prices or even at cost. We have been at this for 8 years now, webcasting on line for over six years. The cost of the hardware and equipment has been coming down in recent years. Parishes beginning now will have lower start up costs. A complete list of costs and exact descriptions of the equipment is available for anyone interested; the total was just over $21,500. The biggest single costs for our equipment were for the five cameras and switcher and the four large flat screen monitors (several thousand dollars for each of these projects).

Since parish funds are often limited, after setting up a parish website, we suggest starting with a link to one camera first, then expanding to other projects as funds become available. If at all possible, invest in a camera with remote zoom and pan capability. Otherwise, the resulting video is almost unwatchable. In addition to server charges for the website, streaming video charges (at the rate for which we currently have demand - 40 gigabytes/mo.) are $100 per month. Lower rates for lower volume are available. Charges for domain and web hosting are about $75/month. Upon the advice of our long range planning committee, we also added a 10 hour per week IT position to our parish staff to help maintain and improve our website as well as provide other Information Technology services. A recent examples of this is the development of a "Donation" link on our website for on-line giving and the future "podcasting" of weekly homilies.

How is Stewardship advanced at Assumption by the use of technology?

The provision of overflow screens and web access to our liturgies is a ministry in itself. As mentioned above, this is made possible by the significant donation of time and talent of many of our parishioners. The large number of parishioners who are trained to operate our webcast system offers many opportunities to put their gifts at the service of the community. It is not unusual to have families and intergenerational groupings of people working together on the webcast. Often adults are teaching teens about the flow of the liturgy as teens share their familiarity and ease with camera operation. It is a wonderful learning experience for both as the gifts of more people are placed at the service of the community through good stewardship.

People who cannot attend a Mass for whatever reason find the streaming video webcast of our celebrations extremely helpful. The webcast keeps people connected to the community and less isolated in times of illness and separation because of distance – even to the point where viewers "tune in" at all hours of the day just to watch the barely visible sanctuary candle burning in the darkness. We regularly hear stories from parishioners who travel for business that they are watching our weekend masses in many different parts of the world. Monthly reports, which we receive from our Streaming provider verify not only this, but also the fact that non-parishioners from literally all over the world seek out our webcasts. And best of all, it helps build community in our parish.

Our flat screen ads ("E-noucements", which we also stream periodically) are used to highlight time and talent as well as treasure donation opportunities for our parishioners. These promotions are proving highly effective in raising awareness of parish life and good stewardship. One parishioner, who has skill in using PowerPoint presentations, is the designated recipient of these announcements and designs the displays often using animation and pictures of the past week's events. These tell of things coming and give reports on ministries, programs and stewardship opportunities.

"If St. Paul were alive today, he would buy a little television time"
Pope John Paul I in 1978

"The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more St. Paul' exclamation:
"Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel (1Cor 9:16)"
Pope Benedict XVI – 44th World Communications Day