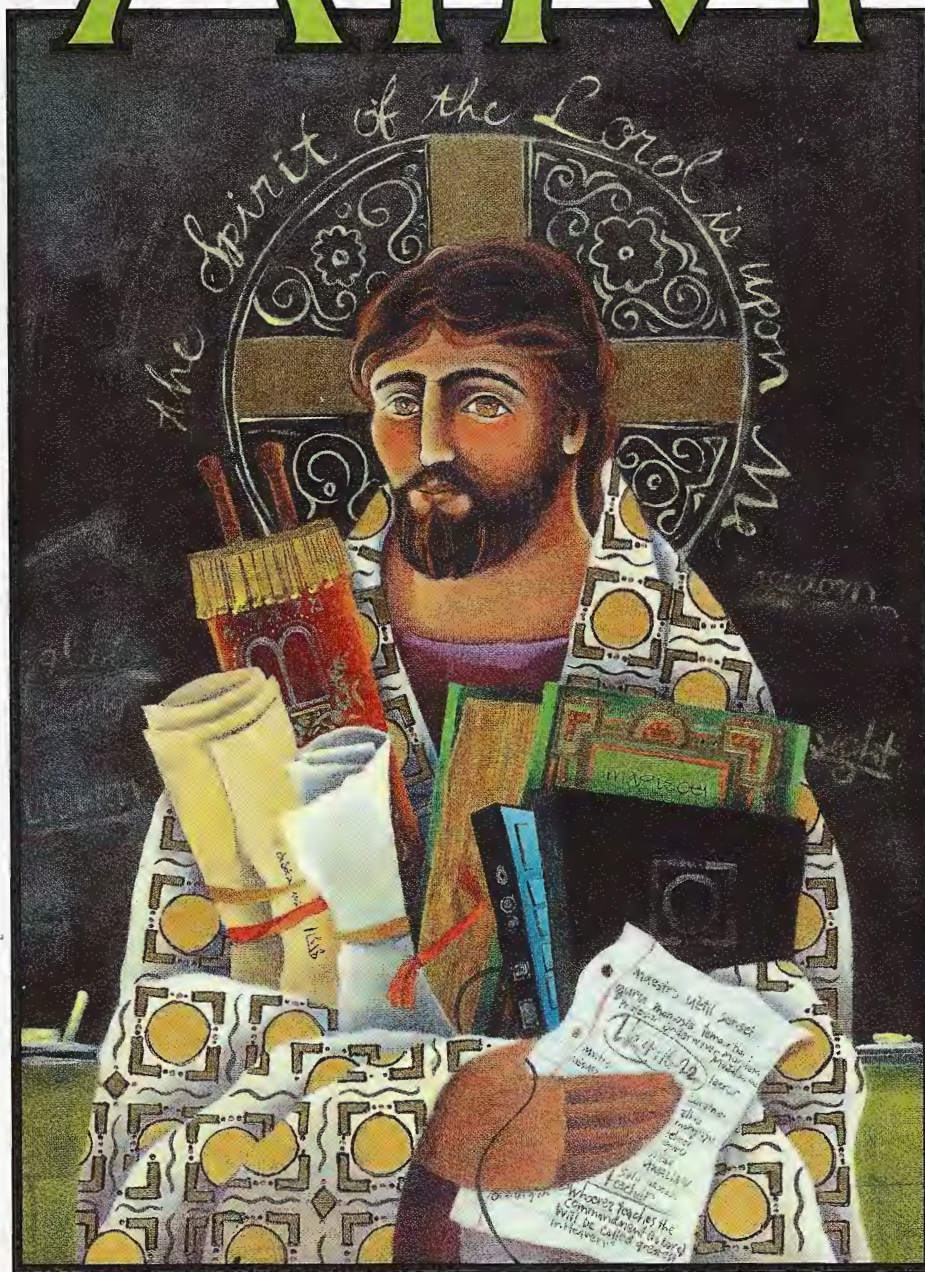


LITURGY  
RESOURCES

RECURSOS  
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# AIMM



## To Screen or Not to Screen

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# TO SCREEN OR NOT TO SCREEN?

*Multimedia Presentations:  
Another View  
of Parish Liturgy*

BY JILL MARIA MURDY





**W**hen I began my current ministry position five years ago, the church was finishing a major renovation project. Though it was included in the long-range plan, nothing was done to the sound system. "Why didn't they take care of that then?" I wondered. But with hindsight my view changed from "What a nightmare" to "O happy fault." Last year, when it was time to pursue updating the audio system, several years of working with the parish had offered me a different perspective on the entire task.

