Parishes programs prosper virtually

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Zoom was no match for the volume of people who wanted to virtually attend Robert Ellsberg’s presentation on his friendship with Dorothy Day. Hosted by Saint Jude Parish as part of its “Sharing the Light” speaker series, attendees exceeded the 100-person limit on the Zoom meeting by so many that even pastor Father Joe Mele was not able to enter the virtual room.

Parishes turned to online programming to find a port in the storm amid the darkest days of the pandemic, but many also discovered unexpected blessings in technology and will continue to use it.

Saint Jude Parish in Pittsburgh's Shadyside and Morningside neighborhoods saw steady growth each time a virtual event was held, with attendance highest for the presentation by Ellsberg, son of Daniel Ellsberg of the Pentagon Papers.

It was convenient to watch from home and easier to attract high-caliber speakers when no travel was involved, according to Mary Lou McLaughlin, chair of the series.

“Virtual programming is working for us,” McLaughlin said.

The parish’s online programming is also making its in-person community more robust. McLaughlin sees faces from the speaker series in the pews on Sundays. Mass attendance is higher now than before the pandemic hit.

On December 2, the Saint Jude “Sharing the Light” series will host Manfred Honeck, director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, who will discuss his work and his spirituality. This time, the parish is making sure to have
a Zoom link that accommodates up to 300 attendees, McLaughlin noted with a chuckle.

At Christ Our Savior Parish on Pittsburgh’s North Side, Father Larry DiNardo has taught a Bible study during Advent and Lent. In 2020, he switched to Zoom during the pandemic.

“It was fascinating that the number started to swell to 70-80 people online,” he said.

The Zoom meetings made it possible for the Bible study to reach new demographics. Older people who do not drive at night and young people juggling hectic work schedules have been able attend.

Father DiNardo will offer both an in-person and virtual option for his study on the journeys of Saint Paul that begins in November. The biggest benefit of online programming is that it reaches people who would not have been otherwise able to attend, he said.

Saint John Neumann Parish in Franklin Park has offered seven different evangelization programs virtually over the past year and a half that include a video presentation and small group discussions. They will continue to offer a virtual option going forward.

Gary Fritsch, director of evangelization, said people have appreciated these programs for reasons beyond COVID safety.

Young parents can participate without having to leave home and find a babysitter. People who travel often for work have joined the audio portion of the presentations from the road via their phones. Fritsch also has seen virtual presentations benefit elderly people who do not like to drive at night.

More than 170 people attended the evangelization programs that the parish hosted during the pandemic. Former members of the parish who have moved away also logged on.

“These are people who would never get any of that content otherwise. The virtual meetings help to build community,” Fritsch said.
At a special Mass on Sunday, October 17 in Saint Paul Cathedral, Bishop David Zubik will ask the Holy Spirit to guide local Catholics as they prepare to participate in a worldwide consultation that Pope Francis has convened to help him find the best ways to discern God's call to the Church.

The Mass is scheduled for 2:30 p.m. and will be live-streamed.

Every Catholic – including those who feel marginalized or who have left the Church — will be invited to participate on some level. Grassroots listening will culminate in a Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October 2023.

“It's a global invitation to a process that stretches far and wide,” said Ellen Mady, chancellor of the Diocese of Pittsburgh and co-chair of the local organizing team for the synod. “The Holy Father is the leader of the universal Church and this process, by design, is intended to be meaningful at the local level and the universal level.

“Going through the process enables us to engage in listening and discernment and participation that helps us to better get to know our own church. And the very fact that it is a universal process is bringing the whole Church together.”

The official name for the consultation, the “synod on synodality,” is literally Greek to most people. The Vatican handbook for those who are planning the synod puts it in easier terms: “he purpose of this Synod is not to produce more documents. Rather, it is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be”
The words “synod” and “synodal” translate into “journeying together.” The preparatory document, found at [www.synod.va](http://www.synod.va), emphasizes that this journey of discernment is part of the renewal mandated by Vatican II. The three key concepts for the synod and its recommendations are communion, participation and mission.

“y journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through Her experience which processes can help Her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open Herself to mission,” the document states.

The synod “is a complicated concept that is very foreign to the modern American mindset,” said Father Michael Sedor, diocesan director for canonical services and co-chair of the synod organizing team. “Americans are very focused on results. This is really about the experience, more than the result.”

The focus is on how the Church discerns its mission, not on what it should teach.

“We're not getting together to talk about doctrinal questions,” Father Sedor said. “At the same time, we are not looking to exclude minority experiences because of doctrinal issues. If someone's experience of the faith doesn't exactly line up with the doctrine of the Church, it's okay to express that. We are not voting on change, but we do want to listen to people.”

The goal of Pope Francis and diocesan organizers is to provide small group opportunities for people to offer their thoughts, culminating in a diocesan-wide gathering in the spring. All participation will be synthesized into a 10-page document and sent to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The USCCB will, in turn, send a summary of all diocesan documents to the Vatican.

“The synod will succeed or fail to the extent to which we rely on the Holy Spirit,” said Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, at a September news conference to launch the synod.

When bishops gather from around the world in 2023, there will be a “first” among the participants. Although women have long been consultants and observers at synods, a woman will now vote alongside the bishops as Sister Nathalie Becquart fulfills her role as undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops.

