It's Our Turn: The Capital Campaign at St. Mark’s United Church of Christ

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

In January 2011 my hometown church, St. Mark’s United Church of Christ of New Albany, IN, initiated a capital campaign in order to raise money for significant building repairs. Throughout the month, the Capital Campaign committee planned several informational meetings for members and hoped to have a video to show during this time. They approached me to produce this video for the campaign. I interviewed several church members and leaders about the positive effects these building changes would make. The video outlines each repair the campaign money would go towards. Sections included are heating and cooling systems, the Soup Kitchen, Clothes Closet, organ repairs, a play area, accessibility, a welcome area in the sanctuary, and repairs in the chapel.

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I’d also like to thank the members of the campaign publicity committee—Sharla Carter, Emily Essex, and John Manzo—for giving me the opportunity to work on this project as well as helping guide me in creating a video which suited their needs.

Finally I’d like that thank St. Mark’s UCC as a whole for being accommodating as I worked with them on this project.
Michelle Manzo
Senior Thesis Creative Statement

In the month of January, my hometown church, St. Mark's United Church of
Christ in New Albany, IN, finished up a capital campaign with the goal of updating their
very worn down buildings. One element they really wanted to promote in the campaign
was a video outlining exactly where the money from the campaign would be going.
Realizing what the sheer cost would be to hire an outside company, they approached
me to see if I would be able to produce a video for them.

As such, the very first thing I did with this project was sit down and determine if I
actually had the time to do it. They wanted it done by the 1st of January, which left me a
slim window of two weeks over winter break to shoot interviews, b-roll, and get
everything together. I accounted for how much time shooting, editing, and duplicating
would take. Realizing I would be home for a few church events before break, I
determined I would just have enough time to turn out a high quality product for my
church.

Another concern was equipment. I have my own digital single-lens reflex camera
which shoots HD video. I knew that I could achieve a high level of picture quality with it.
The tripod I owned had recently been broken, so I took the opportunity to invest in a
nicer one. However, four major concerns remained: lighting, audio, storage and editing.
The church offered to pay for anything I needed, but in that scenario the church would
end up owning the equipment. For the most part, I attempted to buy things on my own
knowing I could use them later and that the church would have no use.
Using the on-board microphone on my camera was going to produce unacceptable audio quality. I went on the search for an affordable lavaliere mic I could use in interviews. Through B&H Video, I was able to find one for less than $30 which had the attachment for my camera. While not a top of the line microphone, it worked beautifully for the project.

I also knew HD video takes up a lot of hard drive space and that my personal hard drive wouldn’t be able to handle it. I found one online and determined this would be equipment the church could benefit from owning. By them owning the hard drive, they can hold on to all the video content on it. My father is also the senior pastor of the church, so it was easy for me to have him order it using the church’s credit card.

Before I began I had Final Cut Express installed on my Macbook, but I had concerns that a minimal program wasn’t going to be able to handle a project of this magnitude. I had money leftover from a summer internship and took a plunge to invest in the full version of Final Cut Studio, something I knew I will continue to use far past this project. The last obstacle was lighting. I couldn’t find an affordable light kit that would meet my needs and didn’t want to invest in equipment I wouldn’t use often. I turned to the TCOM department. First I talked to my advisor, then bounced to the University Teleplex who told me I needed permission from the TCOM chair Tim Pollard. He was gracious enough to grant me permission to check out a light kit for all of winter break, and so my final problem was solved.

After confirming my involvement, I immediately jumped into pre-production with a few members of the publicity committee for the campaign. From the start, it was certainly a challenge having to work with a committee on a video and molding what they
wanted along with my vision for the video. Soon, with great input from my thesis advisor, we determined the key to a great video would be emotional appeal. I advocated it should not be a video brochure—they already had a brochure outlining the information. The goal should be to tug at people’s heartstrings.

Among four of us, a script of sorts was developed and I began breaking it down into the various elements. Soon, I realized that the way it was, over thirty interviews needed to be conducted in a week, which was unnecessary. I sat down with the committee and made it clear that we needed to reduce the script and cut down. Soon, we cut the number of interviews in half and began scheduling. As I was working over my winter break, my schedule was completely open, so most were scheduled in groups of three or four people in a row. This was easiest for me as I could use one set up and not have to constantly tear down and set up lights. I prepared interview questions based on what specific part of the campaign I wanted them to talk about, and worked to make sure there was no one “generic” set-up. No set up was used for more than two interviews.

I also had to be present at major church events worth filming. I went home a few weekends when I knew dinners were going on or some other special event was occurring. I filmed at just about every church service, on Christmas Eve, during music practices, while kids were playing, at the Soup Kitchen, Clothes Closet, and anywhere else I could manage. In the end, between interviews and b-roll I had several hours worth of video files. Something I had to be careful with was to ensure everyone was okay with being on camera. If I was filming at church or at an event an announcement was always made at the beginning of the service explaining why I was there, and what I was doing.
Clothes Closet was where it got a little sticky, as most of the clients aren't church members. I discussed release forms with the committee, but we settled on having signs at entrances and announcements in both locations so they knew I was filming. Before I filmed any of these people I asked if they were comfortable with it, and strayed far away from those that were uncomfortable. No one appears in this video unless they gave me their permission.

