

Lights, Camera, Mass

A look behind The Basilica livestream



Basilica staff members Wendy Caduff, Megan Hume, Heather Craig (clockwise) livestreaming on Christmas Eve.

BY MAE DESAIRE

RISING TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE PANDEMIC

I: March–April, 2020

THROUGHOUT the past year, as we have lived through a global pandemic, we have had to continually adapt and change to our new world. On March 18, 2020, The Basilica announced it was suspending all public Masses, Confession, and Stations of the Cross until further notice to protect people from possible exposure to COVID-19 and for the common good and welfare of our community. This was the season of Lent, and we were preparing for our Holy Week and Easter celebrations.

Throughout those early weeks of March 2020, public gatherings and worship were not recommended for anyone with health concerns. Each week, new statistics and guidelines were released. Archbishop Hebda issued the dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation until further notice on March 12. Many people did not feel safe gathering for Mass but yearned for the nourishment of the liturgies in a time of crisis.

Those early days of the pandemic were frightening and stressful, but as a staff The Basilica team knew we needed to serve our community. We needed to embrace the challenge and reimagine our liturgies. We knew we needed to make the leap and start providing online videos of our Masses and services. We had talked about it off and on for years—the logistics, technology, equipment, platforms—but we always

thought we had more time to work out all of the details.

The time to jump in and start was now upon us. We started livestreaming our first Stations of the Cross on Facebook on March 13. From there, we grew everyday and started livestreaming Sunday Mass on March 15, weekday Mass in the sacristy on Thursday, March 19, and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on Friday, March 20. Our team was filming entirely on an iPhone. We would livestream each service on Facebook and post the recorded videos to our website.

Looking back now, the early videos in hindsight were rough—sound, lighting, camera placement... we were just trying the best we could, while managing our way through each day in a crisis. Our community was forgiving. Each thankful and kind post and email provided the encouragement our team needed to keep striving to make each video better. Each day, we learned something new. We were continually googling new tips and ordered new microphones, lights, and tripods.

As Holy Week quickly approached, we knew we needed to provide a beautiful, engaging liturgical experience for our community watching at home. With support from our parishioners, we were able to hire a professional film crew and livestreaming team just in time for Palm Sunday.

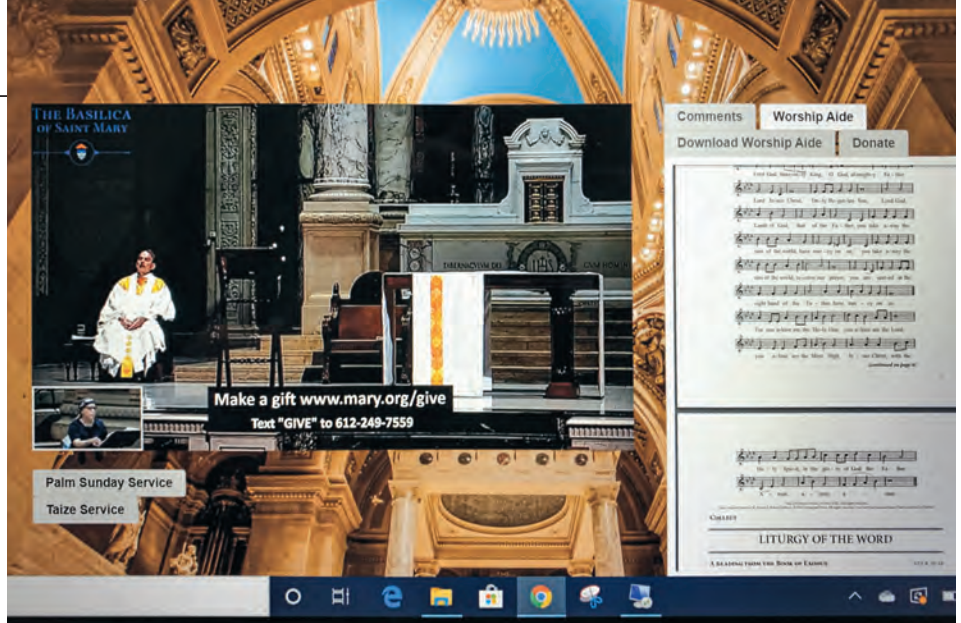
SERVING OUR COMMUNITY AT A TIME OF CRISIS

II: April–July, 2020

John Gorski and his team from QuickCast came to The Basilica the week before Palm Sunday and started mapping out camera placement and setting up their equipment. Thankfully, Gorski was very familiar with The Basilica and had been involved in music ministry in past years. This was a huge advantage, as The Basilica's space, lighting, and sound have specific challenges to address.

Watching the team work to create a beautiful liturgical experience for the small screen was incredible. We received an overwhelming reaction of support and appreciation for the livestream. We felt relief and confidence that we could produce a Holy Week experience that would meet the challenges of the extraordinary times. With no time to waste, our entire liturgy team was working urgently to finalize all of the details for a livestreamed Holy Week.

Our livestream viewers reached over 25,000 on Easter Sunday. We watched on Facebook and the website platform as views and comments came in from all over the United States and the world. As was pictured in our last issue of *BASILICA* Magazine, the Archbishop blessed the City of Minneapolis in a snow-storm, and we were able to share it with thousands of people. It was not the Easter



we had originally planned, but it was still an exceptional Easter experience.

After Easter, we planned to continue contracting with QuickCast to film each Sunday, as we started planning to purchase our own livestream equipment. This process started with collecting proposals from several local installers and working with a specialized technical consultant. Bringing in a higher level of expertise in this area helped to address our specific needs for the system.



