PARISH COMMUNICATION

TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

GOOD NEWS #1:
No need to create. Phew! Take a breath! It is not up to you to create fresh content for your parishioners.

With over 100 Catholic YouTube Channels (over 3,000 videos), 150 Catholic podcasts, 100 Catholic apps, and countless ministries pushing out daily emails (not to mention blogs), there is plenty of content. It is like a fire-hose out there.

GOOD NEWS #2:
Parishioners are hungry for content but overwhelmed by, or unaware of, what is out there. They need a trusted partner to pick the 1–2 things they should listen to out of the sea of options. This is a new opportunity for parishes.

GOOD NEWS #3:
Digital content is easy to forward and share, which makes evangelization so much easier for people not comfortable with traditional "Let me tell you about my faith" approaches. They can easily content with siblings, teen kids, adult kids, spouses, colleagues, and friends. Imagine the possible impact.

GOOD NEWS #4:
Software exists to make this easier to manage. Most parishes already have a variety of communication channels; namely, emails, text messages, bulletins, websites, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, MyParish app and others. The efficacy of these channels depends, in part, on the right management tools. Flocknote and Evangelus are two great options.

5 MISTAKES TO AVOID IN PARISH COMMUNICATION

1.   OOPS...WE HAVE NO GOAL:

Spending money and time on staff & software without a clear communication goal. No bueno.

2.   DON'T WORRY; SOFTWARE WILL SOLVE IT:

Thinking that software will solve your problems. It may help, but it is just a tool. How you use it is the key. Even poor software used well can do amazing things. But great software used poorly will not.

3.   OH, WE ARE TOO BUSY TO GET INVOLVED:

Our secretary can "do communication/media". Leadership, where art thou? Not driving excellence in communication as a leader. Not tracking what is being communicated or if it is working. You are delegating to an admin person and hoping it works.

4.   DON'T DO THAT; PEOPLE WILL GET ANNOYED:

If what we communicate is life-changing, then we need to shout. It is noisy out there. Post, text, email. It's okay. Don't hold back because you think people will get annoyed.

5.   IT'S ABOUT USING AS MANY CHANNELS AS POSSIBLE:

This shotgun approach is demotivating because it is hard to excel in any of them. With clear goals, it usually becomes easier to achieve them with only a few channels. It is about impact, not activity.

At the end of the day, like the apostles, we are in the communication business. Do we know the groups we want to communicate with? Do we know what we want to communicate? Do we care?

If you do not have a Parish Communication Team (or something similar that involves leadership), feel free to contact us at "sharedwisdom@theconnectedparish.com". We will send you our free PDF on "How to Manage Communications in a Parish."

FLOCKNOTE vs. EVANGELUS

Many types of software support communication in some way (examples include Constant Contact, Survey Monkey, Hub Spot, Canva, etc.) but Flocknote and Evangelus are leading the drive for parish-specific solutions.

Flocknote is the "purist," as all they do is this software. Over 10,000 churches (non-Catholic and Catholic) use their software for sending texts and emails. Flocknote is a top service-focused company that makes it easy for staff to learn how to use the software and has partnered with different groups (like Bishop Barron's Word on Fire) to help provide content for delivery.

Evangelus, on the other hand, is part of the well-known publisher Diocesan (Diocesan Publications and Trinity Publications), which has been offering a wide range of services since 1956. Evangelus is the latest addition to their product range.

Key Attribute Comparison
(Software changes constantly. The attributes below are as of Feb. 1, 2022)

KEY FUNCTION	FLOCKNOTE	EVANGELUS
Email	✓	✓
Text	✓	✓
Social media	✓	✓
My Parish App integration		✓
Built-in basic surveys	✓	
Event registration	✓	
2-way communication	✓	✓
Templates/Design support	✓	✓
Content partners (example: Word on Fire)	✓	
Allows Ministry Leaders to manage their own groups	✓	✓
Text to sign up	✓	✓
Messaging analytics (open rate, etc.)	✓	✓
Scheduled communication	✓	✓
Web-based (no software install)	✓	✓
Spanish Friendly	✓	
Safe environment	✓	✓
Free trial (up to 40 members)	✓	
250 members	$50/month	$75/month
500 members	$63/month	$75/month
1,000 members	$90/month	$75/month

CONCLUSION:
Unless you have a clear commitment and process to manage communication, it doesn't matter which software you use. But if you do have a clear commitment and process, you will be successful with either Flocknote or Evangelus. They are both easy to use.

Q and A
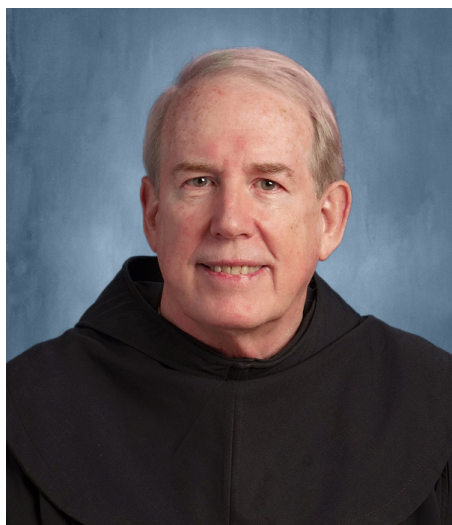
Flocknote

with **FR. GEORGE CORRIGAN**
St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church
Triangle, VA

Q: Which Text/Email software did you use?
A: We used Flocknote.

