



Word  
& Made Flesh  
"Shared"  
Among Us



Australian Catholic Bishops Conference  
National Catholic Media Office

WORD MADE FLESH AND "SHARED" AMONG US

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# WORD MADE FLESH AND “SHARED” AMONG US

*The following collection is a publication of the*



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# Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Confessions of a Digital Immigrant <i>Bishop Peter Ingham</i>	9
Finding the Wi-Fi <i>Beth Doherty</i>	11
Cyberspace: Our New Meeting Place <i>Christine Hogan</i>	16
Evangelising the Digital Continent <i>Bishop Julian Porteous</i>	21
Mindful Twittering <i>Anna Krohn</i>	26
Do Not Be Afraid <i>Yvette Nehme</i>	30
The Power of Visual Communication <i>Matthew Price</i>	33
Everyone Has a Story <i>Natalie Acton</i>	38
A Digital Body of Christ? <i>Dr. Matthew Tan</i>	42
From Rooftops to Newsfeeds <i>Sarah Juszczyk</i>	48
Being Frank (de Sales) <i>Gavin Abraham</i>	53
See, Judge and Act Online <i>Stefan Gigacz</i>	57
Engaging Well with the Digital Life <i>Bishop Peter Comensoli</i>	62
Towards a Theology of the Internet <i>Fr. Jaison Paul Mulerikkal cmi</i>	66

Musing on Life as a Digital Missionary <i>Chris Da Silva</i>	70
Navigating the New Media Landscape <i>Michael McVeigh</i>	74
God Does Not Make Rubbish <i>Fr. Rob Galea</i>	81
A Fisher of Men <i>Irene Sutherland</i>	86
Religious Engagement <i>Giselle Lapitan</i>	90
The Web and I <i>Bishop Greg O’Kelly sj</i>	94
Among the Wonderful Things <i>Annie Carrett</i>	99
Conclave 2.0 <i>Robyn Fahy</i>	106
To Faithful Ends <i>Anita Parker</i>	109
Be an Aussie Catholic Celebrity <i>Emilie M. Ng</i>	113
Xt3 – The Message of Christ in the Third Millennium <i>Mary Elias</i>	117
The Changing Marketplace <i>Neil Helmore</i>	122
The Power of the Word <i>Anne Walsh</i>	126
The Church and the New Public Square <i>Adrian Middeldorp</i>	134
The Technology Train <i>Daniel Saban</i>	137
What’s on your Mind? <i>Michaela Hillam</i>	141

WORD MADE FLESH AND "SHARED" AMONG US

# Introduction

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).*

These are the words at the very beginning of St John’s Gospel. They set the scene and tone of the Eucharistic readings that characterise this Gospel account. Over the centuries, theologians have tried to make sense of this concept, this *Truth* that the *Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*. As Eucharistic people, as people of the Incarnation, we believe it, and we allow these truths to dwell in our hearts. We ponder them, and as missionaries, we share them.

This collection looks at the ways and means Australian followers of Jesus, particularly those working in the Catholic media, share the Gospel message through the new and emerging portals of social media.

In his Message for the 47th World Communications Day, on the theme *‘Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization’*, Pope Benedict XVI focusses on the way social networks can be used to proclaim Christ’s message. Social networks invite a whole new realm of engagement; with images, ideas, words, media, film, video, cartoons, phrases, tweets, statuses and blogs. A whole new language has emerged which must be translated. Just as the Bible has been translated into thousands of languages, so too must the message of Christ be translated to fit the digital environment, without losing its power.

*“In the digital environment the written word is often accompanied by images and sounds. Effective communication, as in the parables of Jesus, must involve the imagination and*

*the affectivity of those we wish to invite to an encounter with the mystery of God’s love. Besides, we know that Christian tradition has always been rich in signs and symbols: I think for example of the Cross, icons, images of the Virgin Mary, Christmas cribs, stained-glass windows and pictures in our churches. A significant part of mankind’s artistic heritage has been created by artists and musicians who sought to express the truths of the faith” (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 47th World Communications Day, Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization](#), 2013).*

This message encourages us to use these networks to proclaim, not only from the rooftops; but also from a status update, a Tweet, an Instagram, a YouTube clip, and myriad other ways.

This collection is a modern response to the mandate to “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole of creation” (Mk 16:15). This book aims to respond to some of the questions about how to evangelise the digital world. How do we engage with social media for the greater glory of God? This is the key question that is asked by a wide range of Australian Catholic communications professionals. The contributors to this book work for the Church in Australia and are employed by dioceses, Religious orders, and national Church offices. They are educators, journalists, editors, graphic designers, computer programmers, academics and youth ministers. What unites them is a passion for the media, for inclusion, and for Christ. Here they share how, individually and in communion, through various social media portals, they have allowed the Word made flesh to be shared amongst us.



# Confessions of a Digital Immigrant

*By Bishop Peter Ingham*

**Bishop Peter Ingham** is the Bishop of Wollongong. He is celebrating his 20th anniversary as a bishop this year as well as his 50th anniversary as a priest next year. He was ordained as an Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney in 1993 by His Eminence Cardinal Clancy and was installed as the fourth Bishop of Wollongong in 2001. He is the Bishops' delegate for the media and Chair of the Australian Catholic Media Council.

I was born in 1941, in the midst of the turmoil of the Second World War. After the war, the world experienced a time of intense change.

In Australia, we welcomed migrants and refugees seeking asylum who have since truly enriched our country. In 1956 I made a life-defining decision to enter the seminary and since then the world has continued to change at an exponential rate. Back then we wrote letters and waited in hope for the postman's whistle signalling that we had mail!

The 1960s, 70s and 80s were a time of great social change especially in the ways we communicated with each other, but the fastest change has occurred over the last decade and a half as a result of the Internet. Suddenly, a new social language has emerged with terms like blogs, tweets, Facebook and Xt3.com.

As Chair of the Australian Catholic Media Council and the

Australian Bishops’ delegate for the Media, I am on a sharp learning curve. I am well aware that I am a ‘digital immigrant’ and not a ‘digital native’. But I am determined to assimilate with this new culture as best as I can. Last year I got an iPad for Christmas and it has opened up a new world to me especially with email and internet connectivity whilst on the road.

I have people around me who are helping me navigate the world of social networking and I love reading comments and messages on my Facebook page. When I post something new on Facebook, I am always amazed at just how fast and far the message is spread. The capability of the Internet to be used as a tool to share the Good News far and wide in seconds is one of the reasons why the Church must engage with new media. Pope Benedict XVI’s last four Messages for World Communications Day have highlighted the opportunities and pitfalls of using the Internet.

The Church and people of faith must not remain silent or remove themselves from the realm of public policy and debate; our opinions and contribution should be eagerly sought. The weight of evidence would suggest that from our long and rich tradition of Catholic faith and culture, we have much accumulated wisdom to contribute to public debate. For this reason, as much as any other, upholding and securing religious freedom is vital, not just for believers, but for society as a whole.

