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## **Visualizing the faith and future**

### ***Diocese uses new videoconferencing technology***

by KEVIN E. MURRAY

editor

CHARLOTTE — The Diocese of Charlotte is harnessing new technology to better reach and serve parishioners.

The diocese, in a project undertaken by the diocesan Catholic schools office, has acquired videoconferencing equipment to connect various locations in the 46-county diocese.

Videoconferencing uses interactive technology to allow two or more locations to interact via two-way video and audio transmissions simultaneously. Through a combination of cameras, telephones and televisions, people at different sites can communicate in a virtual face-to-face setting.

The technology also is capable of incorporating data from computers, cameras and DVDs.

“This equipment is a way to bring school staffs, principals and teachers in particular together without having to drive long distances,” said Janice Ritter, assistant superintendent of diocesan Catholic schools and a videoconferencing project coordinator.

“We also have volunteers who sit on boards and drive a considerable way to attend meetings, often in the evening, which puts them on the road late at night,” said Ritter.

“Videoconferencing is an option that is respectful of people’s time and is environmentally friendly,” she said.

In the configuration adopted by the diocese, the Pastoral Center in Charlotte serves as the main videoconferencing hub and houses the equipment to connect to the five satellite sites across the diocese — Asheville Catholic School, Bishop McGuinness High School in Kernersville, Catholic Conference Center in Hickory, Charlotte Catholic High School in Charlotte and Living Waters Reflection Center in Maggie Valley.

Each of the five sites contain a smaller version of the videoconferencing equipment, which allows it to connect to other sites independently or to multiple sites through the Pastoral Center.

The equipment already has been used for several school-related meetings, but other ministries are taking advantage of it as well.

Diocesan Hispanic ministry recently utilized the equipment for a “Why Catholic?” training session at the Pastoral Center Jan. 17.

The facilitator, Sister Veronica Mendez, a Sister of Our Lady of Christian Doctrine and member of RENEW International, was able to teach the program to participants in the room as well as others in Maggie Valley and Kernersville.

“It was the first time we could hold the training session in one day, covering the diocese without having to hold multiple sessions,” said Jorge Gomiz, Hispanic ministry coordinator for the Charlotte Vicariate.

“Why Catholic?” is a program of RENEW International, a Roman Catholic organization that fosters spiritual renewal, evangelization and the transformation of the world through parish-based small Christian communities.

“The videoconferencing technology allows us to reach more people efficiently and cost effectively,” said Gomiz.

“I see this technology as replacing some, not all, of the face-to-face meetings we currently hold,” said Ritter.

“I also see educational applications,” she added. “I would love to see teachers and students investigate the use of this technology for collaborative instruction.

“With equipment housed at our two high schools, that might be a possibility in the not-too-distant future,” she said.

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