

e- EASTER - Churches reach out via the web

Parishes stream their Masses to reach the housebound and travelers - and perhaps the curious

RICHARD C. DUJARDIN

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Too tired to get out of your pajamas to get yourself to church for Easter services?

Some ministers and priests may cringe at the thought, but three Catholic parishes in Rhode Island are giving parishioners the opportunity to go to Easter Mass, or any other service, without actually having to enter the church.

St. Thomas More Parish in Narragansett, Holy Ghost Church in Tiverton and the Ukrainian-rite St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Woonsocket are providing that option by streaming their services over the Internet.

Of course, one question that Catholics may want answered is "does it count?" That is, does it fulfill a Catholic's obligation to attend Mass? Providence's Roman Catholic Bishop Thomas J. Tobin says no. But you may want to consider that when the Vatican ruled several years ago on whether Catholics would be able to receive an apostolic blessing from the Pope by watching him perform the blessing on television, the answer was yes - provided that one was viewing a live broadcast, not something that had been taped earlier.

Similarly, church authorities have ruled that Catholics who go to church but have to watch the service on a Jumbotron or on closed circuit television because of overflow crowds are still fulfilling their obligation.

But except for those kinds of circumstances, Bishop Tobin says he concurs with the view that watching a Mass on television or a computer does not fulfill a Sunday obligation. That's not to say, he says, it can't offer a great deal of consolation for the sick or homebound who, under church rules, would already be excused from a Sunday obligation.

Nonetheless, the Rev. Marcel Taillon, who has been putting his parish's weekend Masses online for the last two years (including Masses at the main church, St. Thomas More, and the parish's St. Veronica Chapel on Boston Neck Road) and the Rev. Jay Finelli, who has been putting liturgies online at Holy Ghost Church for the past seven years, say that they believe their online services are a tool for evangelization, helping to reach people who might otherwise never go to church.

St. Michael Ukrainian-Catholic church, which is not to be confused with the similarly named St. Michael Ukrainian-Orthodox Church just around the corner on Harris Avenue, is the latest of the Rhode Island churches to put their services online, having begun with Christmas Mass last year.

As with the other two parishes, St. Michael put all of its recent Holy Week services online, including a special Saturday afternoon ceremony that showed the pastor, the Rev. Monsignor Roman Golemba, blessing eggs and food baskets that families had made at home.

The number of people who have logged into the Ukrainian parish's website (

www.stmichaelsri.org) may be tiny compared with the 54,000 views that Father Finelli has amassed over the last seven years by setting up webcams at Holy Ghost.

But Monsignor Golemba says he considers the seven to nine viewers that log into the parish's Sunday liturgy to be an asset, considering there are 60 families on the rolls and that the two weekend liturgies each have an average attendance of 30 people. The Internet, he says, boosts the audience by 30 percent.

"It's not like we are taking away from our own attendance," says the pastor. "We're reaching people who can't otherwise attend - the shut-ins and people in nursing homes and people far away," including a man in Colorado who says there are no other Ukrainian churches close to where he lives.

As a Ukrainian rite Catholic parish that holds its Saturday evening services in English and the Sunday liturgies in Ukrainian, St. Michael doesn't answer to Bishop Tobin but to the Catholic Church's Ukrainian Eparchy in Stamford, Conn. The office of the eparchy says it knows no other Ukrainian parish in New York or New England that has its liturgies on line.

Cornel Osadsa, a parishioner and software engineer who worked with college student Marko Tkach in setting up the system at St. Michael, said the church has received grateful messages and e-mails from people who have viewed the liturgy from Florida, Texas, New York and other states.

"Just the other day we had a family that viewed our liturgy on an iPhone while traveling through Ohio in a minivan."

Father Taillon said putting all of St. Thomas More and St. Veronica Chapel Masses on line (six Masses each weekend for most of the year, more during the summer tourist season) happened almost by accident.

He says he was having a burglar alarm company install cameras for a security system at church when it occurred to him that the same system could be used for Masses to be viewed by parishioners deployed in Afghanistan or Iraq.

"That was the motivation, but I never realized what a blessing it would be," Father Taillon said of the system.

While televised Masses have long been an on-air presence, particularly on such Catholic networks as EWTN, Father Taillon says the podcasts from St. Thomas More Church and St. Veronica Chapel have a special meaning for his homebound parishioners because "they know the priest."