So it is with this that I commend to you our eBook of reflections and experience, insight and advice from digital immigrants and natives, who have reflected on the ways they have used and continue to harness the power of social media for the greater glory of God. I hope you will be as inspired and challenged as I have been by their conclusions.

+ Bishop Peter Ingham

# Finding the Wi-Fi

*By Beth Doherty*

**Beth Doherty** is Communications Director for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. Beth has also taught English as a second language in South Western Sydney; volunteered in South America; and has worked as an editor, and freelance writer. A journalist, teacher, photographer and musician, Beth is passionate about using these gifts to share a message of justice, peace and love.

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[mediablog.catholic.org.au](http://mediablog.catholic.org.au)

When I travelled to Italy in 2010 for the canonisation of Mary MacKillop, I was still reasonably new to the world of Catholic media and had not yet worked out the best way to approach the constant demand for information or the need for speed.

In Rome, I remember waiting on corners with a coffee in hand trying to find Australians for that ‘local angle’ to the story, then, well into the evening I would have to hunt down ‘Wi-Fi hotspots’ to upload photos and blogs, often filing articles at 10 o’clock at night.

In many ways, the canonisation of Australia’s first saint was a story that told itself, but the media were always looking for a new angle: a miracle cure; a lock of her hair; a relic; a medal; an anecdote.

During the canonisation ceremony in St Peter’s Square, there was a special buzz in the air. I had spent hours the night before

seeking out good Wi-Fi, trying to get the best signal and the fastest connection. Yet, as the ceremony was about to begin, I became all too aware that I had spent more time seeking the digital signal which would allow quick upload of photos and far less time trying to find a connection with God.

A stressful, albeit interesting and privileged two weeks came crashing down on me as I stood at the entrance to the *Sala Stampa* - the press gallery, a scaffold with metal stairs leading up to a world of journalists, furiously scribbling notes and snapping photos. I was overwhelmed by a sense of unworthiness. Who was I, a sinner, to be privileged to attend such an event which honoured the most holy of people? Six saints were to be canonised that day, and I was not fit to tie their sandals.

Better theological reasoning prevailed later, but I treasured the moment as a gift from God. Not because it was comfortable or even an accurate reading of the situation, but because it led to further reflection on connecting with God, in both the consolation and desolation that the spirit provides.

It also provided something of an analogy for our digital age: the need for us to be constantly seeking out that ‘Wi-Fi hotspot’ of God’s grace, God’s voice in prayer. That said, as seasoned pray-ers and mystics would know, the signal strength of God’s voice does not pop up on the corner of the screen letting us know how long our download is likely to take. There are no bars indicating how good our connection might be. The signal strength is sometimes weak, and at times the reception is bad. Sometimes there is too much traffic on the network. And perhaps sometimes, the effects of the perseverance with the search for God’s spirit are only discernible later, in retrospect.

Digital natives are called to be missionaries in this brave new

world. Centuries ago, the early Christian missionaries left their homelands to share the Gospel. Often not knowing if they would ever return, they went out, full of zeal to spread the message of Christ.

Today, we are a new band of missionaries, ones who need to step out in faith, often not knowing what will come next. We do not know what the next social network to take the world by storm will be. Naturally, there is a level of anxiety too, because we do not know where all this will lead. We don't know what affect a quickly composed tweet or an assembled meme will have on those who see it; it's hard to predict what will go viral and what will remain in obscurity.

Pope Benedict XVI looked at these opportunities in a positive way in his Message for the 47th World Communications Day, writing:

*“...The development of social networks calls for commitment: people are engaged in building relationships and making friends, in looking for answers to their questions and being entertained, but also in finding intellectual stimulation and sharing knowledge and know-how. The networks are increasingly becoming part of the very fabric of society, inasmuch as they bring people together on the basis of these fundamental needs. Social networks are thus nourished by aspirations rooted in the human heart” (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 47th World Communications Day, Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization](#), 2013).*

For me, the gifts of social media have been like this. I never imagined that something as simple as a free network like Facebook or Twitter could invite such a groundswell of engagement. When I created my Facebook profile in 2007 I never envisaged the way it

could connect me with others. I never imagined that Skype could actually be used to speak one to one with a spiritual director over the other side of the world.

We created a Facebook and Twitter account for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and established a Media Blog, which has enabled us to reach out using a variety of modern means as well as create a clearer, more discernible account of the priorities of the Catholic Church in Australia; which are to reach out, and love one another in our God-given dignity.

In my role as Communications Director for the Bishops Conference, using social media has been a real gift. Despite its unlimited potential to distract me, paradoxically, technology has improved my prayer life. It has helped me to connect with the face of Christ, sometimes quite literally through apps that provide scriptural reflections, biblical content, music and images. I saw how useful an iPad could be and was inspired to finally get one after I saw one of our Australian Bishops using his iPad to pray the Divine Office. And when a youth minister posted on Facebook the following modern-day rewrite of St Teresa of Avila’s famous prayer, I had to stop and reflect on what she had written:

*“Christ has no online presence but yours  
No blog, no Facebook but yours  
Yours are the tweets by which love touches the online world  
Yours are the posts through which the Gospel is shared  
Yours are the updates through which hope is revealed.”*

This post, which I felt compelled to share, was a pertinent summary of how Christians can use social media for the greater glory of God. It was a short message that could be used to touch the hearts of people and energise Christians to use social media well.

In recent months, to coincide with the release of his Message for the 47th World Communications Day, Pope Benedict XVI, through the Pontifical Council for Social Communications created “The Pope App” which can be downloaded for free to iPhone and iPad. In his final months as Pope, he even joined Twitter under the handle @Pontifex, which attracted millions of followers in a matter of weeks. Following in his predecessor’s footsteps, Pope Francis has embraced the technology too, tweeting for the first time just three days after his papal election.

It is my hope that via whatever means, even if it is just one line on a social media channel, that our Church continues to spread the Gospel and reach out in this new and brave world. The Gospel imperative is to *‘Go out to all the world and tell the Good News’* (Mk 16:15); this is a call to be missionaries in the true sense of the word and use every means available, be they carrier pigeons or Twitter.

Let us truly discern and open our hearts and minds to the possibilities given to us by social media to touch the hearts of others, even when we cannot always see them. Indeed, we may find that in some small way, it is possible that through a message, an image, or a shared prayer we find ourselves able to pour oil on the wounds of those who have been broken and show them the balm of mercy that is the true face of Christ.

# Cyberspace: Our New Meeting Place

*By Christine Hogan*

**Christine Hogan** is Publisher at Church Resources, with oversight of its faith-based publications, including the flagships *CathNews* and *CathNews Perspectives*, and *Bulletin Notes*. She is the author of six non-fiction titles, including *The Veiled Lands: A woman’s journey into the heart of the Islamic world*, and *Look At Me: 50 Years of Australian television and the women who made it*.

