

Archdiocese priests tap into blogging craze

Is the blogosphere ready for the clergy invasion?

Many priests in the Archdiocese of Baltimore have joined the Internet's expanding universe of opinion, chronicling their days, charting religious appearances in pop culture and even posting their homilies in Web logs, commonly referred to as blogs.

When they're not celebrating Mass or tending to parishes and schools, the men behind the collars are often posting thoughts for the world to see.

Father T. Austin Murphy started "Jesus Goes to Disney World" (<http://jesusindisney.blogspot.com>) in March, "just for kicks."

It has turned into a unique destination, where the 36-year-old campus minister at Towson University finds a Catholic connection in blockbuster movies like "Iron Man" and "Batman."

In Batman's latest adventure, "The Dark Knight," Father Murphy sees the nefarious Joker as a man with no boundaries.

"He doesn't give any solid explanation for doing what he's doing," he said of the dark clown. "Sometimes evil is just evil."

Animated films like "Wall-E," made by Disney, his blog's namesake, also provide fertile ground for analysis.

"I'm not as young as I used to be," Father Murphy said. "I can't just make a "Star Wars" reference and expect kids to know it. Disney is the one that sticks around."

As someone with a finger on the cultural pulse, Father Murphy has used his spiritual calling to enlighten his visitors, whom he calls his “cyber congregation.”

“I’m looking for ‘What does this say about our culture?’ and ‘What does our religion say about that?’ ” Father Murphy said.

St. Mary’s of Annapolis associate pastor Father Andrew Costello uses his blog, “Reflections by the Bay” (<http://www.reflectbay.blogspot.com/>) in a different manner, but often has the same result. Created initially in response to request for copies of his sermons, he posts weekly homilies, poems and other thoughts.

Father Costello, 68, has written for the public for 30 years and authored several books, but he views blogging as “a challenge” that forces his priesthood to evolve.

“Blogging,” Father Costello said, “makes you more exact with your homilies.”

Father James D. Proffitt, the pastor of St. Michael the Archangel in Overlea, has a profile on the popular peer networking site Facebook and regularly posts on St. Michael’s “Cyber Parish” (<http://smaparish.blogspot.com>).

The four-month-old blog serves as a light version of the church bulletin, and a forum for opinion on Catholic issues.

“This is something I can put up at a moment’s notice,” he said. “Our Web page is more unchanging stuff. With a blog I can put anything up. I was going to do it for a month and just pull the plug, but I keep doing it.”

When a Minnesota professor recently desecrated a Communion host, Father Proffitt used his site to admonish the professor while also pleading with people making death threats to instead act Christian.

The priests say they are not chasing Internet stardom.

“The ones that are controversial get the hits,” Father Costello said, admitting that his blog has a small but loyal following.

Father Murphy estimates that 50 to 60 people a day visit his blog, but a link on a more prominent religious blog can lead to an increase in traffic. No matter who is reading, he stays on message.

“It’s a spiritual exercise for me,” Father Murphy said. “I get a lot of feedback from people and that’s what the Internet does - connects people.”