"They can hear the same homily that their relatives in church are hearing in the church," he points out. And even before a Eucharistic minister comes to their house to bring Holy Communion, the shut-in can see the minister being blessed by the priest.

Father Taillon says parishioners on business trips to countries where Christianity is barely tolerated have told him how happy they were to pray in their hotel room with fellow Rhode Islanders via a podcast from St. Thomas More.

He said Jimmy Baron, the son of former University of Rhode Island coach Jim Baron,

told him how while playing professional basketball overseas he was able to watch the parish's Christmas Mass in Turkey. But it's the weddings and funerals, the priest says, that draw the biggest response.

Three weeks ago Father Taillon celebrated a funeral at the church for a man who had many friends and relatives in Ireland.

Those in Ireland thought so much of him that 35 of them took a day off from work to watch the funeral on a computer monitor, he says.

As for weddings, relatives living far away are now able to become virtual participants at the events, Father Taillon says. And retired Providence Bishop Robert E. Mulvee was once startled to get a compliment from a man in New Zealand who had watched him speak at a Confirmation Mass at St. Thomas More.

As to whether Internet viewing "counts" toward one's Sunday obligation, Monsignor Golemba says a computer can't replace an actual service because it provides no opportunity for receiving Holy Communion.

Father Finelli says the benefit of the Internet - for those who are healthy enough to go to church but don't - is that people who may be hesitant about attending a church can check out the services and see if they would be comfortable going in person.

Father Taillon says he hasn't counted how many have logged in over the two years, but estimates there are three or four viewers for each of the weekend Masses, with many more viewers for weddings and funerals.

By comparison, Father Finelli, who may be considered the pioneer when it comes to Internet Masses in Rhode Island, may have the biggest online viewership, given that he has a camera in his parish's chapel 24 hours a day Monday through Friday for Eucharistic devotion, and three cameras in the church on weekends.

It's not known how many churches around the country have adopted the Internet as a way to broadcast their services. But Father Finelli, who designed the first website for the diocese in Providence in 1995, says he spoke three years ago at a conference of podcasters in San Antonio, Texas, and encountered strong interest in his talk about streaming parish Masses.

The priest has 4,000 Facebook friends, 2,000 Facebook fans and 5,000 followers on Twitter and thinks the numbers may help to explain how he got 400 people to log in to a weekday Mass at Holy Ghost one morning a couple years ago. The name of his website: iPadre.tv

The three parishes say the cost of setting up for podcasting is relatively inexpensive. Parishioners at St. Michael discovered that all that they needed was a small video camera attached to a small computer in the choir loft.

At St. Thomas More, a camera is mounted just over the Third Station of the Cross on the side of the church. At St. Veronica Chapel the camera looks out toward the sanctuary from the front door. At Holy Ghost, the priest has two webcams aimed at the altar, and one camera trained on the choir.

Both Holy Ghost and St. Michael put their signals out via the Internet server

www.ustream.tv, which offers its services for free provided that churches put up a 30-second commercial at the beginning of the service, and every 45 minutes afterward.

Churches that want commercial-free podcasts - which St. Michael's has briefly opted for through the donations of two donors - pay a monthly charge of \$99. That fee gives them up to 100 free viewer hours, and costs 50 cents for every viewer hour over that limit.

Father Taillon says his parish uses an Internet server created by the Boston-based security firm Afa Massachusetts Inc., which allows it to put Masses on line free of charge. Viewers can view the services by logging on to the parish website, stthomasmoreri.org

The Rev. Donald Anderson, executive minister of the Rhode Island State Council of Churches, said he does not know of any other churches in Rhode Island that stream their services.

"I'm surprised that more churches don't do it," he said. "As congregations get older and older, and more people become homebound, I think that many people will want something like this. If you approach it with the idea that it's a way to reach out to those who don't go to church, I would give it very serious consideration."

rdujardi@providencejournal.com (401) 277-7384

**RELIGION - A HOUSE DIVIDED - Fault lines among the faithful
Parishioners' loyalties have complicated the merger of St. Leo and St. Cecilia
parishes**

RICHARD C. DUJARDIN

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PAWTUCKET

Old rivalries die hard.

Just ask the Rev. Michael A. Sisco, who as pastor of the new Blessed Pope John Paul II parish was given the task last summer of merging the churches of St. Leo the Great and St. Cecilia, just two blocks from each other at 699 Central and 1253 Newport avenues.

It's not that the parishioners of St. Leo and St. Cecilia have ever hated each other, but locals say there were enough real differences to keep their members at a distance.

