


## ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON

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F. Beirne Lovely, Jr.  
General Counsel

TO: ALL PASTORS, CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, AND OFFICERS,  
DIRECTORS AND TRUSTEES OF ARCHDIOCESAN AFFILIATED  
ORGANIZATIONS

CC: CABINET SECRETARIES

FROM: F. BEIRNE LOVELY, JR., GENERAL COUNSEL 

RE: GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

DATE: MARCH 14, 2011

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The burgeoning use of social media has affected everyone in today's world. Whether through Facebook®, Twitter®, Wikipedia®, MySpace®, LinkedIn®, chat rooms, blogs and the like, we have all been exposed to this form of communication in one way or another. The Catholic Church and the Archdiocese of Boston is no exception.

In his message for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communication Day Pope Benedict XVI said:

The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more Saint Paul's exclamation: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16). The increased availability of the new technologies demands greater responsibility on the part of those called to proclaim the Word, but it also requires them to become more focused, efficient and compelling in their efforts.

It is important that, as this technology continues to grow, the Church take a position regarding what it, as a Church and as an employer, perceives to be the appropriate use of social media by its employees, volunteers, students and affiliates throughout the Archdiocese. Having an awareness of the implications of employees and others using social media has been paramount in developing guidelines in this regard. My colleagues and I have compiled the attached "*Guidelines for the Use of Social Media*". These guidelines were produced through the collaborative efforts of the Office of General Counsel, the Office of Religious Education, and Human Resources. Further input was sought and received from the Catholic Schools Office, the Office of Faith Formation and Evangelization, Catholic Media, and the Office of New Evangelization as well as various Directors of Religious Education and Youth Ministers.

Guidelines from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and various dioceses across the country were also reviewed in formulating our guidelines.

It is our advice that those working at the Pastoral Center, at parishes throughout the Archdiocese, at Catholic Schools, and at organizations associated with and/or related to the Archdiocese of Boston that wish to engage in the use of social media incorporate these guidelines as part of their best practices for using this form of communication.

We recognize that social media provide a helpful means of communications while, at the same time, present many challenges as they evolve. We're here to assist you and welcome your inquiries at any time. If you have any questions, suggestions or comments please do not hesitate to (i) call me at 617-746-5672 or email me at [Beirne\\_Lovely@rcab.org](mailto:Beirne_Lovely@rcab.org); (ii) call Fran O'Connor, our Assistant General Counsel, at 617-746-5680 or email him at [Francis\\_O'Connor@rcab.org](mailto:Francis_O'Connor@rcab.org); or (iii) call my assistant, Ann Issner, at 617-746-5683 or email her at [A\\_Issner@rcab.org](mailto:A_Issner@rcab.org).

# *The Archdiocese of Boston*

## **Guidelines for the Use of Social Media**

### **Introduction**

*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*  
Matthew 28:19-20

The Church exists in order to evangelize [Evangeliu Nuntiandi 18]. New technologies, new media, and the Internet in particular, offer tremendous opportunities and an equal number of challenges to those who take seriously the work of evangelization.

In his message for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communication Day Pope Benedict XVI said:

The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more Saint Paul's exclamation: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16). The increased availability of the new technologies demands greater responsibility on the part of those called to proclaim the Word, but it also requires them to become more focused, efficient and compelling in their efforts.

The use of technology is rapidly growing to form, inform and, with God's grace, transform the adults, teens, and children of our Archdiocese. It is important, however, that we make every effort to ensure the safety of producers and consumers of social media, while at the same time ensure the integrity of the message we proclaim. This requires responsible, focused, and intentional use of new and yet-to-be developed technologies.

Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly recognized the significance of these new technologies and the benefits that they offer to all individuals and communities. At the same time, he has warned that in using the new digital communications that are available, they must be used in a manner so as to promote "a culture of *respect, dialogue and friendship*." For everyone's further appreciation and understanding of the role such communications play in proclaiming the Gospel, attached to these Guidelines as Appendix A are the Holy Father's messages for the 43<sup>rd</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> World Communication Days.

These Guidelines spring from the questions and concerns raised by many throughout the Archdiocese and are the product of research and consultation with other dioceses, archdiocesan ministry and administrative offices, and parish ministers. They are offered as a synthesis of best practices, consistent with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Social Media Guidelines. The USCCB guidelines are available at <http://www.usccb.org/comm/social-media-guidelines.shtml> and should also be consulted by anyone engaging in the use of social media. It is our hope and fervent prayer that these Guidelines will assist Church personnel as they use the new tools of technology to proclaim the Gospel.