As we planned to take over the livestreaming process, we mapped out a staffing plan to have team members trained to produce our live-stream entirely in-house, without outside technical support. The new system

needed to meet our quality standards and be user-friendly enough for our Basilica staff to successfully utilize. It was a tall order, and it took months to sort out all the details.

There were some major delays along the way. Most of the camera equipment factories in China had been shut down due to the pandemic, creating a global shortage during a time when the demand for livestreaming cameras and equipment was skyrocketing. Fortunately, QuickCast was able to continue on each week as we waited for our equipment to arrive. Once our equipment was delivered, our selected installer brought in the crew to start

working. They laid down hundreds of feet of cabling and spent days setting up cameras, computers, monitors, and switch boards.

During this time, we continued to film weekday Mass in the Sacristy with an iPhone, working to continually enhance the experience for our community. Our weekday Mass virtual attendees created an online community that has thrived, posting messages of encouragement and appreciation for our presidents and staff. Many people have told us that they could not have attended Noon Mass in person, but are now able to join online and have grown in faith by being able to experience Mass each day.

SUPPORTING OUR MISSION AND VALUES IN NEW WAYS

III: July–September, 2020

In early July, our new camera equipment installation was complete and our first staff training was held on July 8. From there our team jumped in and started training everyday. We filmed our first weekday Mass in the main church on July 15. This was an exciting day, as it was also the first public Mass at The Basilica since mid-March. Throughout that week, our team continued to practice filming. We contracted with QuickCast one final Sunday Mass on July 17 and then transitioned to our staff team completely.

Our staff team filmed our first Sunday Mass at 9:30AM on July 26. As a member of the team, we felt a huge sense of accomplishment. We had launched new technology, equipment, and started serving

Continued



Top: Livestreaming screen with QuickCast Summer of 2020; Left: Livestreaming Noon Mass from the Sacristy early in the pandemic.

our community in an entirely new way in a matter of months. We could feel the outpouring of support and appreciation throughout our staff and parishioners with over 700 live attendees between both our mary.org platform and Facebook.

Our team continues to make adjustments and learn new techniques every day. We continually have to update platforms, work through Facebook integration updates, adjust camera angles, and make sound and lighting adjustments. Filming live with six cameras creates a huge set of challenges. The team at the camera board has to be ready to anticipate every movement on the altar.

Our liturgy team has worked to adapt liturgical movements and music ministry to accommodate camera angles and lighting. “Providing the best liturgical experience for our community participating at home,” our Director of Liturgy, Johan van Parys, stated, “has been quite the learning curve for our entire team. Our greatest concern from the beginning has been to assure that people who are at home feel connected to what is happening in The Basilica, not just as spectators but as participants. To that end we must not only celebrate the liturgy well, but we also must take into account camera angles and location for our celebrant, lectors, and musicians. The quality of the cameras is, of course, very important, but the way in which we use them is what makes us attain our stated goal.”

Throughout the summer, we continued to reach new milestones and serve our Basilica community in new ways. We livestreamed our first Baptism Mass on July 26, our first funeral July 31, and our first wedding August 7. This has been a wonderful service to offer our families, given that attendance for these services is limited for social distancing health and safety protocols.

We reopened for our first Sunday Mass on August 2 at 11:30AM. We limited the number of pre-registrations to 50 and had 42 attendees. Singing was limited to a cantor and small ensemble, out of abundance of caution, to limit any virus spread.



Basilica staff member Cathy Edwards livestreaming Noon Mass.

BUILDING OUR LIVESTREAM MINISTRY IV: The Future

We plan to continue to livestream the Sunday 9:30AM and Weekday Noon Masses and prayer services even once our life at The Basilica resumes on whatever level that may be in the future. We see this new ministry as an opportunity to reach beyond The Basilica walls and welcome people in new ways to our community.

We closely monitor our viewer analytics each week and continue to set goals for further engagement with our home attendees.

The message and responses from those who cannot return to attending Mass in person for the foreseeable future are encouraging and help us to continue to grow and enhance our livestream ministry. We are so thankful to our community for supporting the investment in this ministry and the possibilities it creates for the future. ✚

Mae Desaire is the Director of Marketing and Communications.

Experiencing Mass at Home

Karla Edin

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to feel like I’m still a part of The Basilica community even though we can’t physically gather together. Watching Sunday Mass has been a point of grounding and connection during times when I’ve felt unmoored and days have blurred together. The high quality of the music and homilies has reminded me why I choose to call The Basilica my spiritual home. I miss being able to serve our community as an usher and Eucharistic minister very much, but without those responsibilities I’ve had time and space to participate in the liturgy in a new and more focused way, even if it is from my living room!”

Mary Noble

“Grateful is the feeling that comes to mind when I think of The Basilica’s livestream of daily and Sunday Masses. As an active volunteer at

The Basilica, I felt lost when the church closed to the public. Fortunately, our leadership was open to reaching out to the congregation through Facebook and computer livestream. My having access to daily Mass helped give me daily grounding from the stresses and events around me. Thanks so much for providing this wonderful service to the members of our Basilica family.”

Bob Welch

“We have watched several different livestream Masses during COVID-19 and to us The Basilica’s felt more like real church. The production was quite good with various camera shots of those in the Mass as well as the beauty of The Basilica. The focus on the music, especially during the Eucharist, was enjoyable and appreciated. We also liked that the Act of Spiritual Communion was read aloud.”