AND NOW, A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR

The above line was boilerplate in broadcasting for decades when a TV or radio program needed to break for commercials. Sometimes it also acknowledged the people who produced the program and this is the sense in which I am using it here. In mid-March none of us had any idea we would shelter-in-place and celebrate liturgy over the internet. It was remarkable how quickly we went from an idea to production—literally days!

I’d like you to meet the team who is bringing you Saint Mary Magdalen Church’s liturgies, podcasts and reflections. And, in so doing apprise you of what a “shoe-string” operation it is. That said, I can’t begin to express my gratitude for the talent, creativity and hard work a few people have generated to see you stay connected to the parish and can participate as far as possible in our worship.

First of all, we have very little special equipment. We don’t even have a video camera. Instead we are using my iPad. That’s not a bad thing, the iPad has an excellent camera in it and allowed us to go into production immediately. The School of the Madeline loaned us a dolly which enables us to move the camera and keeps the image steady. Early on we used the microphone on the iPad and the sound was atrocious. John Sargen, who has been working to improve the sound in the church, in collaboration with Sam Leung recommended a device that enables us to use the church’s mics and the sound has improved exponentially. As time passes I’m sure we’ll purchase more dedicated equipment so even after the quarantine is ended we’ll be able to stream events in the parish to those who can’t attend.

If you’ve ever watched the filming of a movie or television show you know that behind the camera are upwards of 40 people on the production staff. Beyond the stage there is post-production editing, mixing and cuts between multiple cameras. We have a staff of five and some of them also assist with the liturgy itself.

Let me introduce you to our live-stream production team:

- John Ernst is our camera man, computer techy and engineer. He is currently attending Albany High, John shows technical knowhow with outstanding creativity.
- Mary Ernst, John’s mother, is his always-present technical assistant; she also pitches in as a lector. Mary described recording the sound for the Genesis reading at our Easter Vigil which is available to view on our web page. In order to get an echoless recording of the story of creation John insisted she climb under his desk with pillows surrounding her.
- Cat Nielsen is on the parish staff as IT Director and leader of the RCIA. Part of the reason we didn’t live-stream the Easter Vigil was Cat would have had too many jobs for that one liturgy. Cat has worked with John Sargent to improve the quality of both sound and pictures. She also insures the live stream can be reached through the portals of our web page and Facebook.
- John Sargent is the man in purple. [No Photo] I’ve never seen him without some article of clothing in that color. More that his physiognomy is his experience and understanding of electronic sound. Most of us don’t realize sound engineering is still more an art than a science. All the right components can be in place and the sound may still be off. He has taught me to wear my microphone “just so” in order for people to hear me best.
• Samuel Leung, on the left, discovered we were going live with our liturgies while surfing our web page and saw the test video streaming. He quickly ran over to the church and volunteered. Mostly, you see him at the piano leading the music. He and Andy, our music director, insure we have appropriate hymns and mass settings. Fortunately for us Sam also has a strong computer background and is valuable in working out the kinks of production.

One positive outcome of the coronavirus has been our plunge into social media. I expect we’ll use our skills long after the crisis has ended. In the meantime, our virtual community is enhanced immeasurably by the hard and talented work of these people. Please let them know your appreciation.

Do you have an interest and some expertise in audiovisual, live-streaming, social media, IT or post-production? Let us know. I’m sure the team would like to hear from you and would value your insights.

-Fr. Nick