### **Establishing a Social Media Site**

These Guidelines apply to all Church Personnel within the Archdiocese of Boston who create or contribute to social networking sites, blogs, or any other kinds of social media. Examples of social media sites include Facebook®, Twitter®, Wikipedia®, MySpace®, LinkedIn®, blogs, and comments on any online media stories or articles. Other websites are usually not considered social media, but many of the principles contained in this document should also guide the creation and use of parish, school and ministry websites. For the purpose of these Guidelines, “Church Personnel” are defined as bishops, priests, deacons, religious, seminarians, pastoral ministers, administrators, lay employees, officers, directors, trustees, governors, members, and volunteers (collectively, “Church Personnel”) in our parishes, agencies, schools and organizations sponsored by the Archdiocese or for which the Archdiocese or the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston (the “Archbishop”) has the direct or indirect right (whether alone or in conjunction with others) to elect or appoint officers, directors, trustees, governors and/or members (collectively, “Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations”).

#### **Guidelines:**

- All social media sites created on behalf of the Archdiocese of Boston, any of its parishes or schools, any ministry or department of any parish or school, or any other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization must only be created and maintained by Church Personnel or third parties specifically selected and designated by the organization to create and/or maintain such sites.
- There should be at least two site administrators for each official social networking site. Site administrators must be adults and should either be Church Personnel or third parties specifically selected and designated by the organization to maintain such sites.
- To the extent possible, all social media sites established on behalf of the Archdiocese of Boston, any of its parishes or schools, any ministry or department of any parish or school, or any other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization should be created using the official Archdiocesan, parish, school or other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization email address of a site administrator. An official email address may be the email address provided by the Archdiocese, parish, school or Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization, or an email address generally used by the site administrator to receive Archdiocesan, parish, school or Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization communications. Any email address listed on an official Archdiocesan, parish, school or Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization website is normally considered an official email address.
- Passwords and names of sites must be registered in a central location, and more than one Church official should have access to this information. When a social media site is

created and maintained by a parish, parish school or parish or school ministry, the Pastor must have access to the password for the site and all other relevant site information.

- No personal contact information (for example, home phone numbers or addresses) should be listed in the profile fields of official social media sites. Only official email addresses, office phone numbers, and job titles should be listed.
- Although all Catholics are encouraged to be witnessing to their faith at all times, personal social networking sites should never be used for official ministerial purposes. Personal sites may refer people to official sites of the Archdiocese of Boston, any of its parishes or schools, any ministry or department of any parish or school, or any other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization.
- All information displayed on public sites by Church Personnel (whether official or personal) must reflect the values of our Catholic faith and should always follow the teaching of the Church. This includes, and is not limited to, posts, comments, photos, songs, videos, bulletins, blogs, and podcasts on both official Church websites and personal websites.
- Account settings for official sites should be set to maximize privacy.
- The site administrators are ultimately responsible for both the content they create and any other content appearing on the site.
- If you include a section on your official social media site for third party comments, include a Code of Conduct for those comments. For example, the Code of Conduct on the USCCB's Facebook site is: "All posts and comments should be marked by Christian charity and respect for the truth. They should be on topic and presume the good will of other posters. Discussion should take place primarily from a faith perspective. No ads please." If possible, block anyone who does not abide by the Code of Conduct and delete inappropriate or offensive posts or comments. Whenever possible, pre-screen comments before they are posted and do not post inappropriate or offensive comments.
- Church social media sites should not include advertising for non-Church related websites, events or products, except at the specific direction of the individual ultimately responsible for the site (for example, the pastor for parish sites). Comments that include solicitations or advertisements for non-Church related websites, events or products should be deleted. Individuals that repeatedly include solicitations or advertisements for non-Church related websites, events or products should be blocked, if possible.
- What you write is ultimately your responsibility. Participation in social media on behalf of the Archdiocese of Boston, its parishes, schools, and/or Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations is not a right, but an opportunity; so please treat it with the utmost respect.
- Always remember that you represent the Church.

### **Compliance with Law and Church Policies**

In establishing and managing social media sites, Church Personnel may not engage in any action that may violate federal or state law, the policies of the Archdiocese of Boston, any of its parishes or schools, any ministry or department of any parish or school, or any other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization, or Canon Law. Copyright, trademark, trade secret, and other intellectual property laws prohibit the improper use of others' intellectual property. Do not post copyrighted materials, logos, trademarks, trade secrets, or similar materials without first obtaining the proper permission. If you ever have any question whether material may be protected by intellectual property laws, please contact a supervisor or the General Counsel of the Archdiocese of Boston **before** posting the material.

