



ST. DOMINIC'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

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a digital pentecost

people setting the world on fire with new ways to evangelize

first catholic hackathon | june 2014



from upper left, clockwise: Fr. Emmanuel brainstorming with enthusiastic Story Project™ team; volunteers taking a break; packed Parish Hall listening to idea pitches; Lux team hashing out the details of project; PreachBack™ team starting to plan

It was the first Friday in June. It was Pentecost weekend. With the work week now behind them, 56 people gathered in the St. Dominic's Parish Hall for the first Catholic Hackathon to share their time and their talent in intense collaboration over a weekend.

The Hackathon setup was simple: Have an idea on a novel way to evangelize? Great. Pitch it. Like the idea? Awesome. Form teams and execute the idea in 24 hours. And so the Ideators pitched to the packed Parish Hall. Heads nodded with each buy in. Applause. There was a palpable energy in the air. "Tell me more!" "How should we do this?" echoed around the room. Participants began forming teams around the idea that most appealed to them, determined to transform a concept into concrete reality. Groups of varying sizes came together, congregated around tables, huddled around open laptops, leaning in as they talked with one other. Other groups gathered around large sheets of paper on the wall, using colored markers to brainstorm, chart, and refine ideas and a plan of action together.

The first Catholic Hackathon was well underway!

Beginnings of First Digital Pentecost

The Order of Preachers (the Dominicans) actively looks to collaborate with the laity in the mission of the Church. The Order of Preachers, instituted almost 800 years ago, seeks effective ways to spread the Gospel today using modern technology. From this mandate, the Order of Preachers for Technology, Information and Communication (OPTIC) was born. OPTIC is an international Dominican effort with branches springing up around the world. OPTIC West is the West Coast branch. But how precisely would OPTIC West carry out its mission?

Fr. Emmanuel Taylor, O.P., OPTIC West's organizer and Associate Pastor at St. Dominic's, brainstormed this question with several Dominicans and parishioners over cups of tea. Br. Lupe Gonzalez, O.P., and Charles Axel-Dien, a parishioner, suggested that OPTIC West would host its own Hackathon. Hackathons are not unique to the Bay Area; a variety of them occur every weekend. However, this would be the first ever Catholic Hackathon. It would have, as its goal, the creation of novel ways to evangelize using new media.

Pentecost weekend was chosen for the Hackathon so as to recall the early Church when the Apostles gathered in the upper room. “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Some even spoke JavaScript,” quipped Fr. Emmanuel.

The organizing team was a skeletal crew of 5 and had to work hard and quickly over 7 weeks to make the idea a reality. The team prepared as well as they could but did not know what to expect. Would anyone even show up? The response in the end was overwhelming: 56 participants in all, forming 8 groups. “This IS a digital Pentecost!” proclaimed Fr. Anselm Ramelow, O.P.

It is the Saturday of the Hackathon, early afternoon. It is another blue sky full sunshine day in Pacific Heights. The Parish Hall at St. Dominic’s is full, relatively quiet, with many people working intensely on laptops. The energy of the room is relaxed but concentrated. Now and then, there is a murmur as teams consult each other in lowered voices. Now and then, someone stands to stretch or to head toward the food and drink. Outside and around the church, a team busily takes photos and conducts audio interviews.

For Hackathon participants, the event was a welcomed opportunity to meet fellow professionals and to share their Catholic faith, working together in the service of God.

Said programmer Chris Colosi, “This has been a learning experience for me...We (Lance Johnson, Michael Maleski) have all been chatting about Catholic engineers, in general, and like, are there a lot of us? I met someone who works at the co-working space that I am in. He was on his way to see Lance [Johnson]. We had no idea we were both going to be here [at the Hackathon]. Seeing someone outside of that [work] environment, we have a different bond now. That’s a lot of value for me.”

Many who came to the Hackathon embraced the team aspect of the event. Chris further explained, “It is awesome to have folks come together and be like, ‘Hey, I can do the art, I can do some engineering.’ There is one guy in our group who is a designer. And



A hackathon brings together creative professionals to collaborate, problem solve, and build a usable, tangible product in a weekend. A hackathon is not destructive; it does not mean to break into something. The word hackathon is derived from two words. The first is “hack,” referring to an amateur who does something for the love of it, and the second is “marathon.”



from top, clockwise: Lux team hard at work; a focused Kidzmass.com team; Kidzmass.com is built and tested

he is sitting there working on the logo. He might think that is an easy, fun thing. For me, I would be, ‘Oh, God, like I would slave over Photoshop, and it would be a nightmare.’ Here you are getting on a very small scale what people want in their lives in the tech community: People you trust, who are fun, who have the varying skillsets.”

For Linda Bracanovich, the Hackathon was a draw because “I love to share ideas about God. So I knew it would very likely be a creative gathering, and creativity always attracts me, and so does God, so does the Church. I am impressed with the expertise of the people here, their knowledge of technology, and their interest in serving the Church.”

