

Live Streaming Mass: A Modern Approach to Evangelization

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, the faithful, their families, and the Catholic Church experienced numerous changes. The implementation of stay-at-home mandates by federal, state, county, and local government officials meant that the faithful were unable to gather for Mass for an extended time. This presented a significant challenge for pastors and parish leaders, as gathering as a community was prohibited. To address this unprecedented situation, many parishes began to live stream the Mass. However, many Catholic parishes were caught off guard and were unprepared for this challenge.

The pandemic demonstrated how crucial it is for pastors and parish leaders to recognize the evangelizing potential of live streaming as a tool that can reach the faithful beyond the physical confines of the church walls. The post-pandemic era has unleashed this technology, and it is imperative for parishes to embrace it as a means of ministry that can reach hundreds, if not thousands of individuals throughout the liturgical year.

WHY LIVE STREAM?

First, other faith communities are broadcasting their services. Many non-Catholic Christian communities were already effectively utilizing technology to extend their reach beyond the physical confines of their church buildings prior to the pandemic. These communities gained an advantage during the pandemic by seamlessly transitioning to online platforms to connect with their congregations, while Catholic parishes largely found themselves playing catch-up trying to offer live streaming for the first time. Many of our faithful tuned in to watch broadcasts from other local Christian communities until their parishes got their live stream up and running. Some Catholics found meaningful content and connection through these broadcasts and never returned.

Second, live streaming Mass extends the reach of the parish. It is a benefit to the sick, shut-in, disabled, and elderly of your parish, keeping them connected to the Church when physical attendance becomes difficult. It can help parishioners stay engaged when traveling and encourages continued giving (tithing) even when parishioners cannot attend Mass in person. Finally, it offers a comfortable “first look” for seekers interested in exploring the Catholic faith, extending our reach beyond the four walls of the church. Live streaming should not only be thought of as a momentary necessity due to circumstances such as pandemic restrictions, but an essential part of the parish’s ongoing outreach.

Next, digital messaging benefits the Church’s ministries. Digital messaging offers numerous advantages for communicating about fundraisers, announcements, special Masses, ministries, and activities. Unlike traditional printed bulletins or announcements made during Mass, remote parishioners can now conveniently access and engage with the messages in real-time or at their own convenience through platforms like Facebook or YouTube. This ensures that important information is effectively communicated to all members of the community, regardless of their physical presence.

Finally, live streaming can engage diverse learning styles. The process of learning varies greatly among individuals across the lifespan. Each person has his or her own unique way of absorbing information. Some individuals grasp concepts better through auditory means, such as listening to the Word of God. On the other hand, there are those who learn best by visually observing. The advent of live streaming has revolutionized the way people learn, as it allows for the integration of different learning styles into a single broadcast. This innovative approach caters to the diverse learning needs of viewers, ensuring that everyone can engage with the content in a way that resonates with them.



For example, consider how live streaming offers a unique chance to enhance viewer's engagement with Scripture. At my parish, the live stream of the proclamation of Scripture at Mass (auditory experience) is further supported by the inclusion of the text of the Scripture and a visual image of the scene portrayed in the text. The amalgamation of text, sound, and visuals is particularly effective in engaging young individuals who are accustomed to living in a visually captivating world. In essence, live streaming serves as an extension of the visually stimulating environment we inhabit, enabling a more immersive experience with Scripture.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Before you begin your transformative digital journey toward live streaming, it is important to consider several key factors that will contribute to your success.