Church Personnel are prohibited from disclosing information that is understood to be held in confidence by the Archdiocese of Boston, any of its parishes or schools, any ministry or department of any parish or school, or any other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization, including any information that is proprietary. This may include, for example, information about other employees including salaries and disciplinary records, information about ongoing crises and conflicts including ongoing litigation, information about students including educational records, and financial information about the Archdiocese, its parishes or schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization including lists of suppliers or vendors.

#### **Guidelines:**

- In order to protect both Church Personnel and users of official social media sites, all sites and postings must adhere to all policies of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations, including, without limitation, the Code of Ministerial Conduct, the Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Children, Archdiocesan Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy, the Electronic Use Policy, the Anti-bullying Policy, the Anti-harassment Policy, the Sexual Harassment Policy, HIPAA Guidelines, the Massachusetts Data Security Policy and all other applicable published policies, procedures and guidelines as may exist from time to time or as may be created or amended in the future.
- Logos or trademarks of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations may be used on personal websites only with the prior written approval of the applicable organization.

- In many cases, it is necessary to obtain the prior written consent of an individual to use such person's photograph or other likeness on a website. Should you have any questions in this regard, please contact the Office of the General Counsel of the Archdiocese.
- Appropriate photographs may be posted on official social media sites. However, if an individual requests that his or her photograph be removed (or, in the case of a minor, if a parent or guardian ("parent") makes such a request), that request should be promptly honored.
- Before using any images, video, music or other documents, make sure you have looked for and understand the copyrights on that piece of work. The digital rights management issues of the music and film industries are particularly controversial and have led to a number of high-profile lawsuits and fines. It is best to avoid a potential legal problem by using only properly obtained and approved files.
- In addition, it's important to understand the rights of online written content. Just because you found something on Google does not make it free or available for use.
- When in doubt, seek permission from a supervisor or the General Counsel of the Archdiocese of Boston **before** posting.

### **Contact/Communication with Children**

While social media can be a useful asset for the Church and its ministries, it can also be misused. Notwithstanding the informality of social media, it is most important to remember that in using social media, the boundary issues are the same as in person-to-person communication. Anyone using social media should be aware that children are highly likely to view and respond to materials posted online. Therefore, it is imperative that any Church Personnel posting online on behalf of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations be particularly careful in choosing what material to post and how to interact with children online. Most importantly, parents should constantly be made aware of any contact you may have with their children via social media.

#### **Guidelines:**

- Parents should be made aware of how social media is being used by the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations, be given an explanation of how to access such social media sites, and, to the extent possible, be given the option to be emailed a copy of all material available to their children via such social media websites (including through the use of hyperlinks). While parents should be provided with the same material as their children, it does not have to be via the same

technology (for example, if children receive a reminder via Facebook, parents can receive the same message via email).

- Make sure a minor's parent is always aware of any contact you may have with his/her child via social media. Parents can be informed either through written notice (for example, email) or personal contact (for example, face-to-face or over the phone).
- Ask parents, in writing, which forms of communication they prefer be used to contact their children. When communicating with minors electronically, obtain permission from parents to do so. If parents request their child not be contacted electronically, cease all electronic communication with the child.
- Do not request email addresses and phone numbers from children; this information should only be provided by parents. In the case of young children (i.e., elementary school and middle school students), only parents should be contacted directly.
- In the event minors are contacted directly by Church Personnel via email, parents must be copied on the content of all messages.
- Never post any information about a minor without the explicit permission of his/her parent.
- While the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations are free to publicize their presence on social networking sites, minors should not be specifically sought out as "friends" (in other words, individually invited via site communication tools to associate with the group or page).
- Church Personnel should be encouraged to save copies of online conversations whenever possible, especially those that concern the personal sharing of a teen or young adult. If there is ever any doubt whether a conversation may be inappropriate, a supervisor should be contacted immediately, and the conversation should be terminated. If you receive an inappropriate personal communication from a minor, keep a copy of the message and inform your supervisor immediately.
- When communicating with a minor, write or speak as if you are also communicating with their parents. The boundaries that must be respected in oral communication extend to electronic communication. All communication must conform to Archdiocesan Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Children, the Code of Ministerial Conduct and the Archdiocesan Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy. Communication that violates these policies will not be tolerated, regardless of the medium used to convey it and may lead to discipline, up to and including termination.