St. Mark's is very busy on Saturdays as both Soup Kitchen and Clothes Closet are open. Many less fortunate people in our community come to the church to take advantage of these opportunities. Unfortunately in the past, theft has been a major issue in our church on the weekends. I had so much equipment there every day that I was highly concerned about its safety with so many people in the church. On these days there also aren't many rooms that are completely secure. What proved to be most reliable was keeping equipment in my dad's office. If he was in there, he could obviously watch over it, and when he was not it was locked and secure. Fewer than five people have a key to the office, so it proved to be a good solution for what could have been a very serious problem.

One particular challenge for me was working with kids. I wanted to have them talking in the video, but it was very difficult getting them comfortable with a full set-up. I tried to go without it, but it always resulted in unusable footage. It came to a point that there were only a few kids that could really handle it and still be somewhat natural. I got what I needed, it just proved to be an adventure.

Another problem I ran into while filming was my equipment making it throughout the game. I’d be at the church for several hours at a time and while my battery can last
a while, it was draining from constant use. I had actually asked for a second one for Christmas, so I convinced my parents to let me open a gift a little bit early to solve my power problems. Another big issue I hadn’t anticipated was running out of space on my memory cards. My camera uses compact flash cards and I have a 16GB, which holds around 50 minutes of HD video and a 4GB, which holds only 15 minutes or so. With long days of shooting and interviews I was blasting through these cards. Most projects I shoot I usually don’t exceed my limits, and I did not want to spend money on another card as they can be pricey. I made do by taking my laptop along and dumping video files on my desktop to free up space.

Once I finished the production process, it was time to move on to editing, which I knew would be the most laborious part of the project. I worked to transcode footage throughout. I wasn’t able to just drop raw video files into a timeline—it had to be re-formatted which always took time. I made sure when I was finished everyday to set up my computer to transcode the footage I had shot that day so I wasn’t scrambling when I was ready to edit.

As I began the editing process, I realized I didn’t have a particular vision for the framework. My original plan wasn’t coming together as well as I’d hoped, and I really struggled for a couple of days determining how to bring everything together. Eventually, I decided to split it up based on each individual component on the campaign. This proved to be the most effective framework. This way, all objectives were covered and explained well. They could stand on their own, but all came together in a longer project.

I also had to make decisions regarding music in the video. I knew I wanted a music bed throughout, but I always try to avoid using copyrighted music. I often use
Free Play Music for class projects. It has an entire library of copyright free production music, and had many options I could use for this video as well.

The length of the project was a point of debate throughout. Originally, we’d been advised to make it 15 minutes long, but we felt that was going to be too long and decided to aim for 8-9 minutes. After putting the first cut together, which included everything they wanted originally, it was 25 minutes long. It was clear that major parts were going to need to be cut. The introduction was cut down significantly. We decided to spend much less time talking about the church in general and just jump straight into the campaign. I also made an effort to cut out superfluous comments in interviews. While some comments added some humor or emotional appeal, they were ultimately unnecessary. Finally, I just worked to cut up the core interviews themselves. Over my college career I have developed a knack for cutting out “ums,” pauses, and tangled up words to produce a more flowing sentence. With this video, I also worked and made sure I cut out redundancies so that the speaker got to the point faster. In the end, I got it down to about 17 minutes with the realization the only way to shorten it was to make it too simplistic or cut out entire sections of the campaign. After some debate, the committee and I decided to keep it as is. We determined the content was compelling enough for the members that the 17 minutes went by relatively quickly. In the end, no one complained about length.

My main difficulty in the editing process was forcing my computer to handle such a large project. I’ve had a Macbook for four years. At the beginning of the year I upgraded memory and the hard drive to make it a little faster, but it still struggles as its capabilities are somewhat limited. Often, editing went a bit slowly as my computer
struggled to render footage for playback. I also ended up greatly reducing my playback settings as it couldn’t play it back at full quality without freezing. Each export of the video took about four hours. I ended up just setting it up and going out with friends. By the time I’d get home, it would just be finishing up. I became extremely frustrated at the end because we kept discovering typos despite multiple viewings. For each typo, I had to re-export and I was genuinely concerned my computer would just explode. In the end though, it came through. I spent a couple more hours copying 20 DVDs and came in right under the deadline.

Reception of the video was all very positive. Throughout the month of January I received several calls, texts, e-mails, and Facebook posts from church members complimenting me on my work. It felt great to know that I accomplished what I’d set out to do with this project. While it had a couple of production errors that I notice, it is by and large the best project I’ve put together at Ball State. I had made enough mistakes in the past I knew what to avoid here, and it came together beautifully. Also, this was a great learning process for me as well since I was working for a client, which I hadn’t had much experience in before. I realized it couldn’t be all about me, and I had to address issues and put parts in the video that I wouldn’t have otherwise. Overall, it gave me great confidence in my ability to work for a client and produce a video they’re happy with. Should I decide to open a production company in the future, I know this will be at the top of my reel.