

When the Diocese of Erie needed to upgrade its websites, Christian Brothers IT & Website Services was there to help.

# ITS—Changing the Look of a Diocese

The screenshot shows the Diocese of Erie website with a blue header and a main content area. The header includes the Diocese of Erie logo, navigation links, a language selector, and a search bar. The main content area features a large banner with a rose image and a quote from Psalm 145:5. Below the banner are three columns of news items, a large congratulatory banner for two priests, and a sidebar with more news and social media links. The footer contains contact information and social media icons.

**DIocese of ERIE**  
Sharing the Catholic faith in northwest Pennsylvania

Select Language | Google Custom Search

Parish, School or Site | Contact Us

About Offices/Ministries Vocations Education News & Events Live the Faith How do I?

**TAKE TIME TO STOP AND SMELL THE ROSES**  
On the glorious splendor of your majesty,  
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.  
PSALM 145:5

**Diocesan News**

- BISHOP PERSICO WORKS TO PREPARE HIS PEOPLE FOR GRAND JURY REPORT**  
08/13/2018
- DIocese NAMES FAITH FORMATION DIRECTOR**  
08/07/2018
- ST. PETER CATHEDRAL MARKS 125th ANNIVERSARY**  
08/06/2018
- MASS HONORS 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF RESTORATION OF PERMANENT DIACONATE**  
08/06/2018
- MASSES CELEBRATE MILESTONE WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES**  
08/06/2018

**National/World News**

- Discalced Carmelites use time-honored skills to co...**  
1 hour ago
- Fight scandal by giving witness to the Gospel, pop...**  
2 days ago
- Updated: Canon lawyers explain how Vatican abuse L...**  
3 days ago
- Cardinal O'Malley calls for investigation at Boston...**  
3 days ago
- Bishops, faith leaders condemn Tennessee's first ex...**  
3 days ago

**More News and Social Media**

- REPORT FINANCIAL MISCONDUCT
- REPORT ABUSE

**Connect with Us**

- Staff Directory
- Faith magazine
- NWPACatholic.com

**Quick Links**

- Employment
- Protection of Children
- Report Abuse
- Events
- Becoming Catholic
- Pa. Catholic Conference

**MyDioErie**

All employees of the Diocese of Erie—as well as clergy and religious—may access important forms and resources, other internal communications, the Information Bulletin and more.

**Get in Touch With Us**

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## **The Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania, needed a change—**

not in mission or philosophy, in its websites. It had been years since the diocese had refreshed the look, feel and functionality of its text-based website, and it had outlived its usefulness.

Realizing a do-over was in order, two years ago, diocesan leaders assembled a team to search for an organization that would be able to not only redesign the main diocesan website, but also the sites for its 97 parishes, and all its various agencies, offices and ministries.

Kathy Papalia, the network administrator for the diocese, led the search team and began the process, sending Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to about a dozen companies, including Christian Brothers Services (CBS). Papalia was familiar with CBS and its Chief Information, Privacy and Security Officer Tom Drez through her association with the Diocesan Information Systems Conference (DISC). DISC is an organization that represents information technology (IT) staff from dioceses across the U.S. and Canada. CBS is also a DISC member. "When the diocese decided they wanted to start this project, CBS was right at the top of the list," she said.

CBS presented the Diocese of Erie with its XpressIT Website Update Xpress Content Management System (CMS). This "website in a box" puts administrators in direct control of their web content without the involvement of an IT staff.

Once selected in January 2017 for what would be a yearlong project, CBS had its full web team involved, from operations and development to customer service and user education. The diocesan team included Papalia, a website content manager and its communications director.

The process was completely collaborative and the lines of communication between CBS and the diocese were always open with regularly scheduled videoconferences. CBS designers took the website ideas supplied by the diocese and turned them into drawings and designs.

The two teams went through a draft review process for the design until the diocese was happy with the result.

### **Websites for the Parishes**

One of the project goals was to improve contact and communication with parishioners while improving the connection between the parish and diocesan website and resources. With this in mind, CBS worked with the diocese to create and offer a website to all its parishes.

"From the Website Update Xpress, we made another product called XpressIT Parish Place, which is basically the same CMS, but we designed a front end on it that is specifically geared toward parishes with the features they would need," said Drez.

The CMS supplied by CBS is the underlying database "engine" for all the websites. The front end (what users see) is tailor-made to give the customer the look they want.