### **Personal Websites**

Church Personnel from time to time may create on their own initiative personal websites as a medium of self-expression. Church Personnel must recognize, however, that anything published on a personal website is no different from making such information available in any



other public forum. Personal sites should reflect Catholic values. Any information that causes or has the potential to cause scandal or embarrassment to the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations must be avoided.

If any Church Personnel choose to identify themselves as such on their personal website, many readers may assume they are speaking on behalf of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or another Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization. In order to avoid any confusion, it is appropriate to include a brief disclaimer explaining that your website is personal and does not reflect the views of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations. For example, one may include:

**“The views expressed on this website are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Archdiocese of Boston or [NAME OF PARISH/SCHOOL/ ARCHDIOCESAN RELATED ORGANIZATION].”**

Even with this notice, any information that causes or has the potential to cause embarrassment to the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations should be avoided and may, under certain circumstances, lead to discipline, up to and including termination.

#### **Guidelines:**

- Personal social networking sites should not be used for official ministerial purposes. Official sites of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations should not be used for personal purposes.
- Personal use of social media must be separate from business use.
- Logos or trademarks of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations may be used in an appropriate manner on personal websites only with prior written permission.

#### **Monitoring and Discipline**

The Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations should continually monitor all their official social media sites to ensure their consistency with Church teachings. The Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations may, under certain circumstances, have the right to review the personal websites of Church Personnel. Inappropriate posts, comments, photographs, songs, videos, bulletins, blogs and podcasts on official sites may, under certain circumstances, subject the poster or the site administrator to discipline, up to and including termination.

**Guidelines:**

- Official social media sites must be frequently monitored for inappropriate posts. Inappropriate posts and comments should be promptly removed/deleted. A specific site administrator should be responsible for regularly monitoring such sites and removing inappropriate content.
- If third parties create unofficial groups or fan pages about the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations, site administrators should, if legally permitted to do so, periodically review them for inappropriate content (for example, inappropriate use of logos, bullying, harassing, or defamatory language, etc.). You may report these pages/groups/users to the hosting site and ask that they be removed.
- Church Personnel should report to a supervisor any inappropriate use of organizational logos of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations.
- The Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations will not tolerate Church Personnel posting obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory or otherwise potentially scandalous comments, links and/or images which could discredit or cause embarrassment to the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations, or any of their employees, volunteers, staff, vendors, partners, agencies or schools. The posting of any such inappropriate material on official sites (or, under certain circumstances, on personal sites) may subject the individual posting such material to disciplinary action, up to and including, termination.
- The Archdiocese of Boston reserves the right to make changes to these Guidelines at any time at its sole discretion. The Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations shall interpret and administer these Guidelines in light of changing circumstances and events.
- All Church Personnel who may create, monitor, add to or otherwise utilize official social media sites of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations should sign an acknowledgment stating that have received and read these Guidelines for the Use of Social Media

APPENDIX A.

*Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI For the 43<sup>rd</sup> World Communications Day –  
“New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and  
Friendship.” –2009*

*Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI For the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day –  
“The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word.” –  
2010*

*Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI For the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day –  
“Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age.” - 2011*



**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER  
BENEDICT XVI  
FOR THE 43rd WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY**

**"New Technologies, New Relationships.  
Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship."**

[Sunday, 24 May 2009 ]

*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

In anticipation of the forthcoming World Communications Day, I would like to address to you some reflections on the theme chosen for this year - *New Technologies, New Relationships: Promoting a culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship*. The new digital technologies are, indeed, bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships. These changes are particularly evident among those young people who have grown up with the new technologies and are at home in a digital world that often seems quite foreign to those of us who, as adults, have had to learn to understand and appreciate the opportunities it has to offer for communications. In this year's message, I am conscious of those who constitute the so-called *digital generation* and I would like to share with them, in particular, some ideas concerning the extraordinary potential of the new technologies, if they are used to promote human understanding and solidarity. These technologies are truly a gift to humanity and we must endeavour to ensure that the benefits they offer are put at the service of all human individuals and communities, especially those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

The accessibility of mobile telephones and computers, combined with the global reach and penetration of the internet, has opened up a range of means of communication that permit the almost instantaneous communication of words and images across enormous distances and to some of the most isolated corners of the world; something that would have been unthinkable for previous generations. Young people, in particular, have grasped the enormous capacity of the new media to foster connectedness, communication and understanding between individuals and communities, and they are turning to them as means of communicating with existing friends, of meeting new friends, of forming communities and networks, of seeking information and news, and of sharing their ideas and opinions. Many benefits flow from this new culture of communication: families are able to maintain contact across great distances; students and researchers have more immediate and easier access to documents, sources and scientific discoveries, hence they can work collaboratively from different locations; moreover, the interactive nature of many of the new media facilitates more dynamic forms of learning and communication, thereby contributing to social progress.

