

Is the gift of faith one to be hidden or shared? In fact, the great Commission is one which includes sharing this gift which we receive at Baptism. The importance of that fact cannot be understated with regard to our mission as an institutional Church. In a world in which people claim personal spirituality but struggle with a reason to be engaged with an “institutional” church or to worship as part of a faith group, we must be more present than ever before.

The sharing of our faith is an invitation to a relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior. It is also an invitation to a relationship with the body of Christ as present in his Church. We cannot talk evangelization without acknowledging those two points. Catholicism invites us to a one-to-one relationship with Christ sacramentally, and it puts that faith into action in communion with other believers, present, past and to come – the communion of saints.

Sharing the gift of faith implies that there is communication in order to experience communion. There is an invitation to experience something; there is witness to the joy which faith imbues in its believer, there is testimony to those who share God’s love in corporal and spiritual works of mercy in Jesus’ name; and there is proclamation of the continual conversion each believer experiences when they enter into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ with and through his Church.

That answers the question “Why are we communicating?” but does not even begin to address “Where are we communicating?” “To whom?” or even “How are we communicating?”

In some ways, we lost sight of all this when the Church was at its peak in membership and centrality in people’s lives, in this country until the early 1960s. The questions of where and how could be answered quite simply: a personal invitation within the parish. We heard what we needed to hear at Mass, at parish schools, at parish organizations, at parish socials, and basically at a parish “anything.”

Parishioners knew how to ask newcomers, whether those who had moved into a neighborhood or new immigrants to this country. They invited them to church, to socials, and to the schools. Today’s world is drastically different and without a reliance on the parish as a home away from home, members may struggle with an invitation, especially if they are not well versed in why we need to be members of a community of faith. This new paradigm speaks to why we need new efforts in parishes to engage and equip parishioners, even the most active ones, to understand their faith and learn how to “evangelize” – on how to invite others to share in that faith.

But how does the institutional church communicate effectively and to whom? And where? This, too, introduces the fact that there has been a paradigm shift. Reliance on announcements from the pulpit, in the bulletin or in school letters can no longer reach the large majority of people who are tangentially, if at all, engaged with a parish as Catholics. A diocese can use its newspaper and general media outlets. Social media, including parish websites, FaceBook pages, twitter accounts and the like, along with streaming video and other internet resources, have opened opportunities which can be daunting to the average parish.

Communications is a ministry today for parishes to be successful, one that is not optional. Communications at the diocesan level needs to transform in order to be able to support parishes in that effort.

There is an URGENT need to do something.

In summary, we are all aware of the statistics. We have an overall shrinking number of active parishioners. Annual Kenedy Directory reports indicate shrinking sacramental activity, ESPECIALLY baptisms, which is an indicator of long range membership. It is also an indicator of a growing number of UNCHURCHED members from traditionally Catholic households, young families who are choosing not to baptize their children. If 25% of parishioners attend Church on a given Sunday, some may be visiting or away and not getting bulletins or hearing announcements. In-Pew communications cannot reach majority of our “audiences”

Strategy to Evangelize:

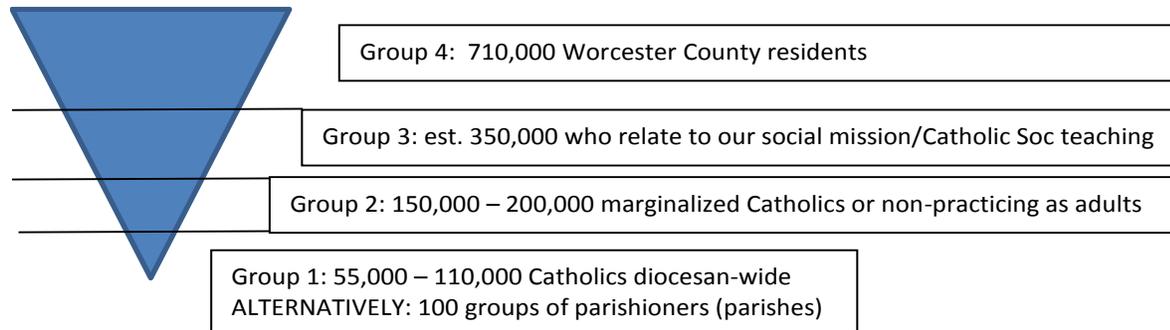
We need to reach beyond the pew (Spread the Good News) to those we need to either invite back (new evangelization) or introduce to Jesus Christ (the great commission), by empowering active parishioners to be more effective witnesses to the faith. We can use public and/or social media to share “good news” stories, whether they are local, national and international, and we must make them available to ALL Catholics. The timing could not be better. We have an opportunity to “Ride the wave” of Pope Francis’ popularity by trying to reach people who had previously written us off.

