

REPORT
of the
COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

October 15, 2025

The Communications Team for the Diocese of Pittsburgh is pleased to report that it has accomplished a major part of its mission. The Team was first convened with Bishop Ketlen Solak on January 23, 2025. Its members include Jon Delano (chair), Carolyn Dillon, Marty Federowicz, Canon Mary Jayne Ledgerwood, Andy Muhl (diocesan director of communications & technology), Canon Joann Saylor (diocesan canon for mission, vitality & administration), and Rick Stachel.

At the outset, we want to thank the many clergy, wardens, deputies, parishioners, and church staff who met with us over the last five months. Without your help, this initiative would never have been possible.

The Mission:

At its initial meeting, the Team defined its mission as follows:

- (1) To evaluate current communications methods at the diocese and the parishes, including the cathedral;
- (2) To recommend and propose improvements, alternatives and upgrades; and
- (3) To recommend structures, implementation methods and help to facilitate the implementation of these communication recommendations.

The Approach:

In a somewhat unorthodox approach because of the time commitment, the Team concluded that the best way to facilitate the goals outlined above was to have **individual meetings** (up to one hour) with the communication leaders at **each** of the parishes in the diocese – **one at a time**. While this is extremely time intensive, it was judged that this was the best way to evaluate current communication methods, recommend improvements, and facilitate implementation of those recommendations on an individual, parish by parish, basis **all at the same time**.

Consequently, Jon Delano & Andy Muhl (occasionally joined by another Team member) met with over 110 individuals from 31 parishes over five months for a comprehensive discussion focused on how parishes communicate with their congregants and local communities and how the diocese could do a better job communicating. [A list of those parishes is found in Addendum A].

Each parish was contacted early this year by email from Jon to their rector or priest-in-charge, their wardens, and their deputies to Diocesan Convention. Each parish named the participants for the one-hour zoom meeting, and this often included a full or part-time office administrator, secretary, or staff member. The key was to include the person(s) most knowledgeable about communications.

The Focus:

Our Team developed with help from Rick Stachel a Discussion Guide [see Addendum B] that we shared and used to elicit open and honest conversation about communications. Again, the goal was to learn the communication methods and preferences of each parish, make suggestions for improvement, and then (in many cases) arrange for Andy to help implement those improvements in subsequent meetings.

Our second major goal, as described below, was to critique how the diocese communicates, to promote “Grace Happens” (which requires individual free subscription by parishioners), and to elicit potential “stories” of church and community outreach efforts that could be shared across the diocese.

Initial Findings on Parish Communications:

- 1) This is an incredibly diverse diocese when it comes to parishes and their ability and methods of communicating with parishioners and their local communities. Some very small congregations simply communicate orally at services, while others use an entire panoply of media (websites, emails, newsletters, social media, livestream, etc.).
- 2) Most parishes have some form of email communication, either using a weekly or monthly e-newsletter or sending out, more casually, an email to a group of parishioners with announcements. Given a small number of parishioners, a few churches are experimenting with text messages. Some parishes still create “hard copy” newsletters of their e-newsletters for those without internet communication.