While the speed with which the new technologies have evolved in terms of their efficiency

and reliability is rightly a source of wonder, their popularity with users should not surprise us, as they respond to a fundamental desire of people to communicate and to relate to each other. This desire for communication and friendship is rooted in our very nature as human beings and cannot be adequately understood as a response to technical innovations. In the light of the biblical message, it should be seen primarily as a reflection of our participation in the communicative and unifying Love of God, who desires to make of all humanity one family. When we find ourselves drawn towards other people, when we want to know more about them and make ourselves known to them, we are responding to God's call - a call that is imprinted in our nature as beings created in the image and likeness of God, the God of communication and communion.

The desire for connectedness and the instinct for communication that are so obvious in contemporary culture are best understood as modern manifestations of the basic and enduring propensity of humans to reach beyond themselves and to seek communion with others. In reality, when we open ourselves to others, we are fulfilling our deepest need and becoming more fully human. Loving is, in fact, what we are designed for by our Creator. Naturally, I am not talking about fleeting, shallow relationships, I am talking about the real love that is at the very heart of Jesus' moral teaching: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" and "You must love your neighbour as yourself" (cf. Mk 12:30-31). In this light, reflecting on the significance of the new technologies, it is important to focus not just on their undoubted capacity to foster contact between people, but on the quality of the content that is put into circulation using these means. I would encourage all people of good will who are active in the emerging environment of digital communication to commit themselves to promoting a culture of *respect, dialogue and friendship*.

Those who are active in the production and dissemination of new media content, therefore, should strive to *respect* the dignity and worth of the human person. If the new technologies are to serve the good of individuals and of society, all users will avoid the sharing of words and images that are degrading of human beings, that promote hatred and intolerance, that debase the goodness and intimacy of human sexuality or that exploit the weak and vulnerable.

The new technologies have also opened the way for *dialogue* between people from different countries, cultures and religions. The new digital arena, the so-called *cyberspace*, allows them to encounter and to know each other's traditions and values. Such encounters, if they are to be fruitful, require honest and appropriate forms of expression together with attentive and respectful listening. The dialogue must be rooted in a genuine and mutual searching for truth if it is to realize its potential to promote growth in understanding and tolerance. Life is not just a succession of events or experiences: it is a search for the true, the good and the beautiful. It is to this end that we make our choices; it is for this that we exercise our freedom; it is in this - in truth, in goodness, and in beauty - that we find happiness and joy. We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by those who see us merely as consumers in a market of undifferentiated possibilities, where choice itself becomes the good, novelty usurps beauty, and subjective experience displaces truth.

The concept of *friendship* has enjoyed a renewed prominence in the vocabulary of the new digital social networks that have emerged in the last few years. The concept is one of the noblest achievements of human culture. It is in and through our friendships that we grow and develop as humans. For this reason, true friendship has always been seen as one of the greatest goods any human person can experience. We should be careful, therefore, never to

trivialize the concept or the experience of friendship. It would be sad if our desire to sustain and develop *on-line* friendships were to be at the cost of our availability to engage with our families, our neighbours and those we meet in the daily reality of our places of work, education and recreation. If the desire for virtual connectedness becomes obsessive, it may in fact function to isolate individuals from real social interaction while also disrupting the patterns of rest, silence and reflection that are necessary for healthy human development.

Friendship is a great human good, but it would be emptied of its ultimate value if it were to be understood as an end in itself. Friends should support and encourage each other in developing their gifts and talents and in putting them at the service of the human community. In this context, it is gratifying to note the emergence of new digital networks that seek to promote human solidarity, peace and justice, human rights and respect for human life and the good of creation. These networks can facilitate forms of co-operation between people from different geographical and cultural contexts that enable them to deepen their common humanity and their sense of shared responsibility for the good of all. We must, therefore, strive to ensure that the digital world, where such networks can be established, is a world that is truly open to all. It would be a tragedy for the future of humanity if the new instruments of communication, which permit the sharing of knowledge and information in a more rapid and effective manner, were not made accessible to those who are already economically and socially marginalized, or if it should contribute only to increasing the gap separating the poor from the new networks that are developing at the service of human socialization and information.