To locals, St. Cecilia's was "the French" parish, established in 1910 to look after the area's French-speaking immigrants and their descendents.

St. Leo's, dubbed "the Irish" church, was, since 1916, the area's territorial parish, open to all nationalities.

The rivalry had gotten to the point where people rarely crossed the line to go to the other church, even though they were so close.

"It's something people just didn't do," says Bruce Guindon, who remembers a similar situation when he was growing up in the former Sacred Heart parish and was scolded by a nun for once having attended the former Notre Dame Church in Central Falls.

"She thought it was sacrilegious of me to go to another church. Well, it was the same way here. If you were of French descent, which I am, you were to go to St. Cecilia's, and that if you weren't French you'd go to St. Leo's."

While the influx of Portuguese and Hispanics, Italians and Polish would eventually blur the congregations' ethnic differences, the divisions were apparent as late as last month, when John Paul parish held its first bazaar - one bazaar in two locations, since neither group would give ground to the other.

"It makes me sad sometimes when we kind of forget that we are Christians here who are supposed to love one another and get along with one another," Father Sisco remarked the other day. "But on the other note, I realize that, human nature being what it is, change comes difficult for people.

"I try to take it all with good humor."

As soon as Father Sisco was given the assignment, he says, he knew he had a tough task ahead.

"The church isn't like McDonald's, which can decide to open one restaurant and close

another," he says. "People's family histories are here.

"These are the buildings where their parents got married and where they were baptized, and where they got married and buried their parents from. There are a lot of emotions attached to these buildings."

So he followed Bishop Thomas J. Tobin's advice and told parishioners he has no immediate plan to close either of their beloved churches - now known as the "tan" church (the old St. Cecilia's) and the "red" church (the old St. Leo's).

"Closing either of these buildings is not a foregone conclusion," he said. "Plan A is to try to fill them, and keep them so we can operate them in the black.

"If this doesn't happen after five to seven years, then we'll have to look at some other alternatives. But for the moment, we seem to be holding our own. I'll have a better picture when we get through our first fiscal year in July."

And how do parishioners see it? It depends on whom you talk to.

Guindon, who had been attending St. Leo's and was on the committee that recommended the merger, said he'd be lying if he said everything has gone as he and others had hoped. "Unfortunately, there's resistance on both sides. People don't want to let go."

Even now, seven months after the merger and three months after Father Sisco's installation, all but one of the lectors and Eucharistic ministers from the old St. Leo's won't take any assignments at the old St. Cecilia's. And those at the old St. Cecilia's say the same about the old St. Leo's. The only ones who appear to have no problem going back and forth are the altar servers.

Because of the continued divisions, the parish also has two music directors, one for each building, with separate choirs for each.

The question is, of course, why force people into a marriage they don't want?

Father Sisco says the merger was a financial necessity. St. Leo's had piled up \$630,000 in debts to the diocese trying to keep its school operating before deciding to close in 2008, and those debts have to be repaid. St. Cecilia's has a bell tower and a set of stairs the diocese says could cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to repair.

"Both parishes were having trouble surviving on their own," he says.

While some parishioners say they are puzzled how there are going to be any cost savings without closing either of the churches, Father Sisco says there are ways. Already, he says, they've successfully merged the staffs without anyone losing a job, with some voluntarily reducing their hours. He's looking to realize big savings by cutting back on outside vendors, remarking that one of the maintenance men, a "computer tech guy," has helped the school achieve savings by doing work previously outsourced.

"I also have a few friends who say they can do the repairs on those steps at St. Cecilia's for much less than what the diocese estimates, without removing the steps," he says. As for the bell tower, "I bet there is a cell-phone company that would love

to put a tower there. It's the highest point in the city."

The priest says he can also raise money by selling St. Cecilia's rectory and convent, though he draws the line at selling St. Leo's School, saying he doesn't want it scooped up by a charter school that would compete directly with his St. Cecilia's School.

When churches merge, the turmoil often causes attendance to nosedive.

At the new Pope John Paul parish, the number of Masses has been reduced, to a 4:30 p.m. Saturday Mass at the old St. Cecilia's, and Sunday Masses at the old St. Leo's at 8 a.m. and noon, and at the old St. Cecilia's at 10 a.m. But parishioners say they have seen no decline in attendance. The parish has about 1,200 families.

Adam Scott, who joined St. Cecilia's when he and his wife moved from St. Mary's parish four years ago, credits Father Sisco with doing a "phenomenal job" in drawing people to church and bringing the groups together.

"When he says his homily," Scott said, "you have a feeling he is talking directly to you."

(Until now, the parish life was being helped, too, some say, by Msgr. Jacques Plante, who heads the diocesan Office of Evangelization and was filling in at some of the Masses as a priest-in-residence. He'll soon be leaving to replace the Franciscans as the new administrator of St. Mary Church in Providence.)

Scott said that when he and his wife attended Mass at the "tan" church on Christmas Eve, which ended with the French carol "Il Est Né Le Divin Enfant," "I don't think there was an empty pew in the building."

"I think it's a very good thing," he said of the merger. "I think it has strengthened our community here by bringing us all together."

Matt Turner, 39, and his wife, Amanda, 36, said they also see positives in the merger. A technical writer for a software company, Taylor said he and his wife joined the parish in 1997 after they got married at St. Cecilia's two years earlier.

Turner said the first encouraging sign he saw was when more than 450 people filled St. Cecilia's parish hall after Father Sisco's installation Mass in October.

But while the parishioner says the majority of people are "on board," Father Sisco acknowledges the difficulties.

One tough decision was formulating a Christmas Mass schedule that would satisfy those on both sides of Newport Avenue. He figured he had come upon a sensible compromise between St. Leo's traditional midnight Mass and St. Cecilia's 10 p.m. Christmas Eve Mass by having the late-evening Mass at St. Leo's at 11 p.m. and the morning Masses at St. Leo's at 8 and St. Cecilia's at 10.

But the priest soon learned it was unacceptable to some. One woman told the priest that the schedule had effectively shut out her 92-year-old mother, who, as a matter of principle, never sets foot in the old St. Cecilia's. Since the only Christmas Day Mass at St. Leo's was at 8 a.m. - too early, she said, for an elderly person - she said

her mother ended up going to another church miles away.

Hearing the story, Father Sisco promised to make an adjustment, saying that on Easter Sunday, he would move the 8 a.m. Mass at St. Leo's to 9.

"I don't want to force anything down people's throats," he said. "I think in 10 years it's all going to be fine.

"I think we can find a way to keep both churches operating, and that if we did have to close, it will be up to the people."

rdujardi@providencejournal.com (401) 277-7384

Remembering that night

The holocaust preserving history | On 74th anniversary of Kristallnacht, Holocaust survivors make sure story is never forgotten

RICHARD C. DUJARDIN

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Alice Dreifuss Goldstein was a 7-year-old girl, one of only a handful of Jews in a private school in Freiburg, Germany, when the one Jewish store in the village of Kenzingen, 24 miles away, was attacked by a mob.

Being so young and staying with her maternal grandparents, Alice says it would be many years before she got the full story of what happened on that dreadful night 74 years ago - Nov. 9-10, 1938 - known today as Kristallnacht, or Night of Broken Glass.

It had been a night of violence across Germany that left more than 1,000 synagogues burned and 7,500 Jewish-owned businesses nearly destroyed. Nazi leaders immediately insisted it was a spontaneous reaction by people in the street to news that a young Nazi military attaché had been gunned down in Paris two days earlier by a Polish Jew.

But Goldstein, now retired from her role as researcher for Brown University's Population Studies and Training Center, says the evidence shows the Nazis had been planning the attacks and even distributed handbooks on how they were to be conducted.

In any case, this has always been a personal issue for Goldstein. The one store in Kenzingen attacked that night was her father's fabric and household goods store, in the family for three generations.

Her first inkling of anything untoward was when her mother brought her home and she saw the store boarded up. Worse, her father and Opa, her paternal grandfather, were missing.

Only later did she learn that the mob, after going inside and tossing the contents out on the street, went upstairs to her parents' apartment and threw books and her mother's sheet music out the window so they, too, could be burned.

The next day, a truck rounded up all Jewish males older than 16 to be taken by train to a camp in Dachau, her father and grandfather among them.

In her case there was a happy ending. The "Final Solution" had not begun yet, and the Germans released her grandfather under a policy of not retaining anyone over age 60. And her father was let go under a policy allowing the release of anyone who could prove he had applied to leave he country.

Almost a year later, on Aug. 28, 1939, the Dreifuss family sailed into New York Harbor on the last passenger liner to leave Germany on schedule, three days before Germany invaded Poland.

Now 81, the Warwick mother of three is one of a dwindling number of first-generation Holocaust survivors who for years now have been telling their stories in

Rhode Island classrooms, under the auspices of the Rhode Island Holocaust Education and Resource Center.

In the basement of the Jewish Community Center at 401 Elmgrove Ave. in Providence, the Holocaust center has its roots in a move by a group of survivors in the 1980s to establish a museum and memorial garden to make sure that the brutality of those years would not be forgotten.

The outreach has since taken many forms, ranging from an annual arts and writing contest, to workshops for teachers to help them find the best ways of bringing the lessons of the Holocaust to the students.

May-Ronny Zeidman, the center's executive director, says the programs reach 6,000 to 8,000 students each year.

"We try to make the point to teachers that some of the Hollywood movies that are out there may not be appropriate for teaching because they're factually inaccurate," Zeidman said. "Many films give a false or sanitized version of what really went on. 'Life is Beautiful,' and the 'Boy in the Striped Pajamas' come to mind."

Do the lessons have an impact?

Melissa Kusinitz, 31, who was the center's Holocaust Teacher of the Year in 2012, has incorporated a section about the Holocaust into her ninth-grade English class at Cumberland High School.

"Without fail, this is the one part of the curriculum that they remember even years later," she says. "I can see changes in the way they react to one another even while taking the course."

Like Kusinitz, Barbara Wahlberg has been using Holocaust survivor Elie Weisel's book 'Night' in her 10th grade English class at Cranston High School East since the 1990s. In Pawtucket, Steve Flynn, has put together a racism and diversity elective at Tollman High School that he has taught for seven years.

All try to have Holocaust survivors speak to their students.

"In this day and age, students need the immediacy of tangible evidence, because for their generation the Holocaust was a long time ago," said Flynn. "To be engaged, they need to see it, hear it and smell it. That's why I've been so fortunate to have survivors speak to my classes. The survivors give them a bird's-eye view as to what true oppression is."

Wahlberg, the first Rhode Islander to receive a fellowship to the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, says she's grateful that survivor Lea Eliash spoke to her classes several times before she died.

"The children are so fascinated. And they ask the right questions," she said. "They want to know how it could have happened."

Among the many stories, sometimes provided by the survivors' children or by friends, are stories of escape.

Family Court Magistrate Edward Newman, whose parents would later travel to Rhode Island and start a successful egg farm in Richmond, talks about how his mother escaped from what could have been her final death march after the Germans learned that the Russian Army was advancing.

Ruth Goldstein, no relation to Alice, tells of how Rose Berkovic, from Antwerp, Belgium, slipped out of a deportation camp in France long enough to take her daughters, Marie, 9, and Jeannette, 5, to an underground that brought them to a Christian boarding school. The girls ultimately made it to the United States, taken in by families in Providence and Pawtucket. Their mother would join them later and the sisters, with their husbands now live in Clearwater, Fla.

Zeidman says she doesn't know how many Holocaust survivors are left in Rhode Island, since many have never come forward to talk about their experience. But her speakers list has nine first-generation survivors and three "second-generation" survivors.

Flynn says that once there are no more, he figures he will have to go recordings and tapes to make the stories alive for his students.

But until that time comes, Alice Goldstein says she will continue to tell her story to students, bringing along the six-pointed yellow star that the Nazis gave her father while he was temporarily a prisoner at Dachau.

"Dachau was the first place where the Germans experimented with having the prisoners wear the star. They originally made it with metal backing, but stopped when they needed the metal for the war. My father called it his souvenir."

Film lineup

Roger Williams University in Bristol is partnering with Flickers: the Rhode Island International Film Festival to host a series of films on the Jewish experience, including the Holocaust, from Tuesday, Nov. 13, to Sunday, Nov. 18, in the university's Global Heritage Hall.

The offerings include a film featuring Rabbi Ben Lefkowitz, who teaches a course on the Holocaust, and Rob Cohen, director of *Kinderblock66: Return to Buchenwald*, to be shown at 6 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 15.

Shown immediately afterward will be "*Kinderblock 66: Return to Buchenwald*," which chronicles the effort to save 900 youths who were imprisoned in the Buchenwald concentration camp and what four of the survivors found when they returned 65 years later.

Set for 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 18, is "*Perceptions of the Holocaust Experience in American Media*," to be immediately followed by "*Living Room Witnesses: The Holocaust on American Television*," which explores how the Holocaust was portrayed on TV from the early 1950s to the mid-1990s.

Richard C. Dujardin