- 3) Facebook is a popular method of communicating at many parishes, although not all. The challenge is to keep content fresh and current. While we found the number of followers on FB often exceeded congregational numbers, there was not always a lot of interaction among followers. Most believe FB is a method to communicate within parishes but developing content that FB followers can share will broaden the reach of this social media option.
- 4) Many parishes have usable websites, but some do not. Most agree that websites must contain up-to-date service information (e.g., times, dates, nature of services) visible on the front page. That's because websites are often used by "outsiders" seeking information about area churches. Unfortunately, we found many websites with outdated information and old inaccurate content. At least a couple larger parishes use its website as the main vehicle for communication, noting that almost all announcements made elsewhere are posted to the website.
- 5) With respect to other forms of social media, except for YouTube (often used to post & save live streams of services or church events), we found very few parishes, if any, who used Instagram, X, Threads, Snapchat, TikTok, WhatsApp, etc. While some say these may be a better way to meet younger people, they are not utilized in this diocese.
- 6) Improving the visibility of a parish in a particular community often depends on its ability to use social media and its capability of "live streaming" its services. Some parishes have significant community outreach programs that get promoted via FB or a webpage. Most do not.
- 7) Another form of visibility is the exterior signage at a particular church. While a few have electronic signs, most do not. Some churches felt they could use an upgrade in their signage. While some churches are on main thoroughfares, others are hidden away and could use locational signs. We also discussed the use of temporary posters or banners to promote special services or events. Finally, some churches have community newspapers or neighborhood e-newsletters that welcome information about their activities.
- 8) One of the major challenges to parish communication is staffing. We found only a very few parishes have one designated person responsible for coordinating all forms of communication, usually a paid staffer. Most have several people involved, including priests, deacons, volunteer parishioners, paid staff people, or anyone willing to take on a particular communication task. That often means the person doing the weekly e-newsletter is not the person doing FB or the website. What drives content could be the

rector or priest-in-charge, a warden, a staff person, or a devoted volunteer – or all the above. Most parishes are simply not large enough or financially capable of affording a single communication coordinator.

Initial Findings on Diocesan Communications:

- 1) Most parishioners do not identify with the Diocese of Pittsburgh, except through the bishop and her annual visits to their church. This is not unusual. Congregants are focused on their own church, its clergy, lay leaders, and members. The diocese is remote, amorphous, and basically unknown to many, especially in terms of its functions and leaders (beyond the bishop).
- 2) Almost everyone we interviewed identified “Grace Happens” as the chief method of communication by the Diocese. It is seen as the primary vehicle by which news of other parishes is shared, along with information on diocesan events, personnel changes, and messages from the bishop.
- 3) Since “Grace Happens” is subscription only albeit free, many parishioners never see it. In some meetings, half the participants acknowledged not getting the publication (which is emailed twice-a-month to subscribers). While the bishop promotes sign-ups during her visits, there was universal agreement to do more through parish communications to provide a regular link to “Grace Happens.” One suggestion was for the bishop to hand out cards to all parishioners when she visits that include the Grace Happens link and QR code.
- 4) We had a wide range of suggestions for “Grace Happens,” including (1) reflective messages from the bishop, including some on current events; (2) news articles about interesting developments at parishes; (3) feature pieces on diocesan initiatives like the Beloved Community; (4) reports on diocesan bodies, e.g., what exactly does the Standing Committee, Council, Board of Trustees, Commission on Ministry, etc., really do; (5) quick biographies on key personnel in the diocesan office; and (6) a feature story on what exactly a bishop does in addition to Sunday church visitations.
- 5) The Diocese does have its own Facebook page with approximately 1500 followers. It is kept generally current, but there does not appear to be much interaction among followers. As noted in #3, a link to FB might be included in the bishop’s hand-out card,

and parishes should be encouraged to provide a link and “share” diocesan stories on their own FB page.

- 6) The Diocese also has a webpage which everyone acknowledges needs upgrading. We heard criticism that the webpage was hard to use with difficulty finding key information. Andy Muhl has begun a process to improve the website, making it more user friendly. It contains a great deal of good information and content but can be a challenge to navigate. One suggestion was to encourage every parish to link to the diocesan website on their own webpage.
- 7) How is the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh perceived in the larger non-religious community? Just as we encourage local parishes to be an outward and visible sign of God’s Love, No Exceptions, in their own neighborhoods, so too we should expect that from the Diocese in the greater Pittsburgh and southwestern Pennsylvania community. This is something that will require greater focus in the year ahead.

Going Forward on Communications:

We are just at the beginning of helping parishes improve their communications as they deem best, as well as upgrading diocesan communications.