I would like to conclude this message by addressing myself, in particular, to young Catholic believers: to encourage them to bring the witness of their faith to the digital world. Dear Brothers and Sisters, I ask you to introduce into the culture of this new environment of communications and information technology the values on which you have built your lives. In the early life of the Church, the great Apostles and their disciples brought the Good News of Jesus to the Greek and Roman world. Just as, at that time, a fruitful evangelization required that careful attention be given to understanding the culture and customs of those pagan peoples so that the truth of the gospel would touch their hearts and minds, so also today, the proclamation of Christ in the world of new technologies requires a profound knowledge of this world if the technologies are to serve our mission adequately. It falls, in particular, to young people, who have an almost spontaneous affinity for the new means of communication, to take on the responsibility for the evangelization of this "digital continent". Be sure to announce the Gospel to your contemporaries with enthusiasm. You know their fears and their hopes, their aspirations and their disappointments: the greatest gift you can give to them is to share with them the "Good News" of a God who became man, who suffered, died and rose again to save all people. Human hearts are yearning for a world where love endures, where gifts are shared, where unity is built, where freedom finds meaning in truth, and where identity is found in respectful communion. Our faith can respond to these expectations: may you become its heralds! The Pope accompanies you with his prayers and his blessing.

*From the Vatican, 24 January 2009, Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.*

## BENEDICTUS XVI

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**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE BENEDICT XVI  
FOR THE 44th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY**

**"The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World:  
New Media at the Service of the Word"**

[Sunday, 16 May 2010]

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

The theme of this year's World Communications Day - *The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word* – is meant to coincide with the Church's celebration of the Year for Priests. It focuses attention on the important and sensitive pastoral area of digital communications, in which priests can discover new possibilities for carrying out their ministry *to* and *for* the Word of God. Church communities have always used the modern media for fostering communication, engagement with society, and, increasingly, for encouraging dialogue at a wider level. Yet the recent, explosive growth and greater social impact of these media make them all the more important for a fruitful priestly ministry.

All priests have as their primary duty the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, and the communication of his saving grace in the sacraments. Gathered and called by the Word, the Church is the sign and instrument of the communion that God creates with all people, and every priest is called to build up this communion, in Christ and with Christ. Such is the lofty dignity and beauty of the mission of the priest, which responds in a special way to the challenge raised by the Apostle Paul: "The Scripture says, '*No one who believes in him will be put to shame ... everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*' But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? (Rom 10:11, 13-15).

Responding adequately to this challenge amid today's cultural shifts, to which young people are especially sensitive, necessarily involves using new communications technologies. The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more Saint Paul's exclamation: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16) The increased availability of the new technologies demands greater responsibility on the part of those called to proclaim the Word, but it also requires them to become become more focused, efficient and compelling in their efforts. Priests stand at the threshold of a new era: as new technologies create deeper forms of relationship across greater distances, they are called to respond pastorally by putting the media ever more effectively at the service of the Word.



The spread of multimedia communications and its rich “menu of options” might make us think it sufficient simply to be present on the Web, or to see it only as a space to be filled. Yet priests can rightly be expected to be present in the world of digital communications as faithful witnesses to the Gospel, exercising their proper role as leaders of communities which increasingly express themselves with the different “voices” provided by the digital marketplace. Priests are thus challenged to proclaim the Gospel by employing the latest generation of audiovisual resources (images, videos, animated features, blogs, websites) which, alongside traditional means, can open up broad new vistas for dialogue, evangelization and catechesis.

Using new communication technologies, priests can introduce people to the life of the Church and help our contemporaries to discover the face of Christ. They will best achieve this aim if they learn, from the time of their formation, how to use these technologies in a competent and appropriate way, shaped by sound theological insights and reflecting a strong priestly spirituality grounded in constant dialogue with the Lord. Yet priests present in the world of digital communications should be less notable for their media savvy than for their priestly heart, their closeness to Christ. This will not only enliven their pastoral outreach, but also will give a “soul” to the fabric of communications that makes up the “Web”.

God’s loving care for all people in Christ must be expressed in the digital world not simply as an artifact from the past, or a learned theory, but as something concrete, present and engaging. Our pastoral presence in that world must thus serve to show our contemporaries, especially the many people in our day who experience uncertainty and confusion, “that God is near; that in Christ we all belong to one another” (Benedict XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia*, 21 December 2009).