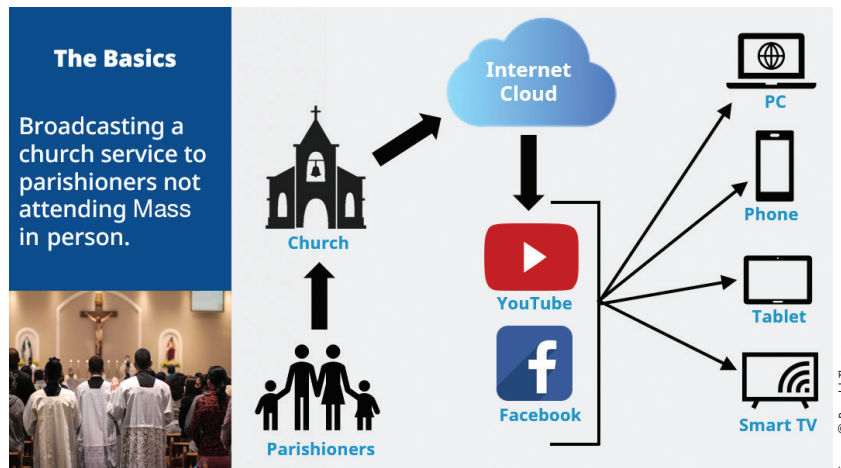
- **High speed internet connection.** Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, numerous Churches invested in internet service that prioritized fast download speeds for retrieving data, while neglecting the upload speeds required for broadcasting their Mass to the internet. To effectively stream their Masses, Churches should aim for upload speeds of at least one gigabit or higher, or as close to gigabit speed as feasible within their geographic location.

- **Do not use Wi-Fi to broadcast your Mass.** The broadcast may experience signal delay due to Wi-Fi, which can hinder the viewing experience of remote parishioners. Your internet provider has implemented delays ranging from fifteen to twenty seconds, further affecting the quality. As a result, the signal may appear pixelated or get stuck for extended durations on the TV or mobile devices of viewers.

- **Use a hardline connection to the internet.** Employ a wired ethernet cable to establish a direct connection to the internet. Connect your computer via the ethernet cable to the router provided by your internet service provider (ISP). By utilizing a hardline connection, you can eliminate the latency issues encountered with Wi-Fi. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there will still be a built-in delay of fifteen to twenty seconds imposed by your ISP.

- **Install lighting for video.** Church buildings built more than two decades ago frequently utilized lighting that imitates the warm glow of candlelight, which falls within the yellow spectrum. However, this type of lighting is not suitable for filming or broadcasting church services. Now, video cameras and live streaming necessitate the use of bright white LED lighting. To ensure optimal lighting for video production, it is advisable to consult with a lighting consultant or designer who specializes in this field.

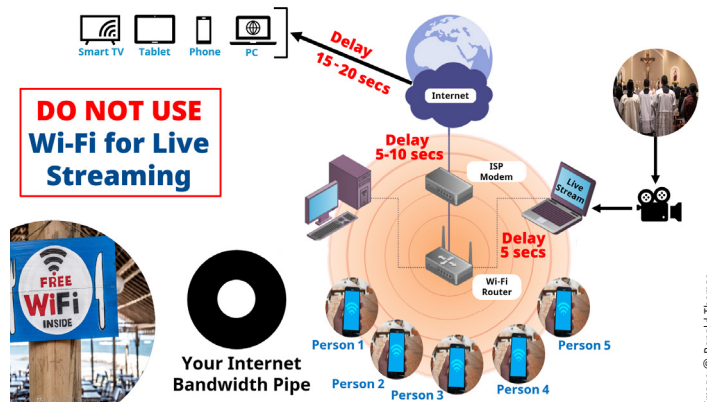
- **Establish a standard for digital, audio, and video platforms.** Audio and video systems have become completely digital. They are interconnected through networking switches and routers



Viewers access live-streamed Mass through a variety of platforms and devices.

to direct signals and commands that are managed from a desktop computer or laptop (lighting, video) or a tablet (audio). Opt for a video platform like Blackmagic Design that offers video products, video switching, and control surfaces. For audio, consider using products from Allen-Heath, known for their sound control console and audio signal processing. The main point to remember is to prioritize “standard” solutions. Assess which products will fulfill your current and future requirements. Consult with experts in the audio and video fields for guidance.

