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PR team: Holy Cross Family Ministries (North Easton, MA), Family Theater Productions (Hollywood), and Frank Tobin Public Relations (LA)

Campaign: A World at Prayer is a World at Peace: The Rosary Bowl

Time Frame: January 2006-May 2007

Budget: \$125,000 (including \$40k in advertising)

The 2007 Rosary Bowl was designed to be the largest outdoor public spiritual celebration of the Rosary in Southern California in 50 years.

To promote the event, a modest team - two paid internal staff from Holy Cross Family Ministries and its local member, Family Theater Productions; one outside, part-time PR consultant; and heavy reliance on volunteers - put their faith in some solid grassroots PR.

They faced the challenge of promoting a positive, unified Catholic Church event through the LA area media that had run many negative stories about the local Church and its leader, coinciding with news that Los Angeles Archdiocese would be the focus of largest clergy sexual abuse trial in US history.

The Rosary Bowl was also scheduled for a busy Saturday night in late May, sure to conflict with proms, graduations, and other events, as well as local evening church services.

Strategy

To reach the target audience of two million Catholics throughout Southern California, organizers knew they'd need to draw heavily upon grassroots support in the 280 parishes, as well as other Catholic organizations, especially with the low budget.

"Our limited budget meant that we had to nurse our resources carefully and rely on old-fashioned,

hit-the-ground-running publicity and marketing skills," says Susan Wallace, external relations director of Holy Cross Family Ministries.

Tactics

The campaign spanned two years, from a startup phase with material creation and liaisons with key events and media sponsors through a full-on bilingual PR blitz.

The bilingual, co-branding campaign with event media sponsors included several Hispanic radio and TV stations.

In addition, media sponsorships and co-branding with national Catholic organizations and web services included the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Exchange, Catholic Online, Parish World, and Catholic Web.

Results

An estimated 40,000 people attended the event. "Quiet miracles happen every day in the PR business, we're all witness to that, but no more so than in this campaign," says Dan E. Pitre, director of PR for Family Theater Productions. "The results of the campaign actually became news itself... how grassroots groups were mobilizing to participate in this event."

National and international bilingual coverage in mainstream and religious media included more than 100 stories. And, the event was covered by every major LA TV station (English and Spanish) and several radio outlets, including NPR.

Future

Outdoor Rosary prayer events were planned in several other cities, including LA and Portland, after the event.