Q: Why did you decide to use this specific Text/Email software?
A: Prior to becoming a Franciscan friar and a priest, I had served in nuclear submarines and worked in the information technology sector here in the United States and Europe. In each of those environments the ability to communicate was paramount. I then served as a lay missionary in the slums of Kenya where communication was as challenging as it gets; you relied completely on announcements and word of mouth. And then I began serving in parishes here in the United States. Communication was far closer to my experience in Kenya. My first parish was completely reliant on the bulletin, end-of-Mass announcements, and eventually mass emails - this was in the 21st century. We were equipped to talk "at" people," but our communication was reliant on face-to-face (and phone) word of mouth.

When I became pastor at that same parish, I brought onboard an individual to animate parish communications. Very quickly we discovered and signed up for Flocknote. The features that were critical were connectivity to mobile devices (text messages, emails, and newsletters), the freedom to organize groups that met the parish needs, the analytics, and the tools available for the emails that allowed branding and "splash" on first view.

The 40-member free version allowed us to explore the full capability and most importantly to get the parish staff to a level of comfort and growing expertise on the capabilities and ways to use within their ministries so that we had a base of group admins before the parish wide launch. We were also an early adopter of Flocknote People which just added more capability. Pastors, Flocknote People is a must in my view.

Our goal was to become a parish that could truly communicate with staff, volunteers, and parishioners. Flocknote gave us the integrated suite of tools to do just that.

Q: How has Text/E-mail software helped your parish become more vibrant?
A: In my first parish, the majority of parishioners did not live within the parish boundaries. We were not a "neighborhood" parish in which other local activities could help form relationships. While we had many initiatives to enliven the downtown parish when we assumed leadership from another religious order, we were dwindling in parishioners, located in a downtown that had seen better days, and had no parking. It was one thing to have initiatives to address all these things, but our most impactful was our "Belonging" initiative. Flocknote was in place to support our messaging and to deliver it into the "hands" of our parishioners, literally, the hands. 86% percent of our parishioners' primary means of connection is mobile phones.

Q: What tips would you give to other priests looking to implement/ use the software?
A: Having rolled out Flocknote in two parishes, my suggestion is to first build the team among your most committed stakeholders - fellow priests, staff, and ministry leaders/members. Work with them to establish your groups, train them in the features/ functions/abilities of Flocknote, and work them to move out of start-up to regular use. In both parishes this meant a committed group of 400 or more stakeholders on the Flocknote team - who are using the full capabilities of the product to communicate.

The "word of mouth" then becomes "when are we going to get it" from the parishioners at large who quickly hear about this product.

Then when we do "sign up Sunday", the roll out to the whole parish, there is a whole cadre of expert users to answer questions, and sign people up on the spot - and with the full list of ministries, groups, and more - the sign up can become a virtual ministry fair.

Q: What has surprised you most about using Flocknote specifically?
A: Prior to becoming a priest I had worked extensively in the software development sector. We developed custom solutions and integration for our clients. The key to follow-on work with that client and in the sector is a good solution meeting the client needs and then client/end-user support. As an integrator I have lots of experience with help desk and product support. Some abysmal, most good, some very good, but none anywhere near the Happiness Engineers at Flocknote. It helps that their product is intuitive, but their responsiveness to inquiries is excellent from startup, new feature launch, to on-going support. When you think about: they practice what they preach. They understand that true communication is intrinsic to their business, their ministry and their success.

SMALL CHANGES
BIG IMPACT

How one small change at the Basilica of St Augustine grew the annual RCIA group

INTERVIEW WITH DEACON DOUG NULLET

Before the change, how many people went through the RCIA?
When I arrived, the average for the last five years was around 2–3 new RCIA members a year.

What change did you make?
Rolling, year-round enrollment. It was that simple. We used to have a fixed date for joining RCIA, and we changed it to rolling enrollment.

How did that impact the numbers?
Within a year of the change, we increased RCIA participation from 2–3 a year to 15–20 a year. To put this into perspective, as measured by different metrics like giving, attendance, Flocknote sign-up, etc., we have about 250 "core parishioners" (people who attend weekly or daily). Typically, each RCIA member will be part of that core. We are effectively growing our "core parishioners" by 5–10 percent every year. That is significant!

Why do you think this happened?
It is simple. Whenever anybody called me and asked, "When does RCIA begin?", I simply said, "You are in luck; it starts tomorrow." That avoided people having to wait, changing their mind, or losing interest.

What changes did this force on the parish?
It forced us to engage the clergy with the RCIA process rather than relying just on Catechists or private formation. There are several Rites of Welcome throughout the year.

How did this impact the parish as a whole?
The impact has been huge. The parishioners have loved seeing fresh faces being dismissed on a weekly basis. Energy begets energy and, as we all know, converts to our faith bring fresh energy and a desire to impact the parish through taking leadership positions and giving. Furthermore, they are able to invite people to RCIA who are outside of the traditional "cradle Catholic" network.

Did this cost a lot of money? Did it impact the budget?
No. The extra costs are minimal.

How did it impact the staff time or volunteers?
Clergy has been tasked to be more involved, but that is why we were ordained!

What is your favorite part of this?
In a parish, we face a lot of challenges. Seeing 15–20 people a year running towards God (not shuffling towards God, but running!) is awesome. It makes it all worthwhile. It makes me smile and rediscover why I ran towards God to begin with.