

## **PODCASTING: A NEW MEDIUM FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

Carlos Briceno

The purpose of my talk is very simple: to get you and others you know to consider seeing podcasting as an opportunity for the New Evangelization and to consider podcasts as a viable way to communicate with those seeking to hear the Good News.

First a little background: I'm a print and radio journalist. So the lens through which I view life and people is through stories. I love to listen to and to tell stories. And what better and more amazing story is there than the story of our salvation. So in talking about podcasting, I hope you understand that I am referring to this new medium as a way to tell the stories of the people and events that make up the life of the Church.

So, how did I get here. In late December 2004, I wrote an essay for the National Catholic Register(1) in which I appealed to creative and faithful Catholics to form a radio training and production company that would emphasize creativity and storytelling with content faithful to the magisterium.

After several dozen people responded, Disciples with Microphones was born. Around this time, in early 2005, podcasting began to seep into the public consciousness, and the group naturally gravitated toward this new medium. We set up a web site ([www.discipleswithmicrophones.org](http://www.discipleswithmicrophones.org)), and one-by-one, members started to offer podcasts and special shows. We kept in touch with each other by e-mail, in a Yahoo group, and we invited others to podcast. We keep adding people who are interested in shouting it from the roof tops all the time, and we continue to offer information to any faithful Catholic who wants to learn how to podcast. We are also putting together a plan to train others how to use radio storytelling techniques as a compelling way to evangelize.

For those of you who don't know too much about podcasting, here is a brief definition: it is the distribution of audio files over the internet, which can be listened to on your computer or on mobile MP3 players, such as iPods. The person creating a podcast can record a program in an MP3 audio format and then upload it to a web site. A listener can then click on the file while at his computer and listen to it as his desk, or, if he owns an iPod or other MP3 player, he can subscribe to the show for free. This subscription then allows something call an RSS feed to check the internet regularly and automatically download the show you subscribed to into your iPod every time a new show is placed on the internet. You can then listen to the show whenever you want on your mobile device.

Podcasting is revolutionary for several reasons. One, it allows for ANYONE to be a broadcaster. Two, the content that is produced can be listened to at your computer or

whenever you want on your iPod. Three, radio stations have only 24 hours to broadcast shows, and this allows for more content to be available to listeners at the times they find convenient to listen. And, lastly and very significantly, there are millions of MP3 players out there, and many young people are the owners. These youths and young adults view the internet, their cell phones and their MP3 players as the vehicles from which they receive their news and entertainment.

Now that we are at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is obvious that new technologies and the internet are not only here to stay, but also are the future of communications. So, how does the Church deal with these new and creative opportunities? On Vatican Radio recently, Jim McDonnell made some comments regarding this that really resonated with me. Here is one excerpt from what he said:

"Having wonderful conduits of information and having wonderful technologies is of absolutely no use if we don't have content to fill it and the content is news and narrative and discussion and information and all those things. And we have to find the people who can create the content that will actually then engage with the viewers and the listeners and the web surface and so on. And that, I think, should be the focus, not the technologies so much as where do we encourage, develop, train and recognize the talent that produces the content that drives the system." (2)

So in this age of new ways of media distribution, this is what is at stake for the church: how can we get the content needed to reach those people who are searching for God? The answer is people. We need well formed Catholics who are willing to record their stories and other people's stories of faith. Put simply, we need disciples with microphones. Who is such a person?

Here's one example:

Audio clip of Father Stan Fortuna from his web site, [www.digitalaudiodeli.com](http://www.digitalaudiodeli.com)

Imagine if you ask some of your best homilists or every priest to podcast homilies. In a recent edition of the influential Jesuit magazine, *La Civiltà Cattolica*,(3) the magazine wrote that priests need to take advantage of podcasting in order to be "podpreachers," making available sermons or prayer podcasts, for example.

What are some content that a disciple with microphone can record?

It could be an event at your parish. It could be something as simple as a show on Natural Family Planning by someone who is trained and teaches NFP. Or it can be something more grand, such as recording people's stories at World Youth Day.

The content is out there. We just need to put out a call for the disciples with microphones who can put together audio in interesting or compelling ways or wants to learn how to do this.

So how can someone do this?

The most basic equipment is this: a laptop or desktop, a microphone, and free audio

editing software that anyone can download from the internet (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>). You talk into the microphone and add some music and you can create a talk show. Or, if you want to go into the field, you can buy a recorder and record into it. Download it into the computer using a USB cable. And then edit it using the free audio editing software.

The only other expense – other than the time expended to gather the sound – is to get the bandwidth necessary to put the MP3 files up on a web site. Audio takes up a lot of space, and most podcasters use a company that acts a server. The company most podcasters on the Disciples with Microphones site use is called Liberated Syndication ([www.libsyn.com](http://www.libsyn.com)), and for as cheap as 10 dollars a month, our podcasters have the capacity to put up a 30-minute show each day, every day for a month. That translates into 120 dollars a year for the ability to broadcast content – and the ability for listeners to listen on the internet or on their iPods.

The final point I want to make is this: my group is hoping to act as a catalyst to build a community of people who are willing to communicate with each other about what their recording needs are and ways to train those people who want to record what parishes and dioceses and archdioceses and other Catholic organizations and entities, including lay movements, want to have recorded. We also want to train well-formed Catholics on how to put together their own shows, as individuals who feel the call to evangelize through broadcasting.

We hope to get people who are skilled at broadcasting and storytelling and creativity to work with us in teaching others in as many languages and as many places around the world who want to podcast. We want to build a community where we are all talking to each other, helping each other, encouraging each other, praying for each other and collaborating with each other. In other words, we want to get a bunch of people interested in communications to communicate with each other, and get as many podcasts and podcasters to talk about the faith as possible.

I realize that those of you who work for the church are overwhelmed by your daily work load, and I am not crazy enough to expect you to teach someone about podcasting or record podcasts yourselves. However, that is the purpose of creating a Disciples with Microphones organization. We want to raise money to get skilled and faithful staff and volunteers from all over the world to teach others and guide others how to podcast.

So in the end, if your diocese or archdiocese has a priest whose homily you want record, we can help you find the person who is willing to do this in an excellent way. Or, if your vocations director wants to get seminarians vocation stories recorded, we can help someone do this.

Or, if you have young adults going to World Youth Day, we want to be able to teach

them how to tell their stories and other youths' stories.

I want to end this speech with some excerpts from Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, called "The Rapid Development":

To those working in communication... I extend the invitation which, from the beginning of my ministry as Pastor of the Universal Church, I have wished to express to the entire world "Do not be afraid!"

Do not be afraid of new technologies! ((These rank "among the marvelous things" – *inter mirifica* – which God has placed at our disposal to discover, to use and to make known the truth, also the truth about our dignity and about our destiny as his children, heirs of his eternal Kingdom.))

Do not be afraid of being opposed by the world! Jesus has assured us, "I have conquered the world!"

Do not be afraid even of your own weakness and inadequacy! The Divine Master has said, "*I am with you always, until the end of the world.*". Communicate the message of Christ's hope, grace and love, keeping always alive, in this passing world, the eternal perspective of heaven, a perspective which no communications medium can ever directly communicate, "*What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him*" (4)

Amen.

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