Who better than a priest, as a man of God, can develop and put into practice, by his competence in current digital technology, a pastoral outreach capable of making God concretely present in today’s world and presenting the religious wisdom of the past as a treasure which can inspire our efforts to live in the present with dignity while building a better future? Consecrated men and women working in the media have a special responsibility for opening the door to new forms of encounter, maintaining the quality of human interaction, and showing concern for individuals and their genuine spiritual needs. They can thus help the men and women of our digital age to sense the Lord’s presence, to grow in expectation and hope, and to draw near to the Word of God which offers salvation and fosters an integral human development. In this way the Word can traverse the many crossroads created by the intersection of all the different “highways” that form “cyberspace”, and show that God has his rightful place in every age, including our own. Thanks to the new communications media, the Lord can walk the streets of our cities and, stopping before the threshold of our homes and our hearts, say once more: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20).

In my Message last year, I encouraged leaders in the world of communications to promote a culture of respect for the dignity and value of the human person. This is one of the ways in which the Church is called to exercise a “diaconia of culture” on today’s “digital continent”. With the Gospels in our hands and in our hearts, we must reaffirm the need to continue preparing ways that lead to the Word of God, while being at the same time constantly attentive to those who continue to seek; indeed, we should encourage their seeking as a first step of evangelization. A pastoral presence in the world of digital communications, precisely because it brings us into contact with the followers of other religions, non-believers and

people of every culture, requires sensitivity to those who do not believe, the disheartened and those who have a deep, unarticulated desire for enduring truth and the absolute. Just as the prophet Isaiah envisioned a house of prayer for all peoples (cf. Is 56:7), can we not see the web as also offering a space – like the “Court of the Gentiles” of the Temple of Jerusalem – for those who have not yet come to know God?

The development of the new technologies and the larger digital world represents a great resource for humanity as a whole and for every individual, and it can act as a stimulus to encounter and dialogue. But this development likewise represents a great opportunity for believers. No door can or should be closed to those who, in the name of the risen Christ, are committed to drawing near to others. To priests in particular the new media offer ever new and far-reaching pastoral possibilities, encouraging them to embody the universality of the Church’s mission, to build a vast and real fellowship, and to testify in today’s world to the new life which comes from hearing the Gospel of Jesus, the eternal Son who came among us for our salvation. At the same time, priests must always bear in mind that the ultimate fruitfulness of their ministry comes from Christ himself, encountered and listened to in prayer; proclaimed in preaching and lived witness; and known, loved and celebrated in the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation.

To my dear brother priests, then, I renew the invitation to make astute use of the unique possibilities offered by modern communications. May the Lord make all of you enthusiastic heralds of the Gospel in the new “agora” which the current media are opening up.

With this confidence, I invoke upon you the protection of the Mother of God and of the Holy Curè of Ars and, with affection, I impart to each of you my Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 24 January 2010, Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.*

**BENEDICTUS XVI**

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**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE BENEDICT XVI  
FOR THE 45<sup>th</sup> WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY**

**Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

On the occasion of the 45<sup>th</sup> World Day of Social Communications, I would like to share some reflections that are motivated by a phenomenon characteristic of our age: the emergence of the internet as a network for communication. It is an ever more commonly held opinion that, just as the Industrial Revolution in its day brought about a profound transformation in society by the modifications it introduced into the cycles of production and the lives of workers, so today the radical changes taking place in communications are guiding significant cultural and social developments. The new technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself, so much so that it could be said that we are living through a period of vast cultural transformation. This means of spreading information and knowledge is giving birth to a new way of learning and thinking, with unprecedented opportunities for establishing relationships and building fellowship.

New horizons are now open that were until recently unimaginable; they stir our wonder at the possibilities offered by these new media and, at the same time, urgently demand a serious reflection on the significance of communication in the digital age. This is particularly evident when we are confronted with the extraordinary potential of the internet and the complexity of its uses. As with every other fruit of human ingenuity, the new communications technologies must be placed at the service of the integral good of the individual and of the whole of humanity. If used wisely, they can contribute to the satisfaction of the desire for meaning, truth and unity which remain the most profound aspirations of each human being.

In the digital world, transmitting information increasingly means making it known within a social network where knowledge is shared in the context of personal exchanges. The clear distinction between the producer and consumer of information is relativized and communication appears not only as an exchange of data, but also as a form of sharing. This dynamic has contributed to a new appreciation of communication itself, which is seen first of all as dialogue, exchange, solidarity and the creation of positive relations. On the other hand, this is contrasted with the limits typical of digital communication: the one-sidedness of the interaction, the tendency to communicate only some parts of one's interior world, the risk of constructing a false image of oneself, which can become a form of self-indulgence.