[www.cathnews.com](http://www.cathnews.com)

All my working life has been in media; in newspapers, magazines, print, and now in digital and social media. My current role as publisher at Church Resources brings these together in a very fulfilling way.

In all those manifestations – all previously in the secular media – my work was about the Gospel value of proclaiming the truth. I did not know it at the time, but it was all about those words in Scripture, ‘*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*’ (Jn 8:32).

If you want to know the truth, you must actively seek the truth: of people, of situations, of events. Then, as a writer, you must, as fairly and accurately as possible, retell it so it is understandable and effective.

I have been involved in reporting on some very big media events



in my life. There were some joyous events to cover such as weddings, Royal and otherwise; the birth of children, Royal and otherwise. There have been small moments of truth, too, which by retelling took the specific experience of one person to millions of readers.

There were great events: like reporting on the lighting of the Olympic flame in Greece, ahead of the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000; and glamorous ones, like covering the launch of Dior's new fragrance, *J'Adore*, for *The Sun Herald*, which had me take a four-day trip to the south of France.

And then there were the terrible events. I remember covering the news of a racist murder in Perth; the news of Louis Johnson's murder. Louis was killed by skinheads in 1992 and finally buried at the age of 19 in his country after his adoptive parents took him home to Alice Springs.

Another ghastly story I covered was for *The Sydney Morning Herald*; the murder of a little child. I remember his mother insisted I look at the tiny form in the white casket in an undertaker's rooms in Newtown, so I could see just how beautiful her son was in order to tell the world. But I saw the effects of a terrible bashing death, barely disguised by the hand of the post-mortem make-up artist and then had to find a way to express that while keeping his mother's belief and her child's dignity intact.

In every one of these stories, I was obliged to tell the truth, to bring the reader or the viewer into the reality of the people who had been touched by circumstance in either a wonderful or dreadful way.

But it is in digital media, and increasingly, through social media, that I find a more direct though at times uncomfortable interaction with readers.

I became aware of the power of social media when *CathNews* covered the canonisation of Mary MacKillop in 2010. We had bloggers there who sent in firsthand reports via email and we used group file sharing sites such as Flickr for sending and receiving images. In a series of around 15 special editions of *CathNews* during eight or nine days, the immediacy and the power of social media was on show.

With the recent resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, social media was at the forefront again. I had a heads up just after 10pm on that Monday and by 10:15 I had spoken to our Ambassador to the Holy See to confirm it. By then a Twitter feed had alerted a friend of mine who had gone into the Vatican website and was able to forward the details.

With this swiftly moving story – a real collision between my working life and faith – the new meeting place was forming. TV cameras, radio reporters, print journalists were rolling into St Peter’s Square all right, but most of them were reaching for their mobile devices to tweet short bursts of news on the run while the longer, background truths were discovered, understood, and crafted later.

They were in the new ‘agora’ Pope Benedict XVI speaks of in his Message for the 47th World Communications Day.

*“...where digital social networks which are helping to open a public square in which people share ideas, information and opinions, and in which new relationships and forms of community can come into being” (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 47th World Communications Day, Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization](#), 2013).*

Over the last 12 months, I had learnt to appreciate the benefits of

using Facebook, both personally and professionally, and have enjoyed seeing who is responding to my posts.

But I've also been dismayed by what can be unleashed on social media too. I have been absolutely lacerated by some *CathNews* readers for being too conservative, too liberal and a heretic. However, this just teaches me that we do, in a way, leave ourselves open to many gifts, but also to a level of vulnerability by using these new mediums.

This is the challenge for me: learning how to deal with the way some people feel entitled to denigrate others on social media, ignorant of the laws of defamation.

I was, however, incredibly heartened by the coverage of the election of Pope Francis, which oddly brought together disparate elements in the service of the media and the Church.

I had woken up early to turn on my iPhone and log into Facebook ready to report the news as soon as it broke. '*Fumata bianca*' (white smoke) was pouring out of the Sistine Chapel! I turned on the television and saw the images live from St Peter's Square. As I started to update the *CathNews* Facebook feed, which also shared directly to Twitter, I realised I was talking directly to our audience, in the new 'agora', about what was happening in the Vatican.

By the time the proto-deacon came on to the balcony, I was ready with the Latin I had learnt at school. When Cardinal Tauran announced the Latin name for Francis, I put it on our Facebook page immediately. I have never been in a position to tell people such an important piece of information as quickly as this. By the time Pope Francis arrived on the balcony, and started to speak in Italian, I was in social media mode completely.

His message of love and respect for Emeritus Pope Benedict

XVI was sent in seconds around the world by television, radio, and Twitter. It was a message of faith and evangelisation to the people of the world from their new shepherd.

It was an astonishing period of time; made more accessible and more understandable through the means of social media. News was reaching the world in seconds as images became popular and were shared on social media again and again. Pope Francis on the bus with the rest of the cardinals? Image shared. Pope Francis pays his own bills? Again, image shared.

I see all of this as a tremendously hopeful sign. Never in history have people been able to so immediately connect with others on the other side of the globe.

Back when *The Australian Women's Weekly* started in the 1930s, photographs took six - eight weeks to get from the collections in Paris to the editor's desk. The editor then culled the information, before it was eventually subbed, printed and distributed perhaps three months later.

Now, in three seconds it's there, unmediated. We could all see how simple, unassuming and calm Pope Francis was without the help of the media interpreting him for us.

My hope for the future is that Pope Francis embraces the world of social media to spread not only the Gospel throughout the world, but Gospel values such as love, faith, joy, hope, prayer, mercy and social justice.

I hope that he uses it to protect and defend the vulnerable and the defenceless, bringing the people of God to the table. And I am ready and willing to Facebook, blog, tweet, retweet and YouTube him anytime if it will help spread the Good News.

# Evangelising the Digital Continent

*By Bishop Julian Porteous*

**Bishop Julian Porteous** is an Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney. He is an advocate of the New Evangelisation. He initiated *CRADIO*, a new online media service, “to nourish the soul of the digital generation.”

[www.cradio.org.au](http://www.cradio.org.au)

When the Americas were discovered, the Church was quick to send missionaries to bring the Gospel to people who had never heard of Christ. The result of their efforts is that the Americas are largely Christian today.

When we look at the spread of Christianity, we can see how the Church was able to utilise the means of communication available at the time.

What helped the initial spread of Christianity was the vast network of Roman roads. It meant that within the lifetime of the Apostles, the Gospel had been taken to the various parts of the Roman Empire, even to Gaul and Spain.

The Church has always made use of the media of the day to spread the Gospel. Monks devoted their lives to faithfully transcribing the Sacred Texts and other great spiritual and theological works, enabling their dissemination. The Church became the great advocate of learning. Texts were translated into new

languages as evangelists took the Gospel further and further afield.

We honour Saints Cyril and Methodius for developing the Cyrillic alphabet in the ninth century, which enabled the Gospel to be taken to the Slavic peoples. The Church was able to embrace the new opportunities for mass production of written materials by utilising the printing press developed in the fifteenth century.