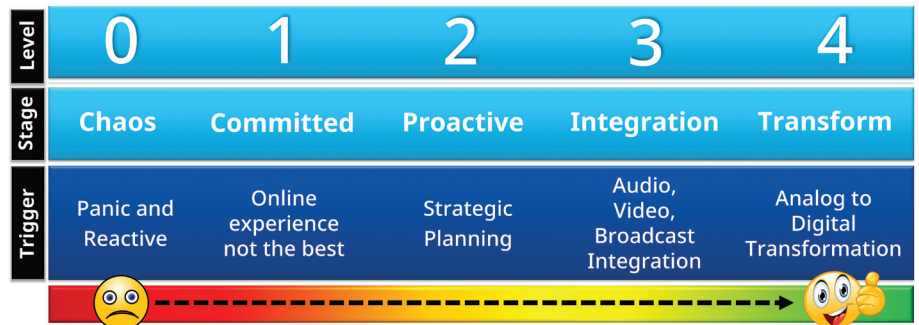
- **Use high resolution cameras for video.** Consider adopting a consistent video camera system from reputable brands like Canon, Sony, or Panasonic. The camera's quality will be determined by your budget, and you can choose from various video standards such as 2K, 4K, 6K, or the emerging but costly 8K option. It is essential that your camera have the capability to output to high-resolution HDMI 1920 x 1080 standard and SDI. Before making any camera purchases for your church, it is advisable to consult with a video expert to ensure compatibility with your existing video and audio setups.



Bandwidth decreases when many individuals connect to the same Wi-Fi hotspot, therefore, Wi-Fi is not ideal for live streaming Masses.

- **Do not use freeware software.** Using “freeware” or free software downloaded from the internet is not recommended. While it may be tempting to save money by using such software, subscription-based software offers benefits like software support, bug fixes, and regular updates. For video presentations, consider using software like vMix or ProPresenter. Additionally, a subscription to Microsoft 365 provides access to Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and other software. Whichever software you use, make sure it is compatible with your video and audio systems.

Live Stream Maturity Model (LSMM) for Churches



The live stream maturity model (LSMM) helps parishes discern where they are and where to take the next step in developing an effective live stream ministry.

THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY

Undertaking the digital transformation of a parish takes us far beyond the conventional practices of distributing bulletins and Missalettes to those seated in the pews. It may seem challenging, but its goals are achievable and the rewards that await are immense. However, it is crucial to approach this task with the utmost care and precision to reap the full benefits that lie ahead.

The Live Stream Maturity Model (LSMM) was developed to offer parishes a comprehensive guide to achieve success in this new digital landscape. It serves as a barometer for parish leaders to determine where their parish stands on the transformational journey and offers a gradual path forward to meet their live streaming goals.

- **Level 0: Chaos.** Level 0 represents a state of unpreparedness or lack of anticipation for unforeseen circumstances. Due to their limited technological knowledge, most priests and parish staffs resorted to using whatever resources were available to conduct Mass, such as smartphones or tablets, Wi-Fi, and even their own cellular data plans. Facebook emerged as the preferred platform for broadcasting Mass, despite its limitations. The audio quality suffered, as it was captured using the built-in microphone of the mobile devices, resulting in a subpar experience for remote parishioners. The audio reception resembled a weak AM radio signal—far from ideal for broadcasting programs lasting an hour or longer.

- **Level 1: Committed.** Level 1 signifies the initial stage of the live stream transformational journey, where parishes realize that relying on the audio and video quality of mobile devices is no longer sufficient for broadcasting. This realization is prompted by complaints from parishioners who express their difficulty in hearing or seeing clearly, coupled with the intermittent disruptions in the live feed on platforms like Facebook or YouTube. Consequently, parish leaders recognize the need to enhance their broadcast capabilities and take a step toward improvement. Typically, this involves making a modest investment in acquiring a laptop and a webcam. At this stage, you may still be utilizing Wi-Fi for connectivity, while also exploring different presentation techniques and experimenting with streaming software. Additionally, you may still be using room audio or have found a way to connect your sound console to the computer to ensure optimal audio input.

- **Level 2: Proactive.** In level 2, the church has made a proactive decision to enhance their audio and video capabilities, resulting in a significant improvement in live streaming for remote parishioners and the overall experience for those attending in person. The pastor has been convinced (or “persuaded”) by church leaders that investing in technology is necessary, and funds have been allocated for this purpose. Typically, a committee is formed to plan the investment and seek external assistance for professional advice on implementing the necessary changes. Instead of relying on Wi-Fi, a high-speed internet connection is now utilized for broadcasting. The audio signal is directly connected from the sound console to a video switcher or laptop, and various tools like PowerPoint, vMix, or ProPresenter are employed.