The first time including multi-media screens was first mentioned, my reaction was, "Not in my church, not in my lifetime!" But through prayer, reflection, and study, I have moved from dislike and fear to embracing the concept. We just completed the installation of a state-of-the-art system that went far beyond the idea of a PowerPoint® projector and a screen to include a pan-tilt camera, broadcasting capabilities, computer input, and DVD recording and playback. I would like to share the process of how we got there, and observations made along the way.

#### Doing the homework

The first step was gathering an ad hoc committee, made up of representatives from the parish's musical ensembles and concerned parishioners. The current sound system had been limping along for a long time. We generated a glorious wish list of everything we wanted in a system, and then whittled our way back to reality. When the idea of screens came up again, I listened. I found more logic in what I was hearing, and we decided to explore the possibilities when we met with several audiovisual companies.

There are a lot of sound companies out there, but designing a multimedia system for a sports arena or megachurch with a performance-based liturgy is very different from what we needed. It was imperative that we work with a company that would:

- respect and understand sound Roman Catholic liturgical principles,
- respect the aesthetics and architectural integrity of the worship space,
- provide the necessary follow-up service and support,
- be good stewards of our existing equipment, and
- be willing to create a multi-phased project if budget constraints required.

Once we engaged a firm, I continued to read and research, talk with other churches, and take field trips to observe the use of technology. Considerations seemed to fall into categories of liturgy, stewardship, community building, and education. While every situation is unique, here is what we discovered.

#### Liturgical implications

*Built of Living Stones*, the Catholic directive that deals with architecture, art, and environment, includes the following instruction for new church construction, and could be applicable in this situation as well:

§233. Provision for electronic media should be incorporated into the initial design of a new building. These should fit into the architectural design and should be made inconspicuous. Consideration should be given to the effect of light on projected images.

To me, discovering Church documentation supporting use of technology was critical. It gave me the firm foundation to build on, as well as something concrete to show the nay-sayers.



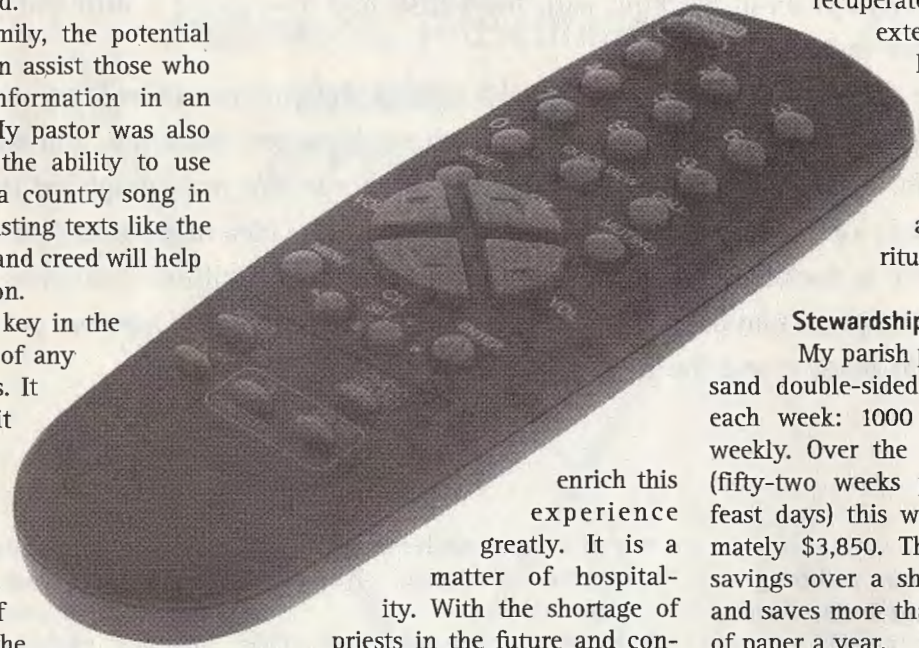
Our church currently has one hymnal in the pew, but we purchase copyrights to all the major publishers. Broadcasting lyrics and/or music on the screens affords us the freedom to use musical selections from multiple resources and make better musical selections to fit the liturgy. My experience is already proving that people sing out more when they are looking at screens rather than holding a hymnal or order of worship. Large letters are also more considerate of those who are visually impaired.

During the homily, the potential for bullet points can assist those who do not process information in an auditory fashion. My pastor was also enthusiastic about the ability to use a movie scene or a country song in his homily. Broadcasting texts like the responsorial psalm and creed will help increase participation.