“I’ve been to other Hackathons,” said Programmer Schubert Lobo. “It’s a lot more hectic; it’s a lot crazier. You end up working a lot. This a bit easier. And then there’s horrible food, not good food like this. Usually it is pizza and coke, stuff like that. These [Catholic Hackathons] are like completely different ideas, more meaningful. This [Catholic Hackathon], I expected to be different because there probably aren’t a lot of apps done for the Church. So I thought it would be interesting.”

On Saturday evening, 24 hours after the event start, each team presented their weekend efforts to a panel of judges consisting of 2 Dominicans, 2 programmers, and 1 designer: Fr. Michael Sweeney, O.P., Fr. Bryan Kromholtz, O.P., Scott Moyer, Jossie McManus, and Ivi Fandino. The panel was impressed by the breadth and depth of the ideas presented. They agreed it would be difficult, almost impossible, to choose a winner as the ideas were so different and unique. But after much debate, a winning team emerged on the basis of a set of criteria, which included:

- Evangelization: Did the product attempt to bring people to Christ and the Church?
- Execution: Was the team dynamic? Were people inspired?
- User experience: Was the product enticing and easy to use?

PreachBack™ was the winning idea, an app that invites users to engage with priests via a feedback loop. The app aims to facilitate homily feedback, the sharing of

insights on the homily message in daily life, and dialogue between a pastor and his flock. Ultimately, the app hopes to help Dominicans become more effective preachers by collaborating with parishioners in a meaningful way.

The runner-up team was the *Story Project*™, a web-based platform to share faith stories on the St. Dominic’s webpage. The stories will be searchable,

allowing people to find stories of others going through similar situations.

The remaining projects were *Kidzmass.com*, a website designed to engage children during Mass; *One*, a relationship mobile app where both partners are actively engaged in the process of natural family planning; *One Parish: Pastor Messaging*, a messaging tool that lets a pastor easily keep in touch with his flock; *Lux*, an app in which daily readings, such as the Missal, can be followed using swipe technology; *God in your Pocket*, an app that sends inspirational quotes throughout the day; and finally, *Digital pilgrimage*, an app designed to share and appreciate sacred art collaboratively.

Lance, a developer, provided his angle on the Hackathon, targeted particularly at those

without a technical background. “Don’t think this is only for people who work in tech. There are a lot of people who walk in here and all they knew was that they had some idea. They didn’t even know how to start. But some of that stuff can be done. So the idea is one of the most important things. You can be the most amazing technical person, but without a good idea, those skills are not put to good use.”



“You can be the most amazing technical person, but without a good idea, those skills are not put to good use.”

—Lance Johnson, developer



from top, clockwise: Maria Choi from the *One* app team; the *Digital Pilgrimage* team confer with each other; the *One Parish* team shares a light moment

It is now a July Friday evening. Over 25 Hackathon alumni mill about in the basement of the Parish school building, sharing stories, partaking in a potluck reunion. These individuals had returned with a desire to continue the camaraderie and work that began a month earlier at the Catholic Hackathon. An international group of Dominicans joined the gathering, including the Master of the whole Dominican Order, Fr. Bruno Cadore, O.P., and Fr Eric Salobir, O.P., the founder and leader of OPTIC.

Fr. Eric shared his enthusiasm and thoughts about what OPTIC West had recently accomplished and its future, “Visiting San Francisco with the Master of the Order, we’ve discovered the creativity and the dynamism of the group now called OPTIC West. A strong spirit of enterprise, modern working methods,

and a real generosity allow this team to think out of the box and to provide new answers to the persisting questions of the Church: how to bring the good news of the Gospel to young people, to a society in mutation, and to new cultures.”

“And now, what’s the next step? The Hackathon by itself was an interesting activity allowing participants to meet each others and to share ideas. Lots of connections and perhaps some strong friendships appeared. But the OPTIC West team is now facing a bigger challenge: how to incubate the winning projects, develop and test them, and, if they succeed, how to share them with other Catholics? St. Dominic’s could be the first Dominican (and perhaps the first Catholic) incubation center for digital preaching projects. God bless this work!” †

EVENT: PROFILES IN FAITH 2014



*top row left to right:
Sara Stephens, Alfredo Neira,
Augusta Lyon, Rosemary
Davidson
bottom row left to right:
Trish, Siena, and Jamie
Beckman, Mike Bentivoglio,
Tim and Lynne Borter, and
Fr. Michael Hurley, O.P.*

On 3 August 2014, at the 11:30 am Solemn Mass, family, friends, the entire congregation gathered for the 3rd annual Profiles in Faith Awards to celebrate the contributions of 10 parishioners. The men and women who walked up to the altar to receive their certificates and plaques from Fr. Michael Hurley, O.P., Pastor at St.

Dominic’s, have collectively served the parish in every aspect: from the daily behind the scenes work, to fund raising, to faith formation, to peer community groups, to commission work, to the Lima Center. Full profiles are available at http://www.stdominics.org/resources/bulletins/3462/919102_0808314_Web.pdf. †

The Administration Commission wholeheartedly thanks contributing writers Fr. Emmanuel Taylor, O.P., and Ivi Fandino; all Hackathon participants and Profiles in Faith awardees for their time; Ivi Fandino for newsletter layout; and Darwin Sayo for additional photography. Feedback on the newsletter can be directed to st.d.comm.committee@gmail.com.