



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#40 – April 2014

Technology in our world, in our ministry

Our world has changed. Before there were computers, this was the reality of our lives:

- Memory was something we lost with age
- An application was for employment
- A program was a TV show
- A cursor used profanity
- A keyboard was a piano
- A web was a spider's home
- A virus was the flu
- A CD was a bank account
- A hard drive was a long trip on the road
- A mouse pad was where a mouse lived
- The verbs "friending" and "liking" didn't exist

Just a few years ago, just prior to 2006,

- 4G was a parking space
- A cloud was something in the sky
- Twitter was the sound a bird makes
- Skype was a typo

And now there's a new – and very common - word in our vocabulary and in the dictionary: "selfie." This word has been named [word of the year](#) by the Oxford Dictionaries.

The definition of the word, according to the Oxford Dictionaries is "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website."

Having first appeared in 2002 in an Australian online forum, research suggests its frequency in the English language increased by 17,000% in the past year. "Selfie" gained this momentum by pictures such as one of Pope Francis with a group of teenagers that went viral.

The Impact of Technology

Technology has changed everything about our lives today, whether or not we realize it. Have you ever thought about what you don't do any longer because of technology? Take this fun journey: [50 Things We Don't Do Anymore Because of Technology](#).

Even technology itself has changed; is changing faster than we can keep up:

- [23 Things Your Kids Will Never Understand](#)
- [Did You Know?](#)
- [Comparing the Internet: 2002 vs 2012](#)

How Things Have Changed:

A greeting card that can play "Happy Birthday" has more computing power than existed in the whole world in 1950.

The first cellphones cost \$3,000 each and had a battery life of about 20 minutes.

- from *1,227 Quite Interesting Facts to Blow Your Socks Off*
(W. W. Norton & Co., 2013)

Communication Technology and Ministry

During previous years in ministry, specifically catechetical ministry, we needed to have a grasp of theology, catechetics, spirituality, learning styles and methods, administration (among many others).

Today an understanding and appreciation (perhaps not broad and full-blown expertise) of the role of information and communication technology

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

are crucial to ministry:

- “For the first time since ancient times, we have the perceptual capabilities to see the world, not just as our little corner of the globe, but as an **interconnected multidimensional whole**. Thanks to digital technology, text, sound, images, and data have all merged into one common language ... and **one common medium** Led by this new way of looking at things, our very perception of the world has changed. ... Communication is the medium for relationships, community, and culture, so a more efficient or powerful tool of communication results in their restructuring...”

(*Millennium Matrix: Reclaiming the Past, Reframing the Future of the Church* by M. Rex Miller, Jossey Bass, 2004)

- [The Social Web: Why Social Media/Networking For Catholic Parishes](#)

- [7 Helpful Stats on Social Media and the Church](#)

- “As individuals seek communion with like minds online, boundaries between real world and online community become blurred forcing us to consider new definitions of **what it means to be in community** in the 21st century. This is especially true for Generation Xers who are more likely to see their support network coming from a linking of relationships in different context than those located in their common geography.”

(Heidi Campbell, “Community.dot.com: A Look at Networked Community” quoted in *Millennium Matrix*, page204)

- The new generation thinks “in hyperlink fashion, learns through participation, makes decisions collaboratively, and accesses their information electronically. We cannot use yesterday’s pastoral and catechetical approaches within today’s environment without risking a major disconnect.”

(*Engaging a New Generation* by Frank Mercandante. Our Sunday Visitor, 2012)

- [Social Media: Don't Be That Church](#)

- [Don't Be That Church II: We Need a New Website](#)

- Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, authors of *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (The MIT Press, 2012), remind us that this is an unprecedented time; we are in the midst of a “triple revolution”—
 - the rise of social networks
 - the personalized internet
 - always-available mobile connectivity

The next generation of leadership of the Church will need to be skilled in offering invitations and being persuasive, rather than believing compliance with their directives will come simply by virtue of their office.

However, there’s an upside. With so many Catholics online ... what connected people to parishes in the past (sodalities, prayer groups, social service outreach, administration, schools and many more) will have another layer to them – continuous virtual and interactive connection.

Michael Kelly, SJ in [Ready for the Next Digital Quantum Leap?](#)

- Mobile devices have fundamentally changed the relationship between information, time, and space. Consider the following [2013 Statistics about adults and the internet](#) (and [Fresh Stats On Social Networks](#)). As of May 2013:
 - 85% of all adults use the internet
 - 70% of American adults have a high-speed broadband connection at home
 - 91% of American adults have a cell phone
 - 56% have a smartphone

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- 34% have a tablet computer
 - 26% of American adults own an e-book reader
- [Ready for the Next Digital Quantum Leap?](#)

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Communication Technology: Statements from the Church

In December 2013 Pope Francis met with the participants of the 26th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, under the theme “Proclaiming Christ in the Digital Age.”

Pope Francis named some important features of contemporary Christian living and gestured toward a balanced engagement with technology.

Since 2005 this has been the theme from the church. Pope Benedict XVI referred to the internet and the world of technology and social media as a "digital continent" in need of "evangelization." He saw promise in the place where women and men, especially the younger generations, gather and spend their time. This virtual place is a place where the Gospel can also be

lived and it can serve as a guide for right social interaction and use of technology.