In more recent times radio offered a whole new possibility of universal communication. The Popes were quick to begin using it. Vatican Radio was established in 1931 and still continues today to communicate to a vast number of language groups. The advent of television saw great communicators like Archbishop Fulton Sheen reach out with Catholic teaching to people in their homes. Mother Angelica has been able to develop a worldwide television network – *Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN)* – beginning humbly in a garage.

In our times there may not necessarily be new lands to discover, but there is a new virtual world opening up through a range of extraordinary technological advances. We are living through a communications revolution. It is an exciting time as advances are happening at increasing rates. It is also a time of great opportunity for the Church.

In recent years, in his Messages for World Communications Day, Pope Benedict XVI has emphasised the importance of engaging with the new media. In 2009, he called young people who are most able to embrace and engage with the new media to use the opportunity to give witness to their faith and proclaim the Gospel.

*“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”*”(Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 43rd World Communications Day, New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship](#), 2009).

In calling on young people to be involved in this new enterprise he commented on the fact that fruitful evangelisation required particular attention to the culture and customs of the people of the day. It is necessary not only to have the ability to use the new media, but also to know how to communicate through it to reach others.

To this end, I have been involved in the development of an Australian online audio service called *CRADIO* to deliver locally-produced, Catholic radio content. This service is accessed via computer; Wi-Fi enabled radios and mobile devices like tablets and smart phones. It is evident that people today want a mobile communications device that is more than just a phone. Manufacturers are adding more and more capacity to such devices, making them the all-in-one key communications tool that people use.

The new technology associated with tablets and smart phones enables access to digital materials anywhere and anytime. *CRADIO* offers streaming 24/7 but its major focus is on providing audio material which can be downloaded on demand. The website now features an extensive library that can be browsed by topic or category, and new material is added daily. Users can also subscribe via email, iTunes, or any podcatcher or RSS reader.

Young Catholics in the major urban centres have a wide array of Catholic events and speakers which they can access. Those living in rural and remote dioceses are starved of local events that they can attend. A digital audio service like *CRADIO* records and produces materials from events in the major urban centres and enables young Catholics in isolated situations to link in with these events.

There is a growing cohort of young Catholics who are thirsty for information about and inspiration for their faith. CRADIO is designed to provide for this need. The production of Catholic materials which are available in cyberspace also offers opportunities for evangelisation. Good speakers who might otherwise only be heard by a particular audience can now offer their message to a broader audience, to those who missed the event or those who are interested in the speaker or topic. Their message can be picked up by someone who is casually surfing the net or someone who is searching for meaning or faith.

Once you are in cyberspace, you are able to proclaim a message to the world. CRADIO, while seeking to provide for Australian Catholics, is a service that can be accessed anywhere. This means that Catholic faith which is often spoken of in churches or in specifically Catholic venues is able to penetrate the marketplace. This is the extraordinary possibility offered by the new media

Such evangelisation of the digital continent needs digital evangelists. Pope Benedict recognised this when he said the following to the young people he was inviting to become digital evangelists:

*“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”* (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 43rd World Communications Day](#), New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship, 2009).

He knew that it would be young people themselves, filled with the faith and love of God, who would best evangelise the digital continent because they would best know and understand the needs



of their peers.

Like missionaries who were often young themselves and set off to foreign lands to proclaim the Gospel, in our day we need young missionaries who will devote themselves to using the new media to proclaim the Catholic faith.

The new media invites contemporary evangelisers to go to the virtual Areopagus. As described in Acts 17, St Paul went to the Areopagus as the place where ideas were shared and discussed. The Areopagus was the public square where people could come and listen. The new public square is the World Wide Web which has two billion people participating. This is the new location for the Catholic faith to be proclaimed. This is the Areopagus of the third millennium.

# Mindful Twittering

*By Anna Krohn*

**Anna Krohn** is a freelance writer, sessional tutor and consultant in adult learning, ethics and the theology of affectivity. She has written extensively on bioethics issues, and is Bioethics Convenor for the Catholic Women’s League. Anna currently lectures in healthcare ethics at Australian Catholic University.

[www.cwlvicww.org/annasblog](http://www.cwlvicww.org/annasblog)

In 1991 the Australian political scientist, sociologist and historian, Fr. Paul Duffy sj, concluded his major study of the role and nature of the media by arguing that if Catholics were to take the Gospel seriously they also needed to take the media seriously.

In his book, *Word of Life in the Media and Gospel*, published in 1991, Fr. Paul Duffy proposed a three-point strategy. Firstly Christians needed to educate themselves about the different types of media. Secondly they needed to develop a critical awareness of the socio-political genealogy of different trends and images on the printed page, the billboard and the airwaves. Thirdly, whether bishop or layperson, they needed to become adept at participating in media land while bringing to it the ‘life-giving’ ethical and theological presence of the Gospel.

Since 1993, I have found myself involved in online commentary, cyber-evangelising and blogging and that these insights are even more potent today.

Media has exploded with a head spinning barrage of data forms and the ‘viral’ proliferation of new ‘nations’ worthy of audience. The exposing, trans-spatial, unsleeping immediacy of cyber-generated dialogue is also tinged with the poignant hunger of people ‘out there somewhere’ yearning for ‘life-enriching’ clues and the warmth of relationships.

Pope Benedict XVI observed in 2011 that the cyber-era has not only digitalised data and relativised the relationship between its producer and consumer and it has also revealed that information is a person-seeking missile, *‘which is seen first of all as dialogue, exchange, solidarity and the creation of positive relations’* (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 45th World Communications Day, Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age, 2011](#)).

At the same time Benedict cautions his audience to a subtle but real theological and ethical wakefulness. He points out that the virtual polis survives on a certain *‘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’* (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 45th World Communications Day, Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age, 2011](#)). Christians need to be alert to the hidden and not-so hidden idols, pathologies and de-humanising practices that can be bred by social media.

As both agents and audiences of social media, we need also to address these problems with the anthropological truth and beauty of our Trinitarian faith, as well as allowing ourselves to be formed in its high theological, epistemic, social and moral virtues.

Here is a snapshot of prompts to myself for virtuous cyber-practice:

- **Contemplation and Mindfulness**

The cyber ether is crammed with banal, silly, superficial, and numbifying amounts of ‘noise’ and diversion. Life is short. Whatever the size, thoughtful content has more impact and durability than something produced by reactive fingers. Be mindful of the good reasons and probable impact of your browse or post. Mindfulness does not exclude serendipity, fun or delight. A virtual and physical deep breath before entering the fray helps. Prayer and grace subtly informs our minds.

- **Justice**

The cut and paste-ability of on-line data, and the pressure for instantaneous results, means that it is tempting to ignore or forget the value of intellectual and creative labour. It is tempting to exploit or be exploited cheaply. The easy anonymity of the internet can feed the ogres, trolls and gremlins of our own vices. Avoid degrading, manipulative or toxic language, imagery or techniques about others or about oneself.