The features that are included in Xpress IT Parish Place are the result of CBS' research of parish websites in the Dioceses of Joliet, Illinois, and Beaumont, Texas. The research included documenting such data as website appearance, the people responsible for site maintenance and what information was most often included on parish sites.

The research showed that about one-third of the parishes have good sites, meaning active volunteers are available to keep the information current; one-third of the parishes run a website through a free service with ads, but do not have enough volunteers to keep the site up-to-date; and another third of parishes do not maintain a website at all.

This inconsistency of parish websites was one of the issues the Diocese of Erie wanted to address, and a key reason why they selected CBS to assist them with their project. With Parish Place, functionality comes right out of the box, allowing the parishes to control their news, information, Mass times and more while maintaining a consistent look and feel with the diocesan site. The Parish Place application does not give the diocese control over each parish site, but there are links back to the diocese from all the parish sites. The system is separate but connected.

## We Are You. We Get You.

Papalia said price and ease of use were other contributing factors in the final decision to hire CBS over the competition.

"Every time I asked Tom Drez questions, the answers were easy. Every time I had contact with him, I felt that it was much easier to deal with Tom. He simplified the pricing process. One of the other companies would have penalized the diocese for each parish not on the system in four years. We will probably never get 100 percent of our parishes on this system, so that was just a dark cloud that was over my head. I didn't want us to be paying for parishes we weren't serving. CBS said if you don't get everybody, that's OK. There aren't any penalties."

Parish Place websites cost \$99 a year to host with a one-time \$200 setup fee, which includes two hours of time to make sure the Domain Name System is operating properly. The fee includes any additional help the customer may need during the process. There are no ads on the websites, and ease of use is the key component. The administrator logs in, fills out a setup screen, puts in their parish logo and changes the color scheme. That's it.

Drez said CBS keeps its rates as low as possible (\$99 per hour), not just to gain a competitive advantage, but to allow Catholic organizations to reduce their IT or web burden and focus instead on their mission. As a 501c3 nonprofit Catholic Church organization, CBS is in a unique position to understand the needs of dioceses and parishes.

"We are owned by the Lasallian Christian Brothers, a teaching religious order. We are you. We get you," he said.

## Successful Launch

The parish websites were the first to start launching in January 2018. The main Diocese of Erie site followed suit in May. Currently, about one-third of the diocese's parishes are using the CBS websites. The next step, according to Papalia, is to gauge interest and bring aboard another group of 31 parishes that have no online presence at all.

"Hopefully, the lure of free setup, free training, free hosting, free support and the free services of our graphic artist will tempt them," she said.

Since the launch, she has received emails from parishes letting her know how easy it is to manage their sites and from others who want to be next.

## Next Steps

Not wanting to rest on the successful launch, CBS and the diocese are now in talks for Phase 2 of the project, which is to create websites for the diocese's Catholic Charities organizations and its schools.

The two sides have also started a conversation that would revamp the underlying donation infrastructure at the diocesan and parish level. CBS has a partnership with Coleman Group, a company that caters exclusively to Catholic organizations. Coleman's "Give Central" is an online giving infrastructure that provides the power that goes behind the "Donate" button on websites. The company also has a mobile app that gives donors the ability to set up reoccurring giving schedules on a weekly, monthly or quarterly basis. A donor's credit card transaction is branded, for example, as "Diocese of Erie," not as "PayPal" or anything else on its statement. The fee per transaction is less than with PayPal or a similar payment method. Dioceses can even send email communications to push messages out in a branded fashion to their donors. A full explanation of the service is at [givecentral.org](http://givecentral.org)

As for now, Papalia and the Diocese of Erie are happy with the results of the project.

"The hosting is easy; the design process was easy; and the planning, even before we accepted CBS as a vendor, was easy."

That is music to Drez's ears. "I don't think it could have turned out better and when you end up with a happy customer and come in on time and on budget, that's great," he said.

CBS has now completed two successful diocesan-level web projects. The Diocese of Joliet, completed six years ago, was the first. Drez said because of the ever-changing landscape in website evolution and end-user usage, the diocese is now looking to update.

"Back when we finished the Diocese of Joliet's website, being responsive for mobile devices wasn't a thing," said Drez. "Now, as you can see with the Diocese of Erie, if you pull it up on any mobile device it adapts, fits, performs and looks great. Times are changing and we are changing with them." ☀

*For more information on Christian Brothers Services IT & Website Services, visit [www.cbsservices.org/IT-and-website-services.html](http://www.cbsservices.org/IT-and-website-services.html). A Parish Place demonstration is at <https://parishplace.com>.*