What are our Communications objectives?

There are fundamentally five objectives to Catholic communications:

1. Stay in touch with active Catholics to engage them in the life of the parish community and the larger Church community
2. Educate, inform, etc.
3. Reach out to inactive Catholics to invite them to more active participation – and at least keep the spark of faith alive in their lives
4. Reach out to people who relate to the causes of the church but have not been “churched” and are heritage Catholics
5. Keep the people of Central Mass aware of the charitable and educational services we provide to the community, the great impact this has as a result, and be a voice of spiritual guidance in times of crisis, as well as a moral voice on key issues before the electorate

Regardless of which objective is being addressed. We need to keep in mind some basic rules that apply to all. Specifically, even when we have one message to convey, the tone and language of a message may vary depending on the audience. (e.g. church language is ineffective when speaking to the unchurched.)



The primary goal of Parish Communications is to keep active parishioners informed (group 1). Yet in trying to accomplish this, Parishes are challenged by the following resources:

- Bulletin (limited information, non-interactive, in-pew and some online reach)
- Newsletters and printed letters (expensive to produce and mail at 50 cents each)
- Websites (need to have them but can't find the time or people to do them or keep them current)
- Email (limited use in most parishes and don't know how to keep lists current)
- Text messages, tweets, Facebook, Instagram, listservs, etc. (Forget it –no time or expertise.)

A desire we all share is to Communicate with occasional parishioners (group 2 and 3) . They may be mobile, elderly/homebound, winter flight families, in the military, away at college, or working jobs which force them to find Masses at other churches.

Beyond those we know, how do we reach out to non-active but still enrolled parishioners? Can we reach out to younger generations of practicing Catholics who are not engaged? And, although the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy ended officially in 2016, our Holy Father reminded us that witnessing to God's mercy is central to our mission. Can we be the face of Mercy to everyone (groups 3 & 4)

To do any or all of the above is to evangelize.

The challenges we face in evangelization are real. How can we communicate to someone who is not there? (groups 2 – 4) How can we communicate in a manner that fosters dialogue? (groups 2 & 3) How can we be "available" when THEY want to communicate (i.e., 24 x 7)? (all groups)

Introducing Communications Ministry as a Collaborative effort

Communications can no longer be a divided effort whereby the Bishop and his office's ministries speak broadly through some media, and try to speak through parish media when the pastor allows it. Why? In essence, any effective communications on the diocesan level, when it stays "disconnected" from a parish identity, stays in isolation of the parish – and is not moving people into a communal relationship. On the flipside, parish-centric communications, when they lack a sense of the breadth of a diocese or larger church reality, are denying local parishioners of their full Catholic identity. Parishes with limited or no resources are denying members of any participation outside of Sunday or daily Mass, yet there are so

many ways that adults can become more informed, more engaged and more committed through effective communications. Parish is where people most effectively experience their faith. Communications ministry as a collaboration of the parish with the diocese offers a parish “face” in conjunction with the practicality of shared resources from the diocese.