- **Discernment**

The internet is not a level playing field. Search out, appreciate and promote interpreters and sources who are truthful, wise, reliable and good. Step over gossip, sensation and personal bickering on whatever scale. Wisdom comes from discerning the cream not by hoarding flotsam.

- **Humility and Teach-ability**

The Holy Spirit works in cyberspace and therefore calls forth particular gifts and talents in surprising places. It takes a brave and humble heart to work with one’s strengths, and to know

personal limits and shortcomings. Social media encourages collaboration but can also breed narcissism. I have learned to be teachable by working with clever collaborators who have talents and gifts thin in my own repertoire.

- **Creaturely Integrity**

Internet creation is not an end in it itself. It is good to remember we are incarnated, time-embedded and sacramental beings. Avoid being consumed by virtual stimulus like so many battery hens and roosters. Like healthy chooks, we need sunshine, exercise and flesh and blood experience. It is important to know when to turn the computer, phone or tablet off and to enjoy and tackle the organic reality of mind, heart and body.

# Do Not Be Afraid

By Yvette Nehme

**Yvette Nehme** is Campus Minister for the Australian Catholic University, Strathfield. Prior to this appointment, she was a Co-ordinator for World Youth Day 2008 for the Sisters of St Joseph. Yvette holds a Bachelor of Theology from the Catholic Institute of Sydney, and holds postgraduate qualifications in Events and Marketing Management. Her Twitter handle is [@NehmeYvette](#).

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*“Do not be afraid. Go on speaking, and do not be silent”  
(Acts 18:9).*

In February 2010, I was appointed to the position of Campus Minister for the Australian Catholic University (ACU). ACU shares in the rich heritage of the Catholic Christian tradition. Its work of education and research continues the long search of the Catholic community for knowledge, truth and understanding, which contributes to human wellbeing. Drawing on the values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the principles enunciated in Catholic social teaching, the university *“explicitly engages the social, ethical and religious dimensions of the questions it faces in teaching and research, and service”* (ACU Mission Statement).

Campus Ministry is a vital part of the university community. It is our role to ensure we keep the mission alive. Being an institution of education, it is expected that we access social media networks to proclaim the Gospel, Church Teachings and our work. Online social

networking has become a way of life for many. St. Francis of Assisi famously said *“Preach the gospel at all times; use words if necessary.”* But this does not mean that we can choose between proclaiming and living the Gospel, because to provide an authentic witness to the Gospel, we must do both.

Almost everyone has a Facebook page these days. Young people live and breathe Facebook. They post the most minor incidents in their lives such as “Just bought a yoghurt” to the most traumatic, such as the death of a family member. They are not afraid of who reads their thoughts nor of how they will be perceived.

I know from experience that many young people go to Facebook for answers and inspiration. With this in mind, I created a work Facebook page. Many of the friends on my Facebook page are current ACU students, graduates, young people from different walks of life and acquaintances from many Catholic, Christian and Church networks. While I am mindful not to hide my light under a bushel, I do think that some discretion is needed; perhaps this comes from my desire to always remain seeker-sensitive. When I say sensitive, I don’t mean we need to be scared of offending anyone with the truth, we just need to be aware of our potential audience.

I recently joined Twitter after being asked by young people to participate. I found the easiest way to participate on Twitter when I first signed up as far as spreading the Good News was concerned was to simply retweet what others have already tweeted. Once I was comfortable with tweeting, I would tweet my Facebook posts.

For the uninitiated, there can be times when being active on social media is challenging, especially when your Facebook posts are ridiculed. If and when this happens, the options available include encouraging an open dialogue or debate or sending a private message to the Facebook user to ask them to kindly remove

their comment. I always choose the latter and on many occasions they kindly remove the comment. I then organise a time to meet in person and discuss the reasons behind why they posted the comment.

Many times the young person posted the offensive comment as a cry for help, and meeting up is an opportunity to not only evangelise but to discuss the post in person and provide pastoral care. Asking a Facebook user to remove the comment is not a way to prevent “free speech” but rather to protect others on Facebook from getting into a debate where they may have no experience in dealing with such a situation. It’s important to practise this kind of discretion when administering a Facebook page because, as mentioned earlier, many young people post whatever they are thinking, unaware of possible ramifications.

Although the majority of young people are not willing to share their faith on social media there is a minority who are not afraid to defend their faith. We should never discourage anyone from using their online social networking opportunities to share the Gospel and Church Teaching. I would encourage young people to “always be prepared to give answers to anyone who asks you to give reason for your posts and retweets. Remember to do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (A paraphrasing of *1 Peter 3:15-16*). Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise.



# The Power of Visual Communication

*By Matthew Price*

**Matthew Price** is a freelance graphic designer and website developer, with a particular passion for producing visually-appealing content for the Church. He worked for 13 years in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, developing many websites and promotional materials. He is married with six children. His Twitter handle is [@mbprice98](#).

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In 1997, a friend of my parents suggested that I apply for a job in the Vocations Office of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. The role of the Vocations Office is to promote and encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life. While this was a dramatic change from the high tech corporate environment, I was very blessed that the Vocations Director was at the forefront of vocations promotion, and was keen to explore new technologies and ways of reaching a wider audience.

To meet the very challenging task of vocations promotion through website and print design, we needed to constantly think ‘outside the square’ and our ‘safe’ environment. As the former Apple Store impresario Ron Johnson suggests: “*Design works if it’s authentic, inspired, and has a clear point of view*” (Design Feast [www.designfeast.com/thoughts-on-design](http://www.designfeast.com/thoughts-on-design) at 20 April 2013). Over the next three

years, we established a strong international online presence with print material being distributed globally.

Fifteen years later, many of the concepts and ideas that were encouraged by a large number of priests (some of whom are now bishops) can now be fully realised, thanks to advancements in technology and burgeoning social media networks. I believe that we need to borrow some of the advertising ideas from the secular world, and incorporate these into how we promote the mission of the Church.

When I first began developing websites, I thought like a developer. I had strict rules of where information must fit. The influence of print design and creative ideas later evolved for me into a pattern of rules so that development and design could work together in balance and harmony. The design became the channel to spread the message more effectively. As we have learnt through the years, visual connection is so important. The visual message determines whether the viewer responds positively or negatively.

Social media has opened up a wider gateway to the world and the message of the Universal Church. We are connected through a large number of platforms and share photos, reflections and inspirational quotes. The message of Christ is not only found each Sunday when attending Mass, but is accessed instantly on computers and mobile devices.

In 2012, I was sent a direct message on Twitter from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications (@PCCS\_VA). It was an invitation to be involved in the design of a new website, [intermirifica.net](http://intermirifica.net), a wiki enabling Catholic media around the world to connect and share their stories. When working on the design, I chose quotes from Pope Paul VI's decree on the media social communications, *Inter Mirifica*, which reflected the international element of the project,

which covered three continents:

*“The effectiveness of media reaches beyond national boundaries... offices should co-operate among themselves on an international plane”* (Pope Paul VI, *Inter Mirifica*, [Decree on the Media of Social Communications](#), 1963).

