

New Catholic radio station AM 1260 The Rock is

REACHING SOULS

Those who tuned to radio station WCCR, AM 1260, at 3 p.m. on May 11, 2015, heard “Praised be Jesus Christ now and forever!” followed by praying of the Divine Mercy Chaplet. With that sign-on, the station became Cleveland’s Catholic radio station, and the 300th domestic affiliate of the EWTN Global Catholic Radio Network.



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Known as “AM 1260 The Rock,” the station is owned by the nonprofit St. Peter The Rock Media. It offers 24-hour, seven-day-per-week broadcasts of EWTN programming, as well as some local content. Two years into its mission, The Rock continues to grow and attracts a large audience, estimated at 2 million potential listeners.

“It was meant to be,” said Dick Russ, a longtime former broadcast journalist who helped launch the station and serves on its board of directors. “If this were not a proven way to evangelize and spread the Gospel, to bring people to Christ, we wouldn’t be doing it. It is absolutely one of the most effective ways to spread the message.”

All the pieces fell into place, said Jerry Monroe, an attorney and president of The Rock’s board of directors. “We formed a nonprofit corporation and a board. We were even able to get the call letters WCCR (Cleveland Catholic Radio), and the corresponding phone number.” He said Radio Disney sold them the FCC license in May 2015, some office furniture and other items to help the station get started. St. Gabriel Radio Inc., which operates Catholic station AM 820 in Columbus, also provided support.

Bernadette Boguski, who joined The Rock as its first executive director in late December 2016, said the station is building success as a lay apostolate in the Diocese of Cleveland. “We got a testimonial from one

listener who joined the Church last Easter and credited The Rock for his conversion,” she said.

“The pastor’s voice can only reach as far as the back of the church,” Jerry said. “The Rock amplifies the voices of our priests and bishops. It also reminds non-practicing Catholics of their faith and helps get them back to confession and Mass regularly. Then they can hear the pastor’s voice.”

The Rock operates from an office in a commercial development in Broadview Heights. It has a transmission site in the Brecksville area, where a satellite dish picks up the EWTN feed, which originates in Irondale, Alabama.

EWTN is a global Catholic broadcasting network created by the late Mother Angelica, the former Rita Rizzo, who entered the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration at the Conversion of St. Paul Shrine in Cleveland in 1944. The network began in 1981 in a makeshift studio in the monastery garage in Irondale, a suburb of Birmingham, with faith and \$200 in the bank.

Jerry said another Catholic radio station, WMIH, operated on the 1260 AM frequency from about 1995 to 1998. The station was purchased and operated by Radio Disney until 2015. It was off the air for a week while the equipment was moved to a smaller office nearby and things were reconnected for The Rock’s launch.

Retired NASA engineer Leo

Burkardt learned the operational end of the station and is a full-time volunteer. He, Bernadette and Sarah Dougherty, the administrative assistant, staff the office during business hours. He said there were a few rough spots in the early days, but The Rock now uses things like internet feeds to help avoid interruptions of the network signals.

“The Rock is a listener-supported station,” Leo said. “About 80 percent of our funding comes from the listeners and about 20 percent from business memberships.”

There are two spirit drives each year, in the spring and fall. Bernadette said the fall drive, scheduled for Oct. 11-13, ends on the 100th anniversary of Our Lady’s last apparition at Fatima. During the three-day spirit drives, the station schedules local programming 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., with a variety of guests.

Tom Wenzel, EWTN’s Cleveland-based director of marketing for North America, serves on The Rock’s board of directors. He said the EWTN affiliates have a common theme: “a zeal for reaching souls, for reaching people where they’re at.”

Tom credits the loyal listeners and volunteers for the station’s success so far. “They show up when you need them. The Lord sends them.” †



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