



The Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA AND EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia

Communications Department Report to the 57th Diocesan Assembly

Overview

What can be said of the year of 2020 that hasn't already been said? Unprecedented, uncertain, constantly changing, liquid - the list could continue indefinitely.

The roll-out of the new website design which His Eminence, Archbishop Mark, was intimately involved with went mostly as planned. Hopefully everyone finds it easier to navigate and more user-friendly. There are continual maintenance issues to contend with to insure it all works properly.

The year began in anticipation of sharing the Diocese's passage through Pascha - anticipation for record setting submissions of photos of the lenten journey up to the Feast of Feasts. Unfortunately, this all changed rapidly.

The early portion of the year was dedicated to COVID. The quickly emerging situation required hours and hours - days, really - of work and thought. Directives and instructions were posted constantly for a period of time as things were changing rapidly. Archbishop Mark is to be commended for his continual guidance, done with love and much patience. Truly, information changed on a daily basis at times and it was difficult to keep up with, but Vladyka had a firm handle on everything. Thanks to the Diocese for your patience during this time - it was a fluid situation and the ball was firmly in the communications department's court, and we did the best we could.

The Youth Tab, under the direction of Mark Linnehan and Matushka Emilia Sheppard has been revamped. This took a back seat while the website was being revamped, and once again when COVID broke out and affected us all. However, it is now complete per the direction of the aforementioned folks.

The second half of March saw the department learning on the fly how to code the website to provide online services for the faithful. Parishes are to be commended for quickly ramping up this technological feature and providing it to everyone. It was no easy task for anyone, and all parishes are thanked for your patience while the "one-stop shop" for streaming was developed. Parishes used Facebook, Twitter and Youtube for streaming (primarily). Feedback showed that bandwidth played a huge role in some of these platforms - at least one parish switched to Youtube as this service could handle streaming a bit better - food for thought. This is also a good time to ask about your parish's online capabilities - do you have a website? A Facebook page? Twitter account? Youtube Channel? These are all important tools in Evangelizing and the time to think about them is not when an emergency happens (as earlier this year). Investigate and develop your online presence now. This is where people look FIRST. It is a statistical fact. (*following information courtesy of crcna.org*)

"I just spent last week at the Echo Conference in Dallas, TX. If you haven't heard of it before, it's a great place to meet folks working in the creative aspects of church as well as learn some great, practical things to help do ministry better.

Justin Wise presented some new research that Monk Development, a website design agency, did on the importance of church websites. I want to share some of those stats and give a few thoughts about them, too.

The percentage of church attenders who said a church's website was important in picking a church to visit:

2009: 34%

2012: 46%

In 2012, 33% say the internet was the first place where they learned about their church.

Thoughts: The web is your church's new front door. It's something Justin and myself have both said before. Your church website is your first impression. It needs to represent who you are as a church. Think of it like the upkeep of your building. You wouldn't let your facilities fall apart, so why would you let your website look bad?

How did people find out about their church's website?

Church bulletin:

2009: 42%

2012: 26%

Search engine

2009: 12%

2012: 23%

Thoughts: People are going online to look for information about their church instead of waiting for their church to tell them where to go. Justin believes if a church can't be Googled, it doesn't exist.

64% of church goers say the church website is important in facilitating participation in church.

What features do people say they use most (in order):

Listen and download sermons.

Serving opportunities at the church.

Finding service information.

Forward content to others.

Read visitor's information.

Thoughts: Church goers are now turning to a church's website to become better connected with the church. So we have an obligation to help them. Justin says websites are becoming more about awareness (letting people know you exist), connection to community (things to do in the church community like small groups) and engagement (increasing the interaction of people with the church).

When you look at these stats, does anything jump out to you?"

(taken from <https://network.crcna.org/church-web/church-website-statistics>)

Perhaps your parish has many older people who "don't use the internet." This is reasonable opinion. But just how are you planning to grow? How are you planning to reach people? There is a sizable portion of the population out there that is searching. They most likely are not in your age bracket. They absolutely DO use the internet - FIRST, before anything else. THESE are the souls you are doing this for. How reactive is your parish to inquiries from these people? Do you return emails? Call them and speak to them one on one? You must treat every case with respect and attention. Does your parish have business cards with contact info? Pamphlets to take away explaining what Orthodoxy is all about? Clear and precise signage? These are all very effective tools (and simple!) to help get souls into your doors.



The Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA AND EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia

www.doepa.org

The Diocesan website saw at least 11,000 visitors during every month of 2020. The LOWEST number of monthly visitors was in September, with 11,199 visitors. March saw a high of 15,386, for obvious reasons. We can confidently say we are looking at traffic of close to 12,000 per month. This has more than doubled in 5 years, and the department will not be satisfied until we hit the 20,000 visitors per month mark.

These numbers also have to be viewed through a different lens. Up to the preparation of this report, we only had 112 news submissions from parishes. that is close to a 50% reduction from previous years. And still our web traffic remains around 12,000 unique visitors a month.

Submissions from parishes were posted as they are received - that is, if many news items are submitted, the first one received will appear first. ALL news items are staggered to appear at different days during the week. This keeps the website fresh. There have been many questions about this during the year. Submissions (unless needing approval from His Eminence) are ALL posted. They may be delayed if I am away from my office, but they will all eventually appear - but again, they will be staggered in order of receipt. ALL news items stay featured for a period of three weeks. There is an algorithm that will bump items out of the rotation if there are too many (common around major feasts).

This process was disregarded for some major events - the passing of Metropolitan Theodosius and Archbishop David, as well as the COVID situation. In those cases, all other news stories were suspended for a short (typically 3 day) period, to return for their allotted time.

Thanks to all parishes for abiding by the policy regarding secular events (food sales etc) - the Department once again advises all parishes to use their websites and social media outlets to promote these items.

Parishes submitting news items this year:

Berwick
Bethlehem
Catasauqua
Coaldale
Edwardsville
Frackville
Glen Mills
Harrisburg
Jermyn
Mechanicsburg
Mount Carmel
Nanticoke
Olyphant (Saint Nicholas)
Philadelphia (Assumption & Stephens)
Stroudsburg
Wilkes-Barre (Holy Resurrection Cathedral and Holy Trinity)
Williamsport

This year 4 parishes were removed from the above list and only 1 added. Additionally, many of the above parishes submitted one story and were never heard from again. It is important to realize that publicizing your parish is a major part of "sustaining the mission." It is a way to let the public know what you are up to and show that you are active and do good works. It is imperative that your parish makes publicity and specifically the internet a key part of your parish life. We need to broaden our vision regarding this topic - do people want to be part of a community

325 N Walnut Street * Bath, Pennsylvania 18014
Telephone: 484-281-3406 * <http://www.doepa.org> * Email: diocesoeopa@gmail.com
Chancellor: Very Rev. Raymond Martin Browne * Mobile: 570.906.1388
Diocesan Treasurer: Mark Linnehan * treasurer@doepa.org

that is stuck in first gear? Or are people looking for a community that is busy, active, acting as an agent of good deeds? Most are looking to be part of a community that is the latter, where do they find that?

Facebook/Social Media

The Diocesan social media is handled by others. This is a key component to spreading our message. Your parish should also have a social media outlet, and it should be updated regularly - weekly at least. Share your good news with everyone - it generates interest. It is also the spot to promote your events - whether religious or secular in nature. These are easy tools to use requiring a dedicated soul and time (and some photos!)

Conclusion

With understanding that this was a trying year for all, the Communications department did it's best to keep the website up to date with the latest news and directives. Appreciation to the Diocese in general for patience and understanding, and especially for those parishes who ramped up their online streaming presence. Thanks especially to His Eminence, Archbishop MARK for staying on top of the ever-changing situation at the beginning of the year, and his patience and understanding as the website was maintained.

Hours worked this year took a precipitous drop - there was simply no work for a good portion of the year as things went into lockdown. The department is hoping to be back in business and up to the expected speed as things settle down. As we approach "getting back to normal," consider making a larger push with your parish's publicity.

The Communications Department continues to spread the message of the Diocese. The results can be seen in record numbers of visitors to the website We have come a long way in five years and there is still much to be done. It is good to see the amount of parishes participating; all need to be more regular with this. The website is updated frequently with the goings-on of the Diocese, but it needs more timely and helpful information. The core belief of the Communications Department is to spread the word, create excitement and interest, and make people sit up, take notice, and want to get involved in the Orthodox Faith along with the good works that are happening. Be a part of it! Share your good news! Do you have a parish website? Parish Facebook? Or a Parish Communications Coordinator? These are all important parts of a healthy parish. Please feel free to contact me by email or phone with any questions.

Yours in Christ

Aric Gingo
Assistant to the Archbishop
Communications