On behalf of the Communications Team, I found this experience of meeting with the communication leaders in every parish in the Diocese to be one of the most rewarding and fruitful experiences of my diocesan involvement over the many years. With the expertise of Andy Muhl, we were able to offer our insights and guidance – and, frankly, fill up Andy’s “help schedule” for months to come on individual parish communication issues – and, at the same time, receive the counsel and wisdom of local parishes on how the Diocese could do a better job in communicating.

The rector of one of our larger parishes advised that one key to successful communication is to integrate it into everything we do. “Everything we do is communication. How do we tell the story?” In other words, every time someone at a parish (or the diocese) does something, that person should simultaneously think how do I share what I am doing with others.

Jesus was pretty good at telling stories, and he didn’t have all the electronics, programs, and devices that we have in 2025. Given the great diversity in congregational size, services, outreach, and resources at our parishes, there is “no one size fits all” model. That requires the

leaders of each parish – and the Diocese – to evaluate (all the time) what is the best way to share information. But making it a priority is key!

Finally, communication methods are ever-changing. Next April, the diocese will host an event featuring an exploration of artificial intelligence, both an exciting and scary new dimension in communication. We hope every parish will be represented.

In the meantime, the Communications Team, Andy Muhl, and I are available to assist in evaluating or helping implement any communication idea you may have. This is an ongoing process, and we thank you for the chance to take part in this important initiative of Bishop Solak.

Respectfully submitted,

Jon Delano, Chair

Communications Team:

Jon Delano, chair

Carolyn Dillon

Marty Federowicz

The Rev. Canon Mary Jayne Ledgerwood

Andy Muhl, director of communications & technology

The Rev. Canon Joann Saylor, canon for mission, vitality & administration

Rick Stachel

The Right Rev. Ketlen Solak, bishop

--- Addendum A ---

PARISHES INTERVIEWED BY COMMUNICATIONS TEAM:

St. Andrew's, Highland Park (3/25)	St. Thomas, Northern Cambria (7/28)
Church of the Redeemer, Squirrel Hill (4/1)	St. Thomas, Oakmont (7/28)
St. Francis, Somerset (4/1)	Christ Church, Indiana (7/29)
St. Matthew's, Homestead (6/16)	Church of the Advent, Jeannette (7/29)
St. Stephen's, Wilkinsburg (6/18)	All Saints, Brighton Heights (8/27)
St. Peter's, Brentwood (6/23)	Trinity Cathedral, Downtown (9/2)
St. Thomas, Canonsburg (6/25)	Church of the Holy Cross, Homewood (9/3)
St. Brendan's, Franklin Park (6/26)	St. James, Penn Hills (9/4)
Church of the Atonement, Carnegie (6/30)	St. Mark's, Johnstown (9/8)
St. David's, Peters (7/3)	Church of the Nativity, Crafton (9/9)
St. Michael's, Ligonier (7/9)	St. Peter's, Blairsville (9/9)
All Souls, North Versailles (7/10)	St. Bartholomew, Scottdale (9/12)
St. Barnabas, Brackenridge (7/15)	St. Stephen's, McKeesport (9/14)
Christ Church, North Hills (7/15)	St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon (10/14)
St. Paul's, Kittanning (7/22)	Calvary, East Liberty (10/15)
Emmanuel, Northside (7/22)	

-- Addendum B --

Parish Communication Discussion Guide

Parish:

Date:

People Present:

PARISH COMMUNICATIONS

Describe the communications methods at your parish, including content, timing, updates:

Service Announcements

Newsletters

Emails

Website

Facebook & other social media

When it comes to communications, who is responsible for what? Clergy, staff, volunteers?

How do you assess your current communication methods? What works, what could be done better, what are you proud of, what seems to work best for your parish?

How has your communication changed over the last few years, and do you have plans for additional changes?

DIOCESAN COMMUNICATIONS

How could the Diocese do a better job with its own communications with parishes & parishioners?

What type of information do you include from the Diocese in your communications (Diocesan news, resources, Grace Happens, etc.)?

What would you like to see the Diocese do to improve both parish communications and its own communications?