

Towards Full Presence

A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media

Abstract

Towards Full Presence aims to promote a common reflection on Christians' engagement with social media, which has become ever more a part of peoples' lives. Inspired by the parable of the Good Samaritan, the document aims to initiate a common reflection to foster a culture of being "loving neighbors" also in the digital sphere.

In the social media context, where individuals are often both consumers and commodities, this Pastoral Reflection searches for a faith-filled response. This response begins with being discerning regarding the stimuli we receive and being intentional listeners. Attentiveness, together with a sense of belonging, reciprocity, and solidarity are the pillars for building a sense of community that should ultimately strengthen local communities, capable of becoming drivers of change. Becoming "weavers of communion" through the creativity of love, we can envision new models built on trust, transparency and inclusion, learning to be present in God's style and bearing the mark of witness.

Executive Summary:

Watching out for pitfalls on the digital highways

The digital revolution has created opportunities, yet presents not a few challenges. The document identifies various pitfalls to avoid as we journey along the "digital highways." From the reduction of individual users to consumers and commodities, to the creation of "individualistic spaces" catering to like-minded individuals or encouraging extreme behaviors, the journey through the online environment is one on which many have been marginalized and wounded. For Christians, this prompts the question: How do we help the online environment to become a place of sharing, collaborating, and belonging, based on mutual trust?

From awareness to true encounter

Becoming a neighbor in the social media environment begins with a listening disposition, in the realization that the others we are encountering online are real people. Even in an environment replete with "information overload," this attitude of intentional listening and openness of the heart makes it possible for us to move from mere awareness of the other to a genuine encounter. We can begin to recognize our digital neighbor, realizing that his or her sufferings concern us. We aim to build not only "connections" but encounters that become real relationships, strengthening local communities.

From encounter to community

On our journey along the digital highways, we encounter others either in the spirit of indifferent bystanders or in the spirit of support and companionship. If we do the latter, we – who are at times the Good Samaritan and at times the wounded – can begin to contribute to healing the wounds created by a toxic digital environment. We need to rebuild digital spaces so that they become more human and healthier environments. At the same time, we can help orient these environments so that they foster real communities based on that embodied encounter which is indispensable for those who believe in the Word become flesh.

A distinctive style

Christians bring a distinctive “style” to social media, a style of sharing that has its origins in Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us with his words, actions, soul and body. He taught us that truth is revealed in communion, and that communication also comes from communion – that is, from love. Christians’ digital media presence will reflect this style, communicating truthful information creatively, in a way that arises from friendship and builds community. It will make use of stories; it will wield its online influence responsibly, as Christians become “weavers of communion”; it will be reflective, not reactive; it will be active in promoting activities and projects that promote human dignity; and it will be synodal, helping us to open our hearts and embrace our brothers and sisters.

This presence of Christians in social media will also bear the mark of witness. Christians are not there to sell a product or to proselytize, but rather to give witness. That is, they are there to vouch, with their words and with their lives, for what someone else – God – has done, forging a communion that unites us in Christ.

Whether they are at times the wounded, at times the Samaritan, or both, Christians’ chance encounters on social media platforms become an encounter with a neighbor whose life concerns them, and ultimately, with the Lord. In this way, communication grants a taste of the communion that has its roots in the Holy Trinity, and that is our true “promised land.”