Through social media and advances in technology, boundaries are being removed and each of us has been given a great opportunity to promote the New Evangelisation to the furthest corners of the earth, to spread the message of Christ, and to further the mission of the Church.

The 46th World Communications Day Message was heavily promoted through social media. I was involved with the design of the kit produced by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and also created a series of Facebook cover images encouraging users to follow #Silence2012 on Twitter. These visual messages created in Australia, spread rapidly throughout the world and popped up in all sorts of unexpected places, including the *Busted Halo* website. The artwork was translated into French and distributed amongst French-speaking social media networks. This result was entirely unexpected but has now opened up further ideas and contacts for international collaboration.

In engaging with other designers and creative artists via my Facebook page [transformationbydesign](#), I have come to realise even more deeply the need within our society for beauty and inspiration, and the power of visual communication to affect a significantly larger audience. Recently, I posted religious art from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom on my page. The humility and generosity of the artists, who were overwhelmed by the extent of the international audience who had now seen their work via Facebook, was inspiring.

The way in which I engage with social media continues to evolve as do the platforms! I interact with my different audiences based on the platform I am posting to, whether it be Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Pinterest, Instagram or Vine. Belonging to a global Catholic network gives greater perspective and reach, and allows for inspiration from those who connect with us. As a graphic designer, my focus in social media is on how best to communicate the message visually, to maximise the engagement and reach of my social network of nearly 10 million, and how I can encourage and assist others in doing the same.

Pope Francis reminds us that we are called to follow in the footsteps of Christ the Good Shepherd. We are challenged to step outside ourselves so as to attend to the needs of others: those who long for a sympathetic ear, those in need of comfort or help. We should not simply remain in our own secure world, that of the 99 sheep who never strayed from the fold, but we should go out, with Christ, in search of the one lost sheep, however far it may have wandered. He also reminds us that the situation today is the mirror opposite of the biblical parable: *“Today we have one in the pen and 99 we need to go looking for”* (Sergio Rubin and Francesca Ambrogetti, Pope Francis: Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio, 2013).

In his apostolic letter “The Rapid Development”, Blessed John Paul II encouraged us to not be afraid of new technologies:

*“To those working in communication, especially to believers involved in this important field of society, I extend the invitation which, from the beginning of my ministry as Pastor of the Universal Church, I have wished to express to the entire world ‘Do not be afraid!’*

*Do not be afraid of new technologies! These rank “among the marvelous things” – inter mirifica – which God has placed at our disposal to discover, to use and to make known the truth, also the truth about our dignity and about our destiny as his children, heirs of his eternal Kingdom” (Pope John Paul II, [The Rapid Development](#), 2005).*

Let us continue to launch out into the deep, trusting in the Lord; spending time incorporating the ‘wow factor’ into our visual communications; and spreading the message of Christ far and wide via the wide range of social media platforms we have at our finger tips.

# Everyone Has a Story

By *Natalie Acton*

**Natalie Acton** is Coordinator of the Broken Bay Synod, a project of the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay.

[www.synod.dbb.org.au](http://www.synod.dbb.org.au)

In May 2011, the Diocese of Broken Bay celebrated its 25th anniversary. In recognition of this milestone Bishop David Walker announced that he would be convening a Diocesan Synod with the intention of celebrating our history, engaging with the present and envisioning the future. The motto of the Synod *“Go...make Disciples”* (Mt 28:19) set forth the vision for the Synod: *“A Synod which would call us to reflect on the commission that is given to each one of us in our Baptism, to grow both in our own discipleship and to bring others to share in this discipleship.”*

Towards the end of our Diocesan Synod, our planning group wrestled with the challenge of how best to present the outcomes of two years’ work of consultation and information gathering.

During the planning process we discerned that the outcomes of this Synod needed to be applied in many contexts, in the living of our individual lives of faith, in local communities honouring their diverse contexts and in shaping the life and work of the Diocesan offices and agencies. Most importantly we wanted the people of the Diocese of Broken Bay to feel a personal connection to this process and outcomes and to feel that the Synod was not just about the Diocese or a corporate intent, but instead that it was accessible for them and relevant to the way they lived out their faith every day.

The first phase of the Synod saw the development of a set of Synod statements, which represented the hopes and vision of the people of the Diocese. We recommended engaging with ministries and programs already active in the Diocese to discover commonalities which could help us realise our vision statements.

We originally sought these stories to analyse their underlying factors to develop a key set of behaviours or ideas that led to their success, but the stories themselves became the Synod’s great treasure. We had pursued these stories looking for an intellectual outcome – an analysis of the factors of success in ministry – but instead we stumbled upon heartfelt stories, from a diverse range of people who proclaimed and lived the Gospel.

We soon saw how important it was that these testimonies be shared with the rest of the Diocese.

Rather than write a lengthy, analytical document that drew conclusions about the Synod’s outcomes, by a representative group of people called together to complete the task, we decided it would be better to give the people of the Diocese of Broken Bay a front row seat to the consultation process. This would mean the faithful of the Diocese would be able to directly access and connect to the Synod outcomes, which were our two key goals.

It was this insight that led to the development of our Synod website.

The purpose of the website would be to tell the stories of the people who had journeyed with us over the course of the Synod. More than 100 video clips of interviews with coordinators, participants, volunteers and employees who are engaged in ministry now form the backbone of this vital resource. The interviews, filmed on location of each ministry, provide a colourful and diverse

presentation of what it means to be a community in mission.

To see firsthand the joys, the frustrations, the challenges, the victories and disappointments in the life of the Church as we live and proclaim the Gospel has had an enormous impact on those who have engaged with it.

As we have workshopped the website with various groups across the Diocese, I have watched them connect with the stories of the people that feature, feeling a sense of pride for the work conducted on their behalf, compassion for those we reach out to, and inspiration to take on the gifts of these stories in starting or refreshing ministries in their own context.

The ‘product’ of the Synod that emerged from these stories is presented in a way that invites local engagement with the outcomes. Trusting in the creativity of the Spirit, as evidenced in the stories, the outcomes were presented in ways that call for a personal engagement, inviting the people of the Diocese to consider how they might be part of bringing the Synod statements to life.

The stories demonstrate that as Church, it is not just what we do, our actions, but the way we go about them. In this way our outcomes identified both a ‘Way of Doing’ and a ‘Way of Being’ that were critical to realising our Synod statements.

The ‘Ways of Being’ were the dispositions of heart observed in the people involved in the ministries featured in the consultation. To aid in fostering this ‘Way of Being’, the website includes commentaries, passages of Scripture and processes designed to engage individuals and groups.

The ‘Ways of Doing’ were the characteristics and activities identified in the ministries that were living the Synod statements. Each ‘Way of Doing’, as presented on the website includes practical



ideas for bringing the statements to life in any context, for ministry groups, in schools and in parish communities.

