

From the bell tower of St. Benedict: Catholic radio evangelizes morning commuters

St. Benedict Parish in Baltimore is taking the Gospel to the airwaves.

Since March 4, WVTO 92.7 FM has been broadcasting Catholic content from 2 a.m. to 10 a.m. in the Baltimore area.

According to station manager Cody Barber, a 23-year-old parishioner of St. Benedict and graduate of Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore, WVTO can be heard up to 6 miles from the church bell tower from which it is broadcast, though topography may affect the signal.

"It all depends on where you're at and how the terrain is," Barber said, adding that WVTO can be heard as far as Druid Hill Park, Glen Burnie, Catonsville and East Baltimore.

For now, WVTO broadcasts content from Relevant Radio, a national, listener-supported Catholic outlet, interspersed with station-identification announcements by Barber.

"I was a little shocked to hear his voice on the radio this morning," chuckled Benedictine Father Paschal Morlino, his pastor. "He's pretty knowledgeable. ... It's a wonderful job for him because he's so creative."

Father Morlino said he had been trying to secure a radio station for about four years.

"When the FCC opened up some frequencies, we got wind of it and started working on it," he said.

The frequency is shared with two other entities, though neither has begun

broadcasting. Father Morlino said the time slot is “not perfect,” though he is pleased to have morning commuters’ ears, and to have secured the slot in the face of “lots of opposition.”

He added that WVTO will include original programming in the future.

“We hope to have (Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori) on once in a while,” he said. “We’ll have things that are going on in the church and things that are going on locally in Baltimore. There are all kinds of events going on here – we would like to publicize those for ourselves, locally, and for the archdiocese.”

The WVTO studio is on the second floor of the St. Benedict parish center.

The call letters come from Father Morlino’s father’s name, Vito, which also means “life.”

The station joins a few other outlets in the archdiocese that offer Catholic content, including WCBM 680 AM and WQLL 1370 AM, both of which broadcast Mass on Sundays at 9 a.m., followed by Catholic Baltimore, a weekly program produced by the archdiocese. WCBM offers a second broadcast of the Mass at 6 p.m., followed by Catholic Baltimore.

From Hancock, WDTF 96.3 FM, broadcasts seven days a week, 24 hours a day, offering Relevant Radio content on weekdays and local and special programming on weekends.

Email Erik Zygmunt at ezygmunt@CatholicReview.org.