

Synod of the Trinity Technology Grant Update from Slippery Rock Presbyterian Church in Ellwood City, PA, a part of Shenango Presbytery.

Much thanks is extended to the Synod of the Trinity for the Technology Grants offered to those throughout the Synod.

Progress report:

1. We have had exceptional “buy-in” from the congregation. Matching funds for the grant were obtained without even asking from several members of the congregation, particularly because they were aware that their family members were watching, many of whom have never found home churches in their adult life. In fact, before the grant was received, the commitment was made to upgrade the equipment whether the grant was received or not. Since we are a small congregation, the grant is a blessing.
2. The equipment was ordered and received without issue by the beginning of August. It took about a month to make physical adaptations to the building to run cable from the computer to the new camera and likewise to the sound system. It took until the beginning of September to get the new software installed on the computer, make adjustments and have upgraded broadcasting go live.
3. And then the challenges began. We have experienced numerous issues with the sound dropping from the Facebook Live broadcast. (I even put in a request to you for some suggestions about resources available). We have tried numerous fixes, including running a Facebook Live one afternoon to see if we could replicate the problem. We have never been able to replicate the issue outside of the church. The during-the-service fix is to go back to the pastor’s laptop to broadcast the remainder of the service. Our most recent fix attempt is in process; consulting with the tech folks at Best Buy, the suggestion was made to get a new laptop with a higher amount of RAM. Since we had already identified the necessity to have the broadcast run on a separate computer from the projector, we purchased a second laptop with a higher amount of RAM. This is where the aforementioned generosity of the congregation in conjunction with the Synod grant is a blessing. That continues to be in process because of the additional need to purchase an adapter to make the connections work. An additional possible fix has been identified if this higher RAM is not a good fix, which would be purchasing a longer cable to run from the sound system to the scarlet solo box so as to decrease the number of connector/adaptors necessary.
4. This process has been very frustrating and stressful. The congregation has been remarkably patient when the transition from the new system back to a laptop broadcast has been made. The commitment has been made; the congregation is in this for the long haul. Another church member recently asked if additional funds were necessary to help out.
5. I am currently working on my Doctor of Ministry through PTS in Pittsburgh. My June class ended up being totally virtual because of the virus. One class was focused on the interaction of technology and the church, a very timely course. My project for the class was to look at this process analytically as well as to take a look at how the congregation has used and accepted technology through an examination of the session minutes as well as in person conversations. A brief summary of those results. Historically, the congregation has done things themselves and it is a multi-month drawn-out process to accomplish things. The use of a projector in the sanctuary was a major production and shift with a caveat that it was ONLY to be used for announcements

and children's things. Life has changed in some ways and not in other ways. The congregation still is fiercely independent, doing things as much as possible on their own. On the other hand, they have moved into the usage of the projector for the order of worship without problem.

6. In summary, we are still in process; I am attempting to keep both in-person and online people engaged throughout the challenges we are experiencing. It should be noted that in spite of the vast resources of the internet, there really are not a lot of resources available to small organizations attempting to navigate the waters of technology successfully. Larger organizations can hire someone to come in and do it for them. For the many smaller congregations that dot the western Pennsylvania countryside, this is not as doable. Looking ahead, I actually am optimistic that Slippery Rock Pres can come alongside other congregations that wish to make the transition to virtual worship, learning from our mistakes and our struggles. I suppose that's because I do believe that we will solve our issues and have a consistently viable, remarkably professional looking service to broadcast. This happens when the church "buys in" to the concept. I can also add as a sidenote, that without the COVID-19 happenings, I do not think that this congregation would have been able to make the leap from past forms of worship to more contemporary outreach and mission, a circumstance that I believe applies to many congregations not only throughout our presbytery but also throughout the Synod.

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