Architecture is key in the placement and use of any screens or monitors. It will certainly limit and direct your project as well. Some parishes choose to project the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist on the screens, and others utilize a blank screen or a simple image that will not detract at these times. For very special liturgies, the spoken word might be combined with visual art. For example, during the Easter Vigil, showing images of each day while telling the Creation story could be powerful. In a multicultural liturgy, the scripture text could be shown in one language while it is being proclaimed in another. Sometimes baptisms are very hard to see unless you are right there. Placing them on the screens might help the entire congregation really enter in to the celebration.

Many parishes use a basement or hall for overflow crowds at Christmas and Easter. Video and audio could

**In a multicultural liturgy, the scripture text could be shown in one language while it is being proclaimed in another.**



enrich this experience greatly. It is a matter of hospitality. With the shortage of priests in the future and consolidated parishes, fewer and fuller Masses will become the norm. Video would allow those in overflow spaces to involve themselves more fully in the liturgy through song and sight.

The outreach potential for a complete system is vast. Currently, we create an audiotape of the Sunday liturgy for many homebound parishioners. While it does not replace attending services, a DVD could provide a more fulfilling experience. You could do a direct or delayed feed to local cable for people who are homebound, place homilies on the Web, or allow those who cannot attend liturgy to engage in "God casts" via iPods®. Remember, though, that there are huge copyright considerations. So think through your decisions

thoroughly! Also, you need to be of these guidelines: <http://www.org/liturgy/current/tv.shtml>.

Consider special liturgies moment. Recording funerals could be a nice gesture for those family members unable to attend. Frequentives say they wish they could see the homily again later when they are living with the grief and trying to process it. Recording weddings, confirmations, and First Communion liturgies could create both a potential for recuperate the costs of an extensive system and help the event be more liturgical by eliminating the personal that can be an obstructive ritual action.

#### **Stewardship implications**

My parish prints about a thousand double-sided orders of worship each week: 1000 x 7 cents = \$7,000 weekly. Over the course of the year (fifty-two weeks plus three or four feast days) this would total approximately \$3,850. This is a substantial savings over a short period of time and saves more than a hundred pounds of paper a year.

Although current hymnals have a few good years left in them, to replace a thousand pew editions would cost approximately \$13,000. Projecting hymn texts will also solve the problem of how to involve those in overflow areas who do not have access to hymnals. As I see it, based on these two cost factors alone, the video production of the system will pay for itself in less than ten years.

I am one of those liturgists who do not like to print orders of worship till the last second because I found that too often "life happens." Because of the computer's flexibility one can have a PowerPoint® prepared in advance and still have the flexibility for last-minute changes. This is



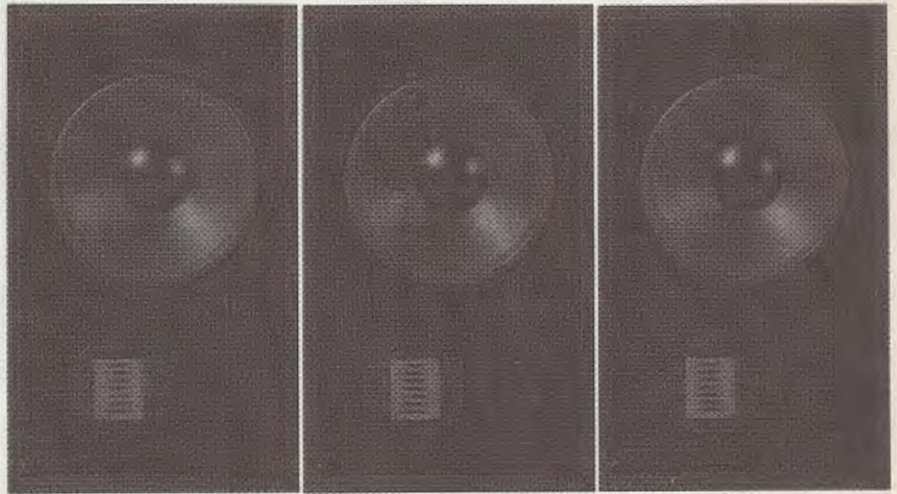
stewardship because it saves wear and tear on your liturgist, support staff, and volunteers!

Initially, funding was approved for the audio portion of our project and the video aspect was put on hold, but after much discernment I approached the finance committee again and asked them to approve the entire design plan. When requesting the additional funds I put it this way: "Although we say that liturgy is our 'source and summit' [*Lumen Gentium*], we spend money on school and religious ed but very little on liturgy itself. The liturgy portion is a small piece of the pie in the parish budget. We have 2,300 families, six thousand members. Four thousand people attend weekend liturgies. What I'm asking you to do is spend ten dollars a person for one weekend. This is a one-time investment that will be used for the next twenty years!"