The Synod provided an excellent snapshot of the people of the Diocese, alive with the Holy Spirit, working in creative, diverse and effective ways in their local communities. This energy conveyed in the stories was the foundation for the eventual outcomes of the Synod. In recording these stories, we gave people a voice. The process also allowed people across the Diocese to connect with the life of the Church, as expressed in a diversity of circumstances. It remains both evidence and inspiration to fulfil our motto ‘*Go make Disciples*’ (Mt 28:16).

# A Digital Body of Christ?

*By Dr. Matthew Tan*

**Matthew Tan** is a Lecturer in Theology and Philosophy at Campion College Australia. He completed a PhD in Political Theology at the Australian Catholic University, and his Licentiate in Sacred Theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome. He is the editor of *The Divine Wedgie*. His upcoming book, *Justice, Unity and the Hidden Christ: the Theopolitics of the Social Justice Approach to Ecumenism in Vatican II*, will be released by Pickwick in 2014.

[divinewedgie.blogspot.com](http://divinewedgie.blogspot.com)

For reasons that are yet to be deciphered, God deemed that I land somewhere in the vicinity of the intellectual vocation, and that any proclamation of the Gospel that he saw me capable of undertaking be carried out in the context of my work in higher education.

If there is any stroke of good fortune or mercy that God has bestowed, it is that being an academic theologian would mean that the task of evangelisation would be a good fit with what one does for a living.

What one does for a living, however, has changed significantly with the rise of the networked age. I think the saturation of internet-based networking has, for better or ill, created a lot of pressures on everyone, whether it be individuals, professionals or institutions, to become more transparent to audiences whose scope often goes

beyond what we imagine or desire. This is no different in academia, and the networked age has indeed prompted a lot of academics to go beyond the confines of the ivory towers many think they inhabit.

What this means in practice is that many academics now feel the need to take their material outside the classroom and make it accessible to audiences that either cannot access the channels of the university, or cut through the often opaque ‘academese’ to make material available on social media. Social media portals very often act as alternative deposits of ideas that challenge the dominance of the ideas being disseminated by the major media outlets. At the same time, it also affords places like Campion College (a tertiary Liberal Arts college) the opportunity to put forward a vision for education that is different from the largely secular and vocationally-oriented status quo in tertiary education today.

As an academic theologian, the networked age has meant that my role as a lecturer must now be supplemented by my work as a ‘popular intellectual’. This parallel role provides, however, a means to disseminate my academic work and a means to keep the intellectual tenor of public discourse and maintain a depth of vocabulary within the Church. I am grateful I was born at a time when the take-up of social networking was still fairly easy, which means that now using social networking as a means to further my work and proclaim the Gospel is relatively simple.

I use social networking to deposit ideas that I can feed back into my teaching or research at a later date as well as get any material that I have developed out to a wider audience than just my students. At the same time, social networking still provides some opportunities to maintain a certain calibre of public or ecclesial discussion, or draw readers into places where such discussions are possible. I also believe my work fits a niche of folks who want to see a radical cultural edge given to some of the things that they normally

do as faithful Christians but which are often dismissed as being socially or culturally irrelevant.

This is why my work as a lecturer and researcher is augmented by my work as a blogger. I run *The Divine Wedgie*, a theological blog which provides me with an outlet to reflect on the Church’s engagement with the manifestations of postmodern culture, including matters like prayer, monasticism, liturgy, pop culture, politics, romance, and beer (not necessarily in that order of importance). More specifically, I try as much as possible to bring to bear on these issues some of the resources that are quintessentially of the Church, and showing how these provide powerful ways to show solidarity with, as well as critique of, postmodern culture. I also write regular posts for *CathBlog*, a daily blog for *CathNews*.

Of course, the material is only good so long as there is the audience to receive it, which means that the task of blogging is also supplemented by the task of forging distribution channels using social networks. The blog is then disseminated through and supplemented by a number of social networks, primarily through Facebook and Twitter. Some of my writing gets reposted on the American evangelical social-networking site, *Faith Village* ([www.faithvillage.com](http://www.faithvillage.com)). Another fun extension to the task of blogging has been repackaging blogposts into podcasts, so that the material on the blog can be redistributed via *CRADIO*. Through a wonderful collaboration with *CRADIO*, I now have a regular podcasting slot featuring materials from *The Divine Wedgie*.

I often get asked about the title of my blog, *The Divine Wedgie*. The phrase came from a radio skit I heard as a teenager, but I think the title serves a few very important functional and theological purposes. At a functional level, I guess in a networked age where anyone and everyone can voice their thoughts, one vital element in the task of social networking is a thumbnail that sticks to one’s mind

long after it is displayed or uttered, and I have it on good authority that anything that immediately associates heavenly things with those more ... incarnated ... can do just that.

At the same time, I chose the title because of its important theological qualities, not the least of which is the fact that, as a researcher in theology and pop culture, the sacramental nature of the Church means that Christianity has a very real contact with the culture around us. More importantly, Christianity challenges the logic by which our culture operates, since the Church communicates the Christ who, as was said in the Epistle to the Corinthians, ‘*overturned the existing order*’ (1 Cor 1:28). I am trying to see it reflected in the blog’s content and title. Just as Christ challenges the existing order, so too the things of Christ, like theology, ought to give the secular status quo a ‘wedgie’. Just like a ‘wedgie’ can be uncomfortable, the content on *The Divine Wedgie* also seeks to challenge and completely upset society’s sense of complacency.

One of the most common problems that plagues Catholic networking is tacky or shallow content, though that can be the problem in all uses of social media.

But these largely presentational problems pale in comparison to what I think are the more fundamental ecclesial challenges that social networking presents. By this I am saying that the practice of online evangelisation touches upon what it means to belong to the Church. The way I see it, online evangelisation presents two sets of challenges for the online missionary.

The first set of challenges consists of two interconnected elements: atomism and virtualisation. A large part of online evangelisation works on an individualistic basis, in that it is presumed that we evangelise primarily as self-driven individuals, when in fact, our evangelisation is but a participation in the spread of the Gospel

by none other than Christ Himself, and when we evangelise, we do so not on our own, but as part of His Body.

Thus, evangelisation cannot be atomistic. It must always retain its link to the Church. One might respond with the line that the Church can be formed online, but I am not so sure the same organic and personal forms of belonging in the Church can be replicated online. You can make contact with someone online and form a friendship, but it is not the communion that we are called to be in the Body of Christ. Indeed, the practice of social networking at its core can work against that kind of communion because social networking is a form of marketing using one’s friends as either a captive market or channels for marketing. It is a form of networking based on exploitation rather than communion, and that is something the online missionary must always keep in mind.

This then brings us to the second set of challenges, which relates to the problem of virtualisation. One temptation with online missionary activity is to be content with leaving the Church community online. The theological problem with that is that the missionary is supposed to spread the Word, but the Gospel of John reminds us that *‘The Word became flesh and dwelt among us’ (Jn 1:14)*. The Word was an *enfleshed* being, a person who occupied real space and time. One is not able to meet persons in their fullness online, and so the experience of the Church requires that missionary activity online pulls those it reaches out of the web and into the real embodied space of the Church. It could be in the local parish, youth group, conference or social organisation, but the embodied experience of the person cannot be seen to be a dispensable element of the spreading of the Gospel online. Otherwise both the Gospel and the Church risk becoming reflections of, rather than a challenge to the wider culture which is uncritically inhaling this cult of virtualisation.

One passage that always comes to mind that helps me understand the nuances of the task of engaging social media comes from a parable from the Gospel of Matthew, *‘Go to the highways and street corners and invite anyone you can find to the banquet’ (Mt 22:9).*

I think this passage reveals some important nuances of the task of digital evangelisation. On the one hand, social networking is one of the corners and highways of the postmodern city which the missionary cannot ignore. The digitising of the missionary and his work can be seen as the contemporary extension of Paul’s implicit exhortation to become *‘all things to all men, so that by all means I may win some’ (1 Cor 9:22).*

Still, highways and corners are but starting points to a particular place, and thus the point of social media, as one of these highways, is to bring others not merely to Christ in the abstract, but to an embodied space called the Body of Christ, that is, an encounter with Christ himself.

# From Rooftops to Newsfeeds

*By Sarah Juszcak*

**Sarah Juszcak** is General Manager of Cradio, a new media service for the new evangelisation. She holds a Bachelor of Communications from the University of Notre Dame and previously worked in marketing and communications at Australian Catholic University (ACU), specialising in digital strategy.

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It was the year 2008, I was 20 years old and World Youth Day 2008 had come and gone in my home city of Sydney. Though a cradle Catholic, I was only now learning to love and live my faith inspired by a series of experiences and the witness of others I had encountered that year. I was also in my third and final year of a communications degree, of which I had enjoyed every bit thus far. I loved film, thrived on the challenge of digital media units, and was fascinated by media and communications theory.

Yet, just months away from graduation, it suddenly started to seem tedious, pointless and superficial. Wouldn't my time be better spent studying theology, becoming a missionary or finding a religious order to join? It dawned on me that up to that point, my education had been focused on learning how to convince consumers that x brand held the key to their ultimate happiness and fulfilment. Yet how would I be helping to build the Kingdom of God? What did communications have to do with Christianity, anyway?

Three years after graduating, I was invited to speak to a group



of young people about media, communications and evangelisation. Seeing as I had just accepted a new role as Manager of CRADIO, an Australian Catholic Internet radio and podcasting service, I thought it might be a good time to find out what the Church had to say on the matter. So, what did communications have to do with Christianity? As I would discover, it had everything to do with it.

God, of course, is the perfect communicator, speaking to us through creation: stars, burning bushes, rainbows and ultimately through the Incarnation, where Christ gave *‘His communication... not only in words but in the manner of His life’* (*Communio et Progressio*: On the means of social communication written by order of the Second Vatican Council, 1971). In Scripture we see how those who came to hear Christ were repeatedly ‘astounded,’ ‘astonished’ and ‘amazed’. In this sense, as imitators of Christ we are called not only to be communicators, but to be good communicators. Then of course Christ instructs his disciples to proclaim his message *‘from the rooftops’* (Mt 10:27), or perhaps more accurately today, from the newsfeeds, blogs or YouTube channels. We are custodians of Truth, and therefore must continually work to find the best ways to proclaim this truth in its fullness and integrity through the means available to us.

At CRADIO we set out with an ambitious vision. Internet radio had not yet taken off in Australia, and is only now gaining momentum; no doubt it will continue to do so with the forthcoming National Broadband Network, 4G networks, better mobile data plans and the advent of ‘connected’ vehicles. Podcasting had proven quite popular amongst early adopters, who were mainly North Americans and tech-nerds, but, once again, it had not quite found its feet in the Australian market. Sydney’s Auxiliary Bishop Julian Porteous, however, had been visiting various media outlets abroad and recognised the enormous potential for the Church in Australia, distinct and dispersed as it is. How could we amplify our voice in an

increasingly aggressive secular environment? How could we tap into the gifts of leaders and teachers of the faith in Sydney and reach out to more isolated communities? How could we do this all with very little funding? Why, the Internet of course! And so, at a round table discussion in Bishop Porteous’ living room, *CRADIO* was born.

Still in its infancy, *CRADIO* draws on the talents of a variety of contributors from around Australia. While we have our own modest studio set up in North Sydney, our material is recorded everywhere from pubs in Adelaide to living rooms in Leeton, or even on occasion from the back seat of a moving vehicle. Part of our aim is to provide a window into the life of the Church in Australia so anyone anywhere can tap into all the wonderful things happening across this Great South Land. We interview touring guests, cover local events and publish talks from various retreats and conferences. Among our regular contributors are Bishop Porteous with his Q&A series, Fr. Richard Umbers with ‘*Living Faith*’, Paul Elarde with ‘*Our Queen, Our Mother*’, Fr. Paul Newton with ‘*Words of Hope*’ and homilies by Fr. Vladimir Echalas and the Missionaries of God’s Love priests. Each day our 24-hour audio stream and website are updated with new content for users to access via their browsers, inboxes, Facebook and Twitter feeds, RSS/podcast aggregators, mobile apps like SHOUTcast and TuneIn and Wi-Fi enabled radios.

Of course, at the heart of our mission is service to Christ and the Church: to bring the Good News of Christ to the world through the media and technology of our age. I have entertained doubts on occasion as to whether this is even possible: surely one cannot be brought to encounter the Living Word through a computer screen, or be empowered by the Holy Spirit via a smartphone audio-jack? There is a definite temptation in any ministry to become frustrated when we do not see the immediate fruits of our efforts, and even more so in the online world where we are physically removed from the people we serve. For the most part we need to trust that God

will work with what exists, and of course God is not limited by the medium! To borrow the words of *Word on Fire's* ([www.wordonfire.org](http://www.wordonfire.org)) Assistant Director, Fr. Steve Grunow, “*If the Church does not authentically and boldly present itself in the context of New Media, others will present the Church, and many of these presentations will be erroneous or hostile*”.

Naturally, feedback does help. One of my favourite messages came from a young woman who had been seconded for work to a remote area where she had no access to a Catholic church. She wrote to tell us that she loved being able to access material from Australian priests and thanked us for reaching out to her online and helping to keep her faith intact. On another occasion I spoke to a teacher of the faith who was a self-proclaimed ‘media convert’. He admitted that at the time he decided to become Catholic, he had not knowingly met one or even set foot inside a Catholic church. These particular exchanges and many others reminded me of the power of media to connect people to networks and discourses that they would never have otherwise been able to access.

There is no denying the enormous potential for evangelisation in the digital realm, but it is important also to recognise the pitfalls. Platