



Empowering Churches with Solutions to Simplify
Complex Diocesan and Parish Church Management

ParishSOFT Customer Success Story:

Saint Anthony RC Parish
The Diocese of Paterson

ParishSOFT®

Saint Anthony Parish of Hawthorne, New Jersey, is a stewardship parish. It follows that the virtue of prudence is expressed in the parish's way of life giving them a noteworthy freedom to examine and be open to new solutions. If a need becomes apparent, Saint Anthony pursues with diligence the best course of action and acts with confidence when the right solution is found.

The parish first encountered ParishSOFT around a decade ago at a catechetical conference where ParishSOFT had a booth. Interested to learn more, they proceeded with careful deliberation. Their evaluation included observing the program in action at a nearby parish and, finding the product to be "superb," they acted decisively to purchase the ParishSOFT desktop system.

Several years later, advancements in technology and changing parish needs again led Saint Anthony to re-evaluate their options. Parish Secretary and Religious Education Administrative Assistant, Diane Brown, describes how prudent discernment once more guided Saint Anthony's choice for web-based ParishSOFT Family Suite and ParishCast.

Challenges

Initially the administrative assistant for the religious education program, Brown took on the additional responsibility of census after the current parish secretary retired. At the time the parish was using ParishSOFT desktop products. Looking back, what she remembers most is the laborious double, and occasional triple-entry, of information needed to track envelopes, religious education and census information, and to coordinate communications.

The desktop program had served its purpose for a time. With the development of new technology, however, it was clear there was significant room for improvement. The limitations of their desktop system became acutely apparent after a parish office computer crashed. Thankfully they were being hosted by ParishSOFT Remote Solutions and had a backup, but the need to rely on one machine, cumbersome processes, and limited ability to communicate with parishioners all pointed to the need for a change.

Then, summer 2017, finance department staff invited Brown to attend a webinar for web-based ParishSOFT Family Suite. It was love at first sight! Parish staff listened in on sales calls and attended training. Taking into account parish and staff needs, cost and product functionality, it was clear that Family Suite was the right fit for Saint Anthony.

Making the Transition

The parish transitioned in November 2017, and saw the upgrade from ParishSOFT Desktop to ParishSOFT Family Suite as a critical opportunity to engage parishioners and strengthen parish data. They reached out via the bulletin, requesting parishioners to contact the parish with any updates prior to the transition to the new platform. Many parishioners responded to the call, enabling the parish to bring records up to date with anything from the death of a spouse to new addresses and contact information.

The transition of parish data from desktop to their new database in the cloud proceeded smoothly with only a few minor hiccups, which were quickly resolved. Says Brown, "ParishSOFT Support was wonderful through everything."

What the parish immediately noticed about their new system? “Everything is in one spot, its all just there!” Although initially they were nervous to make sure all of their legacy desktop data had come over to the next system - and would occasionally check the old desktop program just in case - they now know they need not have worried!

Describing the on-boarding process, Brown said, “It’s very easy! There is nothing complicated about the program.” In addition, readily available “Help” tools built directly into the Family Suite system were a handy resource for any questions they had when getting started.

ParishCast

Prior to switching to the web-based suite, Saint Anthony was aware of their need for a rapid notification system for religious education programs. As a result, in addition to their Family Directory, Religious Education and Offering & Pledges modules, the parish also opted for the add-on module ParishCast. ParishCast is Parish-SOFT’s rapid notification system that lets parishes reach God’s people, including specific groups of parishioners and visitors, for day-to-day communications and emergencies. The integration of ParishCast with Family Suite is not available for desktop users and was an important factor in their decision to switch systems.

The parish observed that the setup process was lengthy, but necessary, to ensure all parishioner information was in the system and up-to-date. But the return on time was well worth it. After setup Brown notes, “I was immediately able to use it, and I use it all the time!”

Empowering Mission

Communicating with families participating in religious education programming has become a breeze. Says Brown, “With ParishCast email, I don’t even use Gmail [parish email had previously gone through Google email accounts].” Creating groups for tailored communications is easy, which is a critical feature for a parish of about 2,700 families at various levels of activity.

On the ground, this means that distinct groups, such as first communicants and Confirmation candidates, can quickly and easily be reached with targeted and highly relevant messaging. This is helpful not only in tracking who has received a specific communication, but also in providing information of interest that might otherwise be lost in the midst of larger religious education communiqués. In addition to email and other communication integrations, text messaging has been particularly useful in almost instantaneously reaching families for last-minute class cancellations.

The cumulative effect has been an overwhelming win for the parish. Since using ParishCast, no one has complained about not receiving a communication and, perhaps due to the highly relevant content, no one has unsubscribed! (Wow!) Analytics reports show who has received and opened the messages. Plus, a report of undeliverable addresses and numbers allows the parish to promptly reach out to families for updated contact information.

Next Steps

It is not surprising that the parish is already planning the next level of integration of ParishSOFT tools into parish life. At the time of our conversation, plans were forming to promote online registration for religious education programs through My Own Church. My Own Church is the online parishioner portal included with Family Suite that gives parishioners anytime, anywhere access to their census, sacramental, and giving information (including online statements for those with ParishSOFT Offering & Pledges).

Saint Anthony plans to use My Own Church as an added convenience for parishioners and parish staff, enabling them to update their own census information, and register for any classes that are set up to accept online registration through the ParishSOFT Religious Education module. Parishioner information flows through to the parish staff, who approve (or not) all data entries and online registrations before the information updates parish records, ensuring data integrity.

Interested in understanding how ParishSOFT Family Suite empowers mission from a parish with hands-on experience? Brown insists you can give her a call! Her advice for parishes looking to get started with ParishSOFT Family Suite, “Just go for it!” We couldn’t agree more.

Witness to Mission

ParishSOFT is grateful for the gift of Saint Anthony Parish to the ParishSOFT community. Their example of thoughtful and active stewardship is a witness to their mission and an encouragement for many parishes striving to live a parish life guided by prudent generosity. We look forward to seeing where their good judgment and vigor will guide them next!

Additional Information

ParishSOFT has helped thousands of parishes and dioceses implement ParishSOFT’s online solutions. For an analysis of your software and services needs, please visit parishsoft.com or call us at 866-930-4774 x6.

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