Pope Francis, then, is continuing the encouragement of Christians to not shy away from technology and social media. Pope Francis said. “Guided by the Holy Spirit, we will discover valuable opportunities to lead people to the luminous face of the Lord. Among the possibilities offered by digital communication, the most important is the proclamation of the Gospel.”

Pope Francis also sees modern communication technologies, especially the internet, as resources for reaching out to people, offering them "real reasons for hope."

Christ has no online presence but yours,
No blog, no Facebook page but yours.

Yours are the tweets
through which love touches this world.
Yours are the posts
through which the Gospel is shared,
Yours are the updates
through which hope is revealed.

Christ has no online presence but yours,
No blog, no Facebook page but yours.

- Meredith Gould in
*The Social Media Gospel:
Sharing the Good News in New Ways*

How's YOUR Basic Geek?

Since a realistic understanding and appreciation of the advantages of information and communication technology is necessary today, how comfortable are we; what do we really know and understand?



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Necessity of Communication Technology in Ministry

Many people involved in ministry today, especially adult faith formation, are reminding us of the importance of using today's tools of communication.

In *The Parish Guide to Social Media: How Social Networking can Recharge Your Ministry* (Twenty-Third Publications, 2013), Clarissa Valbuena Aljentera names some of the **benefits of social networking** for today's parish life:

“First, it builds connections and relationships.” The face-to-face relationships are crucial and where live and faith are lived. “...what social media can do is help enhance those faith connections and help to bring more and more people into life-giving relationships within your parish. ... Online connections allow a wider range of contact and relationships – and the prospects for a parish can be exciting.”

Second, it promotes evangelization and outreach. Social media can also be the welcoming, faith-filled ‘face’ your parish presents to the world. It can be the place where people “meet” your parish for the first time....

Third, it brings new energy to parish activities. Social networking can also be used to rally enthusiasm and excitement around annual activities that may have lost their steam. It can create and reinforce community building.... The community at large can learn about and track parish social justice activities, thereby using social media as a vehicle for evangelization and witness.

Fourth, it extends parish life past the physical boundaries and schedules. Through the use of social networking, the activity in a parish on Sunday mornings can continue through virtual interaction during the week. ... online activity allows conversations to take place beyond our physical doors. Good news spreads in new and engaging ways.”

In *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing Good News in New Ways* (Liturgical Press, 2013), Meredith Gould also lists the benefits of social media:

“When used wisely and well, social media can help your church:

- build Christian community within and beyond church-the-building;
- celebrate the sacraments;
- deliver time-sensitive news and information;
- educate newcomers about your church community;
- enhance the website's functionality;
- establish and maintain a local, regional, or national presence;
- gather feedback from congregants;
- minister to the homebound and those unable to attend;
- organize, publicize, and invite people to events;
- preach the Gospel;
- model Gospel values and Christian love;
- provide a safe, secure place to gather for online fellowship; and
- share stories to deepen faith and inspire action.”

Don't miss this [wonderful story about the power of social media](#) and age:

- Are we ever too old to use social media?
- Can we use social media to make the world a better place?

Another benefit of social media was simply stated in “tweet language” on Twitter on November 16, 2013: “Thank goodness for online community! Was stuck. Posed a q'n. Six different, workable responses. Thank you!”

Questions and Hesitations

Amid the growing use of information and communication technology by parishes, religious organizations and (arch)dioceses, there are sometimes questions and hesitations about its implementation and benefits.

In our next issue of **GEMS** we will look at some of these specific questions and reluctances. For now, you might find these quotes and articles interesting and helpful:

- [Fear Not: Objections To Tech In Parishes](#)

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- [Overcome Steep-Learning-Curves](#)
- [Why Aren't More People in Ministry Using Social Media?](#)
- [Why Are Many Parishes Laggards When It Comes to Technology Adoption?](#)
- [Do You Use Facebook and That Other Stuff?](#)
- [The New Evangelization and Today's Technological Tools](#)

- Meredith Gould, in *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing Good News in New Ways*, writes about three conceptual barriers to social media success:

“Although we’re rapidly approaching the tipping point for social media acceptance, there are still many people in active ministry who cling to these false ideas, believing that social media:

- Isn’t real, therefore nothing generated with or from it is authentic;
- Undermines church-the-building, therefore cannot be used to inspire attendance or participation; or
- Should be considered a nonessential luxury because it takes too much time to learn and use.”

A Sparkling GEM

As an indication of the attraction of a positive figure via today’s technology: The Global Language Monitor, a Texas-based company that tracks top talkers on the web, in November 2013 did their [14th annual review of words in English on the Internet](#). Pope Francis was the most popular person on the Internet and @Pontifex was the fourth most popular word in 2013.



Answers to How’s YOUR Basic Geek

1: H; 2: J; 3: D; 4: L; 5: G; 6: O; 7: T; 8: A; 9: M; 10: C; 11:R; 12: E; 13: P; 14: I; 15:Q; 16:S; 17: B; 18: K; 19: N; 20: F

Number Correct

1 – 5: No geekiness

6 – 10: Almost a geek

11 – 15: Pretty geeky

16 – 20: Pure geek



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found at:

- <http://www.ecatechist.com/ebooks/> Scroll down for *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*.
- www.pastoralplanning.com. Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation*.