Growing in the faith – a benefit of adult communications

Bishop McManus and others have been often quoted to say “You cannot love what you do not know.” An ongoing catechetical discussion taking place locally and nationally is the challenge to form adults in their faith, so that they can live and share the Joy of the Gospel with an understanding beyond that of a teenager, when most adults stopped availing themselves of catechetical resources. Effective Communications as a collaborative effort of diocese and parish can offer resources to adults to mature in the faith far beyond anything an individual parish can offer on a regular basis – or at least at the moment a particular member is interested in learning more and developing their spiritual life. This can range from formal programs, such as Dayton Univ., to discussion forums on specific topics as presented in the Conversation with Bishop McManus TV series, to effectively promoting parish-based scripture studies offered for deaneries or clusters.

What are the objectives of a Communications Ministry?

1. DIRECTLY Support parishes in their evangelization efforts through effective communications
2. Provide a public voice to the Bishop, his office and his representatives on issues – and the “face of Catholic Church” in Central Mass in various Catholic media
3. Be accessible to the general public to help understand “all things Catholic” though secular media and (now) social media - a filter to give context to national and international Catholic issues

In summary:

1. Do it collaboratively and cooperatively
2. Provide a *Service* to each parish by the diocese
 - a. Technical: standardized platform for website, email and video
 - b. Content providers: local stories and other content that can automatically update without redundant efforts across all parishes.
3. Coordinate among ministries and organizations
4. Collaborate with parishes in their need to share information intra-parish and inter-parish

We are missionaries – and always have been. How can we get a message beyond the pulpit or the rectory/parish office? Following in the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*, we must empower our active parishioners to be equipped to carry the message into the world. In order to do that, we must assure that we share information with parishioners – as a sign of trust as well as a means of enabling them. We must also engage them to help our clergy to preach – and witness – in the new, social media world.

If our goal is to communicate that the Church IS relevant in the lives of all the various identified groups (graphic above), how do we approach that? Allow me to suggest three, intertwined tactics.

1. Don't expect everyone to "enter" through the same door. We offer a number of ways that people can at least initially interact with our parishes or Catholic agencies: spiritual, liturgical, social justice, educational, charitable, etc. – all doors of relevancy for people based on their personal interests, their affinities, and their identity. For example, many young people identified with Pope Francis' teaching about the environment in *Laudato Si!* The church was relevant to them, at least from this stance. Building on that through local blogs by Youth Ministry, managed on the diocesan level but accessible at the local parish level, begins to "connect the dots" between a Roman document for the universal church and a local parish grappling with how to see *Laudato Si* as part of its local mission – to the individual person who is growing in the faith.

Pope Francis is showing us that we come to know Jesus Christ through many different avenues (serving the poor, in worship and the sacraments, in protecting the environment) – all of these can be "touchpoints" in their lives where parish and church have a role to play.

2. Engage them WHERE THEY ARE, on their turf, by their interests, demonstrating genuine concern for them. This is similar to #1 above, but is more than just topical. How often have we hosted talks and events at the parish and wondered why more people did not come? "They said they were interested in this topic so why aren't they here?" We've all heard it and said it. But we failed to take into account that so many people are living fragmented lives; schedules are often different from day to day; commutes are far longer and leave people with little to no energy on week-nights. As a result, weekends are packed not just with sports but all the chores that come with today's lifestyle. Increasingly, our events are supported by retirees and, perhaps, the under- or unemployed.

As an alternative, consider the power of also offering things via social communications. Enter the world of social communication where people can watch videos, listen to podcasts, read and interact on blogs, use chat sites to "dialogue" on various topics. All of these accomplish a variety of our stated objectives from above: get people engaged; keep them engaged; and develop at least some relational tie to the parish which is the "face" of that social communication, even if it was the portal through which they landed while surfing a diocesan resource (video or pastoral letter), or a national resource (like Dayton) or a media resource (like Catholic Free Press or Crux).

Invite people to "sign up" for different kinds of information. All commercial and consumer industries use niche marketing. Why? People are bombarded with so much information. They want to be able to know about things of interest to them and not drown in too much information. Similarly, we could organize not just websites but email lists, blogs etc. to be oriented by ministry.