- **Level 3: Integration.** Level 3 represents the next phase of the strategic initiative that was initiated in level 2. In order to ensure the successful implementation of the planned changes, the church leaders have made the decision to seek the expertise of an external consultant or AV company. It is crucial to emphasize that using individuals from the church to implement changes is not advisable. To maintain a fresh perspective, bring in professionals to design and implement your plan. As part of this process, a dedicated team of trained volunteers has been assembled to oversee the operation of the church’s AV system and facilitate live streaming of the Sunday Masses. Furthermore, significant progress has been made in enhancing the church’s video capabilities by initiating upgrades to the video and lighting systems. Additionally, a notable milestone has been achieved as the parish has transitioned from analog audio to digital audio, marking a significant advancement in the overall audio quality and technology used within the church.

- **Level 4: Transformation.** The integration of audio and video in the digital transformation process marks an important milestone. This involves connecting all digital devices through a private ethernet network using switches and routers. Additionally, digital lighting control has been implemented to enhance the overall experience. Various tools like Photoshop, PowerPoint, and ProPresenter are utilized to create visually appealing presentations that display readings and prayers. To ensure clear and high-quality audio, the microphones have been upgraded, and wireless microphones may have been

invested in to provide greater flexibility in microphone placement.

LESSONS LEARNED

People and Process

- Collaborate with various parish ministries such as art and environment, music, and liturgy to enhance the spiritual experience of the assembly. By working closely with these ministries, parishes can design an audiovisual system that is visually appealing and that supports engaging celebrations for those present physically or participating remotely.
- Work with the parish finance committee to budget for large purchases or upgrades. Consider making a presentation to the committee on your plans to get their buy-in and support.
- Establish strong relationships with key church leaders to create a supportive network to work toward the goals and objectives of the AV ministry.
- Seek outside professional assistance. Utilize the expertise of professionals in your area to accomplish the goals for digital transformation.
- Invest time and effort in training volunteers. Providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge will empower them and ensure the long-term success of the AV Ministry.
- Prepare for the future by training your replacement. By investing in the development of potential successors, you ensure the continuity and long-term success of the AV ministry.
- Form a technology committee that focuses on various aspects of audio-video production and live streaming including networking, cybersecurity, construction, computers, and applications.
- Create and implement a strategic blueprint, revising as necessary. Adaptability is crucial as technology evolves throughout the digital transformation journey.
- Create comprehensive instruction materials (how-to's) to educate volunteers for service in this ministry.

Technology

- Improve internet speed by upgrading bandwidth capacity. This will allow for faster data transmission and smoother online experiences.
- Achieve optimal performance by switching from a wireless connection to a wired one. This eliminates potential interference and provides a more stable and reliable internet connection.
- Consider upgrading to a high-speed fiber connection offered by your internet service provider to ensure fast internet speeds



Parishes that began live streaming Mass during COVID-19 can improve their setup by enlisting the help of audiovisual professionals.

and seamless browsing, streaming, and downloading.

- Stay up to date with the latest advancements in technology. Become familiar with new protocols and equipment that can enhance live streaming performance.
- Protect the parish network and valuable data by implementing necessary security measures. This includes setting up firewalls, using strong passwords, and regularly updating antivirus software to safeguard against potential threats.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The undeniable truth is that the genie (“Live Streaming”) has been released from the bottle, and there is no way to put it back. The Catholic Church continues to wrestle with the best way to move forward to expand online offerings to meet the spiritual needs of people today. The process of digital transformation is indeed a voyage that requires careful planning and execution. Parishes possessing the necessary financial resources and expertise can leapfrog from level 0 or level 1 to level 4 on the Life Stream Maturity Model scale, thereby achieving digital transformation in a shorter timeframe. Although this approach may incur significant costs, the benefits for reaching the desired outcome more swiftly make it a worthwhile endeavor. To ensure a smooth transition, it is advisable to strategize and implement upgrades in phases. Starting with audio enhancements and gradually incorporating other improvements will contribute to the overall success of your digital transformation. ♦

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At www.PastoralLiturgy.org

Find and share this article with parish staff and the liturgy committee at the following URL:<http://www.pastoralliturgy.org/LiveStreamingMass.pdf>.