

St. Mark's in Milwaukee – Film Series

- How you planned your project (why did you do it and what was it based on?)

St. Mark's has a group of people (all ages and about 15 total) who meet at a local pub once a month to talk theology and share beverages. My thought was to add another "non Sunday morning" opportunity for informal gathering fellowship and conversation. Our priest associate is really interested in film, and I wondered what it would take to get a film series going. As it turns out, all that's required is a little money for video equipment and purchasing licenses so that we could legally advertise our film series in the neighborhood. Our idea was to show well-known movies, family friendly, but that also were interesting enough to spark theological reflection. We found researched licenses (we ended up buying the licenses through Criterion Pictures, USA); we researched good av/equipment by asking tech people in the congregation; we spent a little money on advertising and on snacks and we hosted the events.

- What happened (did it work as you thought, or did it fall flat?)

It both worked and didn't work--it made excitement in the parish for the summer (a time when St. Mark's has traditionally not programmed too well); it drew a nice number of interested parishioners (14 at the first event; 9 at the second); the conversation was fantastic.

We had hoped to interest UWM students or guests in the neighborhood, and we found that that has not happened to date. Perhaps in future, the direct advertising is less effective than encouraging parishioners to invite a friend to the showing. It's also possible that doing this event OUTSIDE might be really exciting and more of a draw.



The other win, really, is that now the church owns A/V equipment for use in Sunday School, Adult Ed, AND now, we can host one of these "St. Mark's at the Movies" events during the year (perhaps quarterly) for about \$100--license plus snacks.

- What did you learn and what will you do next based on these results?

We learned that direct advertising (posters at the grocery store etc.) may be good for raising the parish profile in the neighborhood, but it doesn't particularly (at least this at this first series) turn into visit from a stranger. The one visitor (non-parishioner) we had was a friend of a parishioner. This makes us wonder if INVITING friends is a better way for actually raising attendance--though I do think that the direct advertising is still good for getting the parish name out into the community.

1. Describe your project (Why this project and what you based it on)

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St. Mark's at the Movies flowed from our successful Theology Pub program. We wondered if there would be a group of people who were interested in meaningful fellowship on a non-Sunday morning basis. We chose three movies--one for each month of the summer--we



purchased the licenses for one showing, and we purchased the AV equipment to project the movie. We popped popcorn and got snacks. We purchased soft drinks and had wine and beer available for any who would like. People coming straight from work were welcome to bring dinner along in a brown bag. We had tables out bistro-style, with nice table clothes and snacks on each table. Our priest associate introduced the films and touched on a few themes to look for and then led

1. Tell how the project was implemented (What steps needed to be done, resources needed etc.)

Identify someone willing to lead the post-movie discussion on theological topics--could be the priest, deacon or someone in the congregation who loves movies and is familiar with common theological themes--creation, redemption, apocalypse, atonement, prophecy etc..

Set the date.

If advertising in the community, I'd recommend buying a license for the viewing. This can be done through criterion.com

Buy pretzels, m&ms and make popcorn. Have soft drinks available. Tell people it's BYOB.

Put some nice tablecloths on the tables and make the snacks the centerpieces. It's a pretty fun, festive movie night.

Make sure you have loud enough speakers and a big enough screen that everyone can comfortably see and hear.

We chose movies that had a running time of about 90-100 minutes. Our thought was that then, with a 30 minutes conversation about theology, the event could still happen on a week night. We chose Thursday nights, thinking it'd be less competing with summer offerings. If a Friday night, I'd be open to a longer movie.



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2. How are you reviewing and reflecting on the results? (What happened and what happens next?)

Number of non-church guests. Total attendance (as a function of community engagement). Declining cost/event (for instance; the outlay of \$600 or so dollars for a projector and DVD player and speakers means that every following event is quite inexpensive. We've decided to do 3-4 during the adult education program year. Also, now the church has a cracker-jack AV system for all events--including the annual meeting, visiting speakers etc.)

I'm disappointed that we had no community inquiries for the film series from either Marquette or from UWM. I wonder if in future, we should target better--like get some of the campus chaplains invited personally and see if their kids are interested.

At the same time, it is a low-risk, high reward ministry...even if it ends up simply adding vibrancy to St. Mark's.

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