

Parish opens teleconferencing center

By George P. Matysek Jr.

gmatysek@CatholicReview.org

When pastoral leaders from the westernmost corner of Maryland participate in archdiocesan meetings, it often means a 165-mile trek to Baltimore.

Monsignor Thomas Bevan, pastor of St. Patrick in Cumberland, hopes the travel burden will be lightened now that his parish has opened a new media/teleconference center that will soon make it possible to see and hear what is happening in Baltimore and elsewhere without leaving "Mountain Maryland."

The new facility, located in the parish center, features state-of-the-art computer technology that allows wireless Internet access, PowerPoint presentations, cable television broadcasts and DVD/VCR tapes to be projected onto a 13-foot square wall.

The room will be used for parish and regional meetings and will be equipped for full videoconferencing capabilities in the coming months when a camera is installed, according to the pastor.

"It really allows us to do all sorts of things at meetings," Monsignor Bevan said. "It's free to all our parish organization or if families want to come in and use it."

Because St. Patrick is a historical church founded in 1790, it has become a tourist destination and a stopping point for bus tours. The pastor hopes to use the new technology to create a virtual tour of the church that can be accessed across the country.

Monsignor Bevan said the center will become a resource to area parishes. It might also provide an additional source of income for his parish if it is rented to outside businesses and organizations. One local company has already inquired about renting the facility, he said.

Since its opening, Deacon Loren Mooney, coordinator of religious education, said the center has been used for meetings such as a regional workshop for catechists.

“We were teaching them how to be aware of the media influence on young people and we were able to show content from the Internet like YouTube and MySpace,” Deacon Mooney said. “It was very helpful.”

The media/teleconferencing center includes a new kitchenette. New narrow tables were purchased to seat up to 50 people and parish volunteers have constructed a small stage, podium and heavy drapes to cover the tall windows in the former school building.

One wall will display archival memorabilia of a famous son the parish, Bishop James Edward Walsh, the first Maryknoll priest to become a bishop.

“Our parishioners are very proud of what we’re doing,” Monsignor Bevan said. “So many of them are elderly, and they’re just amazed by the technology. They are interested in using it.”

Once completed, the total cost of the project will be \$20,000. The parish has received a \$7,500 grant from the Bishop P. Francis Murphy Fund to help pay for the center.