

Joyce demonstrated. I hope that in a parallel way, when digital tools are the best way to reach people, chaplains will be able to use these forms of communication in their ministry.

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My Experience Supervising CPE Units and a Candidate Supervisor via Video-Conferencing

Gary Sartain

In early October of 2009, I was approached by Ministry Health, a large Catholic hospital system centered in Northern Wisconsin, about the possibility of starting a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program. I agreed to meet with them in mid-October at their Marshfield, WI facility to do further exploration. In the interim, I was contacted by Diane Tugel, an Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) Candidate Supervisor, who had just moved to Green Bay, WI from Richmond, VA, and wanted to find a way to continue in the process.

I invited Diane to send me her materials so I could get acquainted with her on paper ahead of time and asked her to meet me in person in Marshfield prior to my meeting with Ministry Health. Our brief time together that day confirmed what I had felt from reading her material—that she was a person we would definitely want to find a way to keep in the process, if we could. After a positive response from Ministry Health and after the willing agreement by Lutheran Homes of Oshkosh, WI to take Diane as a Supervisory Education student and allow Ministry Health to become a satellite of that Center, we were ready to go. A contract was written and signed by all four parties involved; the necessary work was done to gain satellite accreditation; six students were interviewed and selected; and the first unit was begun late in January, 2010.

Diane and I did much of the preliminary work together using Skype. We were able to build a working relationship and work out the details of the unit without the benefit of physical proximity, which I don't believe could have happened if we had been restricted to audio communication only. Student entrance interviews were conducted in person by Diane and the Minis-

try Health Director of Mission Services with me present via Skype. I found I was able to participate fully and effectively in the interview process.

I was simultaneously researching various web-based video-conferencing options, particularly looking for a platform that would be more secure than Skype, as well as offer the option of having more than two video feeds operational at one time. I was researching based both on some of the needs we wanted to address as a Region (board & committee meetings; sub-region continuing education; and supervisory education) and in terms of what would work for Centers and Supervisors wanting to do individual CPE units.

While there were a number of programs out there that would have worked including WebEx, Adobe Connect, and Elluminate to name a few, we settled on MegaMeeting (www.megameeting.com) because it allowed us to break up the 25 seats we signed up for into any configuration we wanted, allowing several meetings to go on simultaneously. We could, for example, have a North Central Region Board meeting with 9 attendees at separate sites while two Centers were doing CPE with six students, with each student at a separate site. MegaMeeting gave us the option of naming any number of people as hosts, which allowed them each to set up and run a meeting.

Diane and I have now supervised two units together and we are well into a third. Each unit has had six students. While I was actively engaged in the process as a co-supervisor at times in the first unit, I have been able to step back to a very passive observer role for the latter two, as Diane's competence (and confidence) has increased. Even though my role is now primarily to "supervise the supervisor," I still log-on live for the duration of her once-a-week group sessions, recording them and uploading them to the "cloud"—into an online file folder to which she also has access—so that both of us can view them and make notes, making it possible for me to bring specific things to her attention when we do individual supervision.

SUCCESS ALL AROUND

Six students have successfully completed each unit, and several have been employed by Ministry Health as Chaplains. Four of the six current students were participants in our earlier groups who have chosen to continue their CPE journey, while Diane has moved expediently forward in her own process. In addition to co-supervising or observing group activity, Diane and I have had a very good experience using this technology for individual su-

pervision. Also, Diane has taken her equipment with her to monthly Supervisory Education Student (SES) gatherings in Oshkosh, Wisconsin and Chicago and has set up in those venues so that I could attend virtually on the occasions when I could not be physically present. If all goes as planned, Diane will ultimately become an Associate Supervisor and Ministry Health will move from satellite to ACPE-accredited Center status. Neither would have been possible without the use of video-conferencing.

It is important to note that it has been far from a perfect experience. The limitations have been our own learning curve with the technology and the bandwidth available in northern Wisconsin, coupled with the port restrictions placed on us by Ministry Health's Information Technology department. MegaMeeting prefers port 1932, but Ministry Health restricts us to port 80, which slows the transmission. It is normally not noticeable, but during times of peak usage, we can sometimes experience a delay of several seconds. This is not an issue if one is simply observing, as I am now doing; but when I was co-supervising the first unit, it was problematic—and, there are rare times when the Internet service goes out completely.

To make web-based video-conferencing work optimally, you need a fast Internet connection with good bandwidth; a computer with a duo-core processor; a good webcam; and a good speakerphone. It took us a while to settle on the right basic equipment. Our experiential learning in this regard led us to the same conclusion that many of the web-based programs have now come to—namely that the best equipment (as of the date of the writing of this article) is as follows:

- The best webcam is a Microsoft Lifecam Studio because it can be mounted on a tripod and has good optics.
- The best speakerphone is a Phoenix Duet Executive because it has excellent echo-cancelling technology, picks up a complete CPE group clearly, and can be ganged with other Duet Executives to provide coverage of a large room or group.

Even with the proper equipment, we are still currently restricted in MegaMeeting to video screen resolutions of 320 X 240 pixels, which means the picture is quite grainy if we blow it up to any size at all. Still, the recordings we do of sessions compare quite favorably to what I have seen produced for certification over the years—consistently better audio and almost as good, if not as good, video. I did try another program, called Nefsis (www.nefsis.com), which allowed us to make the video high-definition quality. However, it is understandably more expensive. I do feel it's user-friendly platform and

flexibility with video quality make its extra cost worthwhile and we will give it serious consideration when our current contract with MegaMeeting expires in April of 2011. (What I mean by user-friendly platform is how it allows one to show the desktop or share an application, set the video cameras of various attendees at different resolutions, record directly to your computer, and monitor bandwidth.)

Also, Skype has just recently added the option of multi-point video-conferencing at a very reasonable price, and there are several freeware add-ons for Skype that make it possible to record both video and audio, so that is also worthy of experimentation. While Skype allows some sharing of a desktop, it does not have the full capabilities that the MegaMeeting or Nefsis options provide, but it may be just fine for some applications.

It is important to note that our set-up has been primarily limited to two-way. There are several places around the country that are about to attempt doing CPE with students each logging-on from separate sites—it will be interesting to see how that works. MegaMeeting will allow up to 8 cameras to be open at a time, and the lower resolution video is fine for one person because each picture needs to be small to leave room for several others on the screen, so the platform should be adequate. What will be vitally important is making sure that each person has the right equipment and knows how to set it up and use it properly. If that isn't done, there can be real issues with echo, which can be very frustrating for our process which requires such careful listening.

My experience with Diane and Ministry Health has confirmed my previous experience offering a unit via video-conferencing. It is indeed possible to offer quality CPE education provided certain parameters are met. The primary common denominators in both successful experiences have been committed students who were highly self-motivated; careful attention to assure the technology is used to its full potential; a willingness to maintain a sense of humor; and the flexibility to deal with the frustration that the technology can be counted on to introduce at regular intervals!

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