3. Engage them DIRECTLY and FREQUENTLY to stay top of mind

Email/LISTSERVS, Facebook (via likes) and Twitter can put things in front of them multiple times per week – and they can RESPOND so that there is an opportunity for dialogue. (ref. High use of email and social media in survey -- see Appendix Summary)

When there is something exciting or something worth sharing, parishioners can share and spread the word via their shared emails, Facebook posts, etc. Because the Diocese could provide a Content service

with local stories, combined with access to CNS national and international news, there is always something that can be generated for attention.

Everything points back to PARISH identity to support ideal of active parish participation – under an umbrella of DIOCESE for broader resources. In other words, let faith-based messaging go viral.

How can Communications service evangelization mission?

EMPOWER: Equip active Catholics with the ability to be engaged in evangelization by addressing their attitude and comfort level with Church teaching and issues

WELCOME BACK inactive Catholics to engage the local parish in dialogue – through members, pastoral leadership or individual ministries, initiated via social media tools which migrate to in-person contact.

INVITE the Unchurched to a local faith community that embraces and experiences the Joy of the Gospel – that this faith is one of joy, real-love and hope for the future.

All of these speak to today's hotbutton in communications: engagement. In our survey of parishioners it was noted that people overall were hungry to know more: they use emails and social media to stay in touch with other groups to which they belong, still value a printed publication that they can read and share at their convenience, and are virtually all users of the internet. They will surely find sources less reflective of our local Catholic voice, making it imperative that we be present to engage them and empower them to help us in our mission to Spread the Good News.

One Communications Ministry

We propose eliminating artificial, separate operations for Communications, TV Ministry and The Catholic Free Press. We would no longer be about trying to justify separate operations, but provide various platforms which would be local-focused and available on every parish website, and integrated to be used by parish and diocesan social communications. Decisions on what issues to promote and how to distribute are coordinated and consistent. There can still be "brand" identity to not lose recognition, but all content would be generated from a single-focused operation.

The benefit for both the diocese and the parish is better communication between a parish and its various members, more effective coordination of diocesan resources and more timely sharing of content.

We need a common web-platform for ALL parishes and ministries (eCatholic) as well as common access to FlockNotes for email. Standardization within the ministry would allow for ease of support while still maintaining local, parish control.

A central office, utilizing a strong web platform (eCatholic) which features easy to use support, can be supplemented by the diocesan ministry teaching parishes how to use Social Media and empower parishioners to assist. Over time, best practices can be shared among parishes since there are

standardized products. When clergy or lay staff move from parish to parish, the same tools exist; only the unique identity of the parish changes from one to another.

All Diocesan staff becomes Content Providers (all agencies and departments) along with the Communications Ministry which also would provide technical delivery service to complement parish communications. The Diocese would provide common platforms for TV, web and Print media

Example 1:

Parish A is very small and has little paid staff. Their website (if there is one) has Mass times and there is little opportunity to post other information. Since there are rarely any changes made, few people have any reason to go to the website. There may or may not be email. There is NO FaceBook page or other social media being used.

Post: Parish A would get a website picking from among various standard templates to add their own photos, graphics. etc. As part of that website there would be a series of “drag and drop” services that could be present on their site – and would AUTOMATICALLY update daily or as appropriate: Liturgical: Readings of the day, Daily Mass from the Diocese as a streaming video for shut-ins; any special letters from Bishop McManus; Advent and Lenten daily reflections from Bishop Barron’s Word on Fir; Informational: Local stories from the CFP; national and international news from CNS and/or Vatican News service; diocesan calendar of events for all parishes to submit events; Educational: streaming videos for adult formation and resources from Religious Education; Stewardship: online giving; Partners in Charity and other initiatives; opportunities for online registration for paid events (dinners, retreats, trips)

Example 2:

PARISH B is mid-size and has a website. But like Parish A it struggles with the number of things the paid staff can do.

It would have all of the above, but if any staff time is available, they can add a number of local resources to the website: i.e., photos from recent events, a blog based on the Sunday homilies;

FaceBook pages could be set up by ministry with a look and feel consistent with the parish website to maintain identity. Events could be promoted with online registration.

Parishioners can submit email addresses through a link on the website and be notified of any important news from the parish.