This simple and clear analogy cut through the red tape. What seemed like a major decision was suddenly not nearly as big an issue. (It was also interesting to note that the first weekend the new audio system was in use, donations increased substantially because people were so pleased with the improved quality of the sound.)



## Taping a liturgy or rehearsal allows a choir director to play it back for critique and helps in training liturgical ministers.



### Community building

So far we have talked about how the tools may be utilized within the liturgy, but there is enormous potential for the screens in other capacities. Before Mass, it would be very easy to have a video loop playing a variety of things including the parish mission statement, pertinent weekly announcements, and the Lectionary readings for reflection.

Incorporate items that typically appear on bulletin boards, such as introducing new members and highlights from the activities that took place in the parish this week in the school and the congregation. In a large faith community a common complaint is that people feel they do not know their neighbors or what is going on within the parish. Highlight a ministry each week.

### Educational opportunities

Taping a liturgy or rehearsal allows a choir director to play it back for critique and helps in training liturgical ministers. If a parish is considering changing something like extraordinary minister of Communion procedures, being able to watch the current practice, discuss it, and analyze it is invaluable. If other events take place in the worship space, they will surely benefit from the audiovisual enrichments as well.

### Future considerations

Before using advanced media capabilities within your liturgies, there are many questions to ask. First of all, who will operate this new equipment? Some churches hire professional media ministers. This may all fall under the liturgist's job description, or a media committee may be developed. Perhaps this



is a wonderful niche for some of your more "techy" members or a responsible teenager. Contemporary media art is also a wonderful way to reach out to a younger generation. Initially there will be a lot of additional work for the liturgist in developing detailed scripts, creating templates, and rehearsing before major liturgies. It would not be difficult to tie together media presentations with the parish bulletin and Web site for a consistent parish look and feel. Advertising calls this "branding" and it can create subtle ties.

Begin slowly. I repeat, begin slowly, and do not be afraid to err on the side of caution as you use the media technology. One could liken it to buying a new Steinway. Just because you get it home and in your living room does not mean you are immediately going to be able to play a Rachmaninoff concerto! Using the tools well takes talent, discipline, and practice for the operator, and practice for the congregation. It takes a bit of adjusting before you pray well as a community using the new equipment. You will learn by trial and error, but thorough planning saves frustration for everyone.

Develop a policy of use. This, too, will require some serious consideration. How much of the liturgy do you want to show on screens? Are you balancing prayer and performance? Are you using technology to enhance the liturgy, or are you turning it into a show? It's a little like the monster truck syndrome—adding chrome and bells and whistles. Just because you have the capability to do something does not mean you should! Bouncing texts, poor clip art, and too many special effects are just tacky. Typos are magnified!

If your situation has live Internet access you need to exercise tremendous caution if you are using teen volunteers and double check the accuracy of any links, or you may find yourself showing something

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extremely inappropriate in church! Make sure there are parental control locks on any computer that may have Web access.

Drawing up a written policy will save you from awkward situations and force you to think through things concretely. During wedding planning, I guarantee you will run into Biff and Buffy, who will want to show a video of how they met and how awesome their love is. You will have to work to

convince them that this is some for the reception, not the wedding liturgy. Similarly, many people PowerPoint® tributes for loved ones at funerals. Is that something that stays at the funeral home? Or will it allow a running loop during the reception? Or is it played one time five minutes before the funeral? The challenge of being pastoral and liturgical comes into play.

I would recommend anyone using screen options to read Qu J. Schultze's *High-Tech Worship: Using Presentational Technology Wisely* (Baker Publishing, 2004) or Eileen Crowley's *Liturgical Art and Media Culture*. "Media, Use of, and Liturgy" by Thomas Kane in *The Dictionary of Sacramental Theology* provides a concise overview of the pitfalls.

#### Meeting the challenge

Do not forget to communicate. If you explain to your parish what is happening and ask for their feedback, you will find them supportive with some great suggestions. Some people will react negatively to change, especially in an area as personal as religion and faith. Consider the new technology to be inappropriate.

We are not trying to characterize or reinvent the liturgy. Just as we are comparable of the talents, we are not to apply what we have been given to the best of our ability. The Church and religion have never shied away from technology. Some of the most ancient technology. Some of the most ancient are cave drawings and early cuneiform dealt with religious themes. The first book printed on a movable type press was the Gutenberg Bible. Broadcasts of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen are still touching people today. There would be no lights, no organ, and no microphones without technology. Our challenge is to embrace advanced media techniques in an educated fashion and use them