Young people in particular are experiencing this change in communication, with all the anxieties, challenges and creativity typical of those open with enthusiasm and curiosity to

new experiences in life. Their ever greater involvement in the public digital forum, created by the so-called social networks, helps to establish new forms of interpersonal relations, influences self-awareness and therefore inevitably poses questions not only of how to act properly, but also about the authenticity of one's own being. Entering cyberspace can be a sign of an authentic search for personal encounters with others, provided that attention is paid to avoiding dangers such as enclosing oneself in a sort of parallel existence, or excessive exposure to the virtual world. In the search for sharing, for "friends", there is the challenge to be authentic and faithful, and not give in to the illusion of constructing an artificial public profile for oneself.

The new technologies allow people to meet each other beyond the confines of space and of their own culture, creating in this way an entirely new world of potential friendships. This is a great opportunity, but it also requires greater attention to and awareness of possible risks. Who is my "neighbour" in this new world? Does the danger exist that we may be less present to those whom we encounter in our everyday life? Is there a risk of being more distracted because our attention is fragmented and absorbed in a world "other" than the one in which we live? Do we have time to reflect critically on our choices and to foster human relationships which are truly deep and lasting? It is important always to remember that virtual contact cannot and must not take the place of direct human contact with people at every level of our lives.

In the digital age too, everyone is confronted by the need for authenticity and reflection. Besides, the dynamic inherent in the social networks demonstrates that a person is always involved in what he or she communicates. When people exchange information, they are already sharing themselves, their view of the world, their hopes, their ideals. It follows that there exists a Christian way of being present in the digital world: this takes the form of a communication which is honest and open, responsible and respectful of others. To proclaim the Gospel through the new media means not only to insert expressly religious content into different media platforms, but also to witness consistently, in one's own digital profile and in the way one communicates choices, preferences and judgements that are fully consistent with the Gospel, even when it is not spoken of specifically. Furthermore, it is also true in the digital world that a message cannot be proclaimed without a consistent witness on the part of the one who proclaims it. In these new circumstances and with these new forms of expression, Christians are once again called to offer a response to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is within them (cf. *1 Pet 3:15*).

The task of witnessing to the Gospel in the digital era calls for everyone to be particularly attentive to the aspects of that message which can challenge some of the ways of thinking typical of the web. First of all, we must be aware that the truth which we long to share does not derive its worth from its "popularity" or from the amount of attention it receives. We must make it known in its integrity, instead of seeking to make it acceptable or diluting it. It must become daily nourishment and not a fleeting attraction. The truth of the Gospel is not something to be consumed or used superficially; rather it is a gift that calls for a free response. Even when it is proclaimed in the virtual space of the web, the Gospel demands to be incarnated in the real world and linked to the real faces of our brothers and sisters, those with whom we share our daily lives. Direct human relations always remain fundamental for the transmission of the faith!

I would like then to invite Christians, confidently and with an informed and responsible creativity, to join the network of relationships which the digital era has made possible. This is not simply to satisfy the desire to be present, but because this network is an integral part of

human life. The web is contributing to the development of new and more complex intellectual and spiritual horizons, new forms of shared awareness. In this field too we are called to proclaim our faith that Christ is God, the Saviour of humanity and of history, the one in whom all things find their fulfilment (cf. *Eph* 1:10). The proclamation of the Gospel requires a communication which is at once respectful and sensitive, which stimulates the heart and moves the conscience; one which reflects the example of the risen Jesus when he joined the disciples on the way to Emmaus (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35). By his approach to them, his dialogue with them, his way of gently drawing forth what was in their heart, they were led gradually to an understanding of the mystery.

In the final analysis, the truth of Christ is the full and authentic response to that human desire for relationship, communion and meaning which is reflected in the immense popularity of social networks. Believers who bear witness to their most profound convictions greatly help prevent the web from becoming an instrument which depersonalizes people, attempts to manipulate them emotionally or allows those who are powerful to monopolize the opinions of others. On the contrary, believers encourage everyone to keep alive the eternal human questions which testify to our desire for transcendence and our longing for authentic forms of life, truly worthy of being lived. It is precisely this uniquely human spiritual yearning which inspires our quest for truth and for communion and which impels us to communicate with integrity and honesty.

I invite young people above all to make good use of their presence in the digital world. I repeat my invitation to them for the next World Youth Day in Madrid, where the new technologies are contributing greatly to the preparations. Through the intercession of their patron Saint Francis de Sales, I pray that God may grant communications workers the capacity always to carry out their work conscientiously and professionally. To all, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 24 January 2011, Feast of Saint Francis de Sales*

## BENEDICTUS XVI

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