“This isn't just another program that gets completed and then we move on,” Father Sedor said. “The Holy Father is looking for a new way of being and operating in the Church. Hopefully these small groups will continue to share their experiences. A document is a document. The goal here is to have a new experience of the faith.”
Our Lady is our help

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By Father Richard S. Jones
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While I have not yet mastered all the names of the new parishes throughout our diocese, one thing stands out to me. Thus far, 10 names honor the Blessed Virgin Mary: Mary, Queen of Saints; Our Lady of the Valley; Our Lady of Hope; Our Lady of Consolation; Our Lady Help of Christians; Our Lady of Mount Carmel; Our Lady of the Lakes; Mary, Queen of Peace; Mary, Mother of God; and Immaculate Heart of Mary (in the Shrines of Pittsburgh).

Thus, Mary is a pervasive presence in the reorganized landscape of our diocese. The number of parishes under her patronage is a testimony to the influence she has upon our faith pilgrimage. Mary’s “job description” of duties in the Church is quite extensive—Refuge of Sinners, Health of the Sick, Comforter of the Afflicted, Gate of Heaven, Perpetual Help and Star of the Sea are just a few.

The Church dedicates October to the Rosary because the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary originated in thanksgiving for Mary’s answer to the many rosaries prayed for the victory of a Catholic naval coalition over the invading Ottoman Turks at the Battle of Lepanto on October 7, 1571. In 1716, Pope Clement XI made it a feast of general thanksgiving for Mary's prayers on everyone's behalf.

Mary was present when the Church was founded, praying for it to carry out the mission her Son entrusted to it. Mary, the mother of the Church, intercedes and prays with us and for us. “All these devoted themselves with one
accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brother.” (Acts 1:14)

Mary is our mother and model prayer companion. St. Padre Pio said, “The rosary is like a great sword that Mary puts into the hands of her children to defend themselves against the evil one.” As we engage in spiritual warfare in a world filled with distraction, agitation and impatience, the rosary overcomes evil with calm, gentleness, and patience.

I grew up in a home where it might have been an easy choice to abandon the rosary. My mother was Catholic, my father was Presbyterian, and there were seven of us kids. Dad would often say, “It was two faiths, but one love.” Through love, my parents made Mary present in our home. We thought we had the best of both worlds as our family read the Bible each night and prayed the rosary.

Together, those devotions were a “dynamic duo” in our faith development and formation. Another was our pastor, Father Thomas F. Carey at Saints Simon and Jude Church. I can still envision him in his black cassock that had large black rosary beads fastened at his waist, which he wore at hospital visits, school sporting events, when blessing a home, or burying the dead. One could never forget how devoutly, reverently and prayerfully Father Carey said the rosary—with trust, with wonder, and with love.

He was truly passionate about Marian devotion, holding leadership positions in both the diocesan Blue Army and the Legion of Mary. Every week, he led us in the rosary after daily Mass. Father Carey often said, “If your birds are going to fly right in life, Mary must lead and direct your course.”

Praying the rosary helps us to meditate on the truths of the Gospel. It directs us to live out more fully the graces of the joyful (grateful), sorrowful (suffering), luminous (revealing), and glorious (worshipful) mysteries of Mary and Jesus. The rosary shapes our mind, heart, will, emotions, spirit, and soul. It conforms us ever more closely to Christ and His Mother through a kind of training in holiness.

The rosary is easy to learn to pray as a child, but it takes an entire lifetime to experience its riches. It is a powerful prayer of intercession, whether our intentions are as great as someone’s conversion or as simple as doing a chore.

In my duties as hospital chaplain at UMPC Mercy, I see many people in and near their final hours. This fills me with gratitude for the volunteers who generously make the rosaries for our patients and their families. As they gather around the bed praying, the rosary is medicine for the soul, the lifeline to heaven!

No matter how many times we have prayed the Hail Mary, it never gets old — “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”
After 100 years, Legion of Mary mission still vital

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https://youtube.com/watch?v=hU-hI6jBazY
The Legion of Mary is marking the centennial of its organization, established to help the world recover from physical and spiritual trauma.

Bishop David Zubik led a 100th Anniversary Mass of Thanksgiving on Sunday, October 3 at Epiphany Church, part of Divine Mercy Parish in Pittsburgh. The Mass included a Eucharistic Procession and Rosary.

In his homily, Bishop Zubik recalled the beginning of the Legion of Mary, founded by Frank Duff, a group of women and a priest in Dublin, Ireland, in 1921.

“The world was trying to heal from the wounds of the first World War,” he said. “And while people looked for ways to reestablish their homes, to look for new avenues of peace, to find opportunities for the economy of the world to get back on its feet, Mr. Duff saw there was another reality that was even more important—the ways in which what is in our hearts and what is in our souls might in fact be strengthened and be fed by the power of God’s grace.”

The Legion of Mary is a lay apostolic association of several million Catholics in more than 170 countries. It sees as its priority the spiritual and social welfare of each individual. Members participate in the life of their parishes through visitation of the sick—both in their homes and in hospitals—of families, and through collaboration in every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by parishes.

In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the first official praesidium, or basic unit, was established in 1947 at Saint Stephen Parish in Hazelwood. It was entitled “Our Lady of Fatima.” At the Mass last Sunday, Annette Bentivegna served as October Queen, crowing the statue of Our Lady of Fatima.

Carol Scherer continues to chair the Mass of Thanksgiving.

Meanwhile, the week-long Pittsburgh Rosary Congress, which included the Legion of Mary Eucharistic Procession, concludes with Mass at 7 pm Friday, October 8th at Saint Anthony Chapel on Pittsburgh’s Troy Hill.
Bishop Zubik leads the Rosary following Mass celebrating the centennial of the Legion of Mary.