

These Church Livestream Fails May Be the Funniest Thing You See All Week

The Rev. Megan Castellan has been livestreaming morning prayer from home every day through the coronavirus pandemic for her parishioners at St. John's Episcopal Church in Ithaca, New York.

But Thursday's prayer (March 26) was an "epic disaster," Castellan told her followers on Twitter.

Both the rector's dog and cat decided to participate in the Facebook Live video, hovering over her shoulders on the couch.

Offscreen, her husband, forgetting Castellan was on camera, made a loud phone call, then motioned to her that he was going to go get tested for COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

Castellan, also briefly forgetting she was on camera, responded by miming sticking a swab up her nose, part of the testing process.

Then a "mysterious loud noise" sent her dog leaping off the couch to investigate, returning in time to lick the rector's hand enthusiastically through the final prayer.

Castellan briefly considered recording the video over again, she told Religion News Service, but then she realized that as lives have been upended by the pandemic, maybe somebody else needed to hear that everything was awful this morning and that everything that could go wrong, did.

"We don't want to fail in public, but I also think that one of the things that has restrained the church in doing online things is we don't want to seem ridiculous and we don't want

to fail,” she said.

“The truth is, if you look at a lot of what we do, it is inherently ridiculous, especially to an outsider. And so we just need to sort of lean into that and let it go a little bit.”

Clergy across the globe are learning similar lessons as they turn to the internet to offer encouragement to congregants ordered to stay home to slow the spread of the coronavirus and to continue services online as their houses of worship temporarily close.

Over the last couple of weeks, more than 15,000 new churches have signed up for the Church Online Platform, a livestreaming service for churches. Many others have turned to livestreaming features available on social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube.

With so many using those tools for the first time and the internet’s inability to forget, some hilarity was bound to follow.

Most clergy, like Castellán, seem to have maintained a sense of humor about the inevitable bloopers.

“It reassures people that they’re allowed to be human if we are allowed to be human,” she said.

Here are a few online church fails that have gone viral.

Tom v. Tree

The Bible encourages Christians to “fight the good fight.”

But worship leaders of Marietta First Church of the Nazarene in Marietta, Georgia, seem to have read that as “fight the good ficus.”

The church has been streaming its services on YouTube for

about a year, but that couldn't prepare it for what happened when a "skeleton crew" filmed worship Sunday in an empty sanctuary.

As its appropriately distanced worship band sang "Open up the Heavens," an artificial tree toppled over onto the drummer, who was visible in the corner of the screen. A minute-long battle ensued, as the drummer, identified as Tom Winterbottom, attempted to continue playing, then to push the tree back into position, sending an overhead light swaying.

The church has embraced the viral mishap, posting a video clip zoomed in on Winterbottom's struggle on its social media channels.

"This wasn't planned, but God used it to bring laughter to the hearts of many. For that, we are thankful," Senior Pastor Gerald Carnes wrote.

Fiery Sermon

The Rev. Stephen Beach, vicar of St. Budeaux Parish Church in Plymouth, England, delivered a fiery sermon on March 19.

The message was meant to be the last in a series of short videos Beach posted on YouTube as an "online worship experience" for members of his congregation, part of the Church of England.

Leaning into the frame in front of a glowing cross-shaped candelabra, the vicar briefly introduced the topic of waiting. Then he glanced down at his shoulder, which evidently was a bit too close to the candles.

"Oh dear, I've just caught fire!" he exclaimed, batting out the flames engulfing the sleeve of his sweater.

In the next video, Beach kept his distance from the candles but encouraged viewers, "You must watch the outtake. My family are really impressed with it."

Googly Eyes Rector

The Rev. Adam Sexton of St. Andrew's Orthodox Church in Ashland, Virginia, had never used Facebook Live until recently.

When the archbishop of Washington closed all parishes in the diocese and directed Orthodox believers to pray at home, Sexton wanted to make the Divine Liturgy available to them.

So, the rector recounted in a March 15 Facebook post, which has been shared more than 2,000 times, that his child walked him through how to use the livestreaming feature. Unfortunately, the child didn't walk him through its filters, which overlay special effects on speakers' faces.

When he stepped close to the camera, he realized afterward that a pair of large googly eyes appeared on his face throughout the video.

"I have no idea why or how but it's hysterical and I'm not even mad," Sexton posted. "It's fantastic. So so so funny."

Undeterred, he said, "We'll give it a shot again next week."

Facebook Filters Strike Again

In Italy today, a priest decided to live-stream a mass due to COVID-19. Unfortunately he activated the video filters by mistake.

— Gavin Shoebridge (@KiwiEV) March 24, 2020

It wouldn't be the last time Facebook filters foiled well-meaning clergy.

A Twitter user tweeted a video clip Monday that has been viewed since then more than 7 million times of a Roman Catholic priest livestreaming a mass in Italy wearing a series of virtual accessories.

As the priest greeted viewers, “Buona sera,” a colorful digital helmet appeared over his face.

The video then cycled through a few more filters, making the priest appear to be lifting weights before donning a Blues Brothers-style dark hat and sunglasses.

“Technical difficulties won’t stop him. He’s on a mission from God,” one Twitter user responded.

UPI since has identified the priest as the Rev. Paolo Longo, parish priest of the Church of San Pietro and San Benedetto di Polla in Salerno.

Longo later posted an invitation to pray the rosary with him on Facebook, noting in Italian, “Even a laugh is good.” {eoa}

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