

Diocese of Palm Beach's Successful Launch of a Virtual Holy Week

Research/Situation Analysis: Defining the problem: The Diocese of Palm Beach (DPB) is comprised of 53 parishes and missions in five counties and includes more than 232,700 Catholics. On March 18, 2020, the Bishop of the diocese (and all Bishops of Florida) announced that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all public participation in Masses would be suspended until further notice. The purpose of this project was to provide an alternative for in-person Holy Week liturgical events and transition to hosting virtual Holy Week events for the annual Chrism Mass (April 7), Holy Thursday (April 9), Good Friday (April 10), Holy Saturday (April 11) and Easter Sunday Mass (April 12). For Catholics, Holy Week is the most sacred time of the year, as they remember and commemorate the last week of Jesus's life on earth. This was an unprecedented task with a tight timeline, involving numerous people and new technology. **Research Methods:** Primary research conducted included interviews (informal) with the other state diocesan Directors of Communication to learn their plans for Holy Week (findings included that each diocese was working to quickly pivot to hosting virtual Masses, but not all were going to film each day of Holy Week), analysis (informal) of what technology tools worked the best to film Masses (the DPB purchased one product suggested and needed), and focus groups (informal) with those who would be participating in the filming of the virtual Masses (findings used in the implementation). Secondary research conducted included historical research (informal) of what was done to prepare for previous Holy Week Masses (findings included that Easter Mass was the only one filmed and aired on TV), plus fact finding (formal) with the television sales manager in order to learn the statistics of viewership of the Easter Mass from last year (finding was 1,810 viewers). **Planning:** The main goal of providing virtual Holy Week events for the faithful, was to provide them with a public service to meet their spiritual needs and evangelize to the Catholic parishioners in the DPB who were not able to attend Mass in person due to the COVID-19 restrictions. **Objectives:** 1) Inform the faithful of the plans the DPB would utilize to host virtual Masses during Holy Week by April 7, 2020 with a minimum of 5 communication touches including emails, website updates and social posts. 2) Reach a minimum of 5,000 on Facebook during the Facebook Live Holy Week events from April 7-11 by checking FB analytics. 3) Increase household viewership of the Easter Mass from 1,810 in 2019 by doubling viewers to 3,620 in 2020 using Nielsen ratings as a measurement tool. **Strategies and Tactics:** The strategies, or plan to reach the goal, included creating liturgically correct messaging and a graphics package to announce the change of the virtual Holy Week events. The plan included disseminating the materials to the parishes for them to promote the services to their parishioners, plus creating a plan to film the Masses and air the Chrism Mass, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday Masses through Facebook Live (and link them to the DPB website). The plan further included taping a promo video for Holy Week, promo video for Easter Mass on TV, and the taping of the Easter Mass, which is aired on a local television station annually (the DPB tapes and airs a Mass every Sunday on this television station). The tactics, or actual events/methods used to implement the strategies, included: creating text and graphics for messaging, social media and the DPB website that included information for the entire weeks' worth of celebrations, plus individual Masses, then emailing the parishes with this information, purchasing the proper tools needed to film the virtual events, organizing the details of filming the Easter Mass, using Facebook Live for the other Masses, linking them to the DPB website and engaging with the faithful during the virtual events. **Audience:** Due to the fact that no parishes were open to the public for Holy Week, the audience included the Catholics within the diocese's five county area. The demographics of the Catholics in the DPB include both males and females of all ages, who reside in Palm Beach, Martin, Okeechobee, St. Lucie, Indian River Counties and beyond. There is a diverse mixture of ethnicities, education and income levels between these counties. The psychographics of this audience include those that are Catholic, seeking spiritual guidance during Holy Week, typically attend Mass during Holy Week and believe in their faith. **Implementation: Timeline:** On March 18, 2020, Bishop

Barbarito, along with his fellow Bishops in the state of Florida, informed their faithful that Masses would be closed to the public until further notice due to the pandemic. Nine business days later, a full schedule of virtual Holy Week events was shared via social media, the DPB website and shared with parishes to communicate to their parishioners. Planning occurred every day to prepare for these events, supplies were purchased, and equipment was tested. Reminders of the virtual events continued to be posted online from March 31 to the start of Holy Week. On March 31, the taping of the Easter Mass took place and on April 7, the Chrism Mass was live streamed via Facebook (and posted on the website), followed by Holy Thursday on April 9, Good Friday on April 10, Holy Saturday on April 11, each with the Easter Mass being aired on April 12. The assigned responsibilities included that the Communications Director organized these tasks with the help of the Communications Team and priests, lectors and musicians who were assigned responsibilities for the Masses. **Plan**

Messaging: The communication messages for target audiences were simple with the event, date, time, and where to find the Masses with some messaging that included icons representing each holy day. The messaging avenues included emails, media coverage, website announcements, articles in the Catholic paper, correspondence with reporters who inquired about Mass services, plus video, text and graphics on social media to notify the faithful of the virtual events. **Plan Creativity:** This creative program is the only one of its kind and was a direct result of having to be resourceful due to the pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions. The project included creative graphics, was sensitive to the pandemic, provided a needed and timely solution to a problem and included interactive, relationship building elements (real time messaging with audience during FB Live). **Evaluation: Objectives Met:** All objectives were exceeded. There was 1) The DPB was able to inform the faithful of the plan to host the five virtual Masses during Holy Week with 10 communication touches (five more than objective) by April 6 (ahead of schedule), by sending email to parishes, social posts and a website updates. 2) The diocese reached 18,619 people on Facebook during the Facebook Live Holy Week events April 7-11, which is 13,619 more (272.38% better) than the objective of 5,000. 3) According to the Neilson ratings, there was an increase in household viewership of the televised Easter Mass from 1,810 in 2019 to an unprecedented 27,350 household viewers in 2020 (25,540 increase in viewers in one year, 655% above the objective which was 3,620). An extra benefit was that during Holy Week, the DPB grew in Facebook followers from 3,227 to 4,057 followers (22% increase), plus a total of 59,130 people were reached on Facebook during the entire Holy Week (including promos). Also, during Holy Week, website page views from 2019 to 2020 increased 324% and video views increased 1,730%. **Goals Met:** The project met the goal to provide virtual Holy Week events for the faithful of the diocese, as they were not able to attend Mass in person due to the COVID-19 restrictions. **Budget: Documentation:** The budget for this project was \$6,000, and the DPB finished the project \$866 under budget (14% savings from budget). The cost of the televised Easter Mass (filming and airtime) is budgeted annually at \$4,550; the cost of the lavalier mic was \$184; the cantor was \$150 (in annual budget), and the organist was \$250 (in annual budget). There was approximately 20 hours of staff time dedicated to planning and implementing this project (estimated cost: \$1,500). It should be noted that \$2,820 in donations was sent to the DPB in April 2020 in appreciation of the TV Masses and virtual services, thus the net expenses were \$2,314 (61% under budget). In addition, the lavalier mic has been used many times since its purchase for other projects, too.

Justification: The ROI from this project included tangible and intangible benefits. The goal to provide virtual Holy Week events to the faithful of the DPB was met, an overwhelming number of grateful comments and letters have been shared with the communications office, and the Facebook page has a permanent increase in followers, plus there is continued online engagement for the weekly Televised Catholic Masses has occurred since. Holy Week is the most sacred time of the year and providing virtual Masses for the faithful during a time when parishes were closed to the public during COVID-19, was invaluable and was able to keep the DPB faith family connected during a time of crisis.