

August 15, 2024

2024 Regional Grant Report
Front Range Mission
St. Paul's Lakewood

We requested funds to purchase a Meeting Owl 3 plus an expansion mic and protective case to facilitate holding hybrid meetings for various gatherings of the congregation in support of our parish mission: "to live out the love of God as seen in Jesus Christ."

Our biggest success with the Owl 3 has been with the inclusion of lay leaders in our various ministries and leaderships gatherings. We are able to routinely offer remote participation in gatherings such as Vestry meetings, Worship Committee meetings, and team meetings with our renewal leaders, and Adult Faith Exploration discussions on Sunday mornings. Set-up is extremely easy and participants appear to be duly impressed with "Hootie."

While easy to set up, we've learned there are some nuances in terms of enhancing the experience for remote participants. For example, we've learned to direct in-person speakers to turn their voices toward the Owl. We've also learned how to position the chairs in the room and how to locate the expansion mic so that all speakers are able to be seen and heard.

A few months in, our rector wanted to host a hybrid spiritual foundations class on a weekday evening and found writing notes on a board to be somewhat challenging for remote participants. With some creative financing, we purchased the Whiteboard Owl so that we could continue to extend our digital presence for parishioners and potential seekers.

We have attempted to utilize the Owl for all-parish meetings with mixed success. Our first attempt was aborted because we hadn't worked out how to manage the audio (who to mute, etc.). Our second attempt was more successful in that remote participants were able to "see" other participants in the room (via the Owl's panorama view) and to feel a part of the whole proceedings. It was easy to take questions from remote participants through Zoom and for the Owl to broadcast them to the whole room, but the reverse did not work as well. For a question from an in-person participant to be heard by remote participants, it had to be repeated by a speaker near the front of the room, i.e., near the Owl.

The feedback from participants in our hybrid meetings has been quite positive. The Owl's ability to scan the room and provide a panoramic view is a welcome feature that seems to help remote participants feel "included." Initially, we found the sound quality to be somewhat of an issue which seemed puzzling. As we teased that out, however, we realized (as previously mentioned) that the in-

person speaker needed to direct their comments toward the Owl. Turning toward the big screen TV on the wall and away from the Owl, for example, caused the sound to fade away. Someone sitting away from the table could not be heard. We learned to use the expansion mic to cover more of the room as well.

As the coordinator of Adult Faith Exploration, I have also experimented with recording our Sunday morning sessions using the Owl so that missing participants could experience our discussions both visually and auditorily. I am able to record both the video presentation and the group discussion, then send the recording to regulars who wish to "catch up." Again, those who are missing feel a sense of "inclusion" with the whole group. I have also been asked to also offer the option of remote participation on Sundays.

One step which we have been somewhat shy about completing is to train more leaders in the use of the Owl for their meetings. That will be my goal as we enter into the Fall season. Having worked out the "kinks," it should be relatively easy to transfer that knowledge to other ministry leaders.

Overall, acquisition of the Meeting Owl has helped us include persons in meetings and classes who cannot attend in person. We are most appreciative of the opportunity afforded by the grant from the Front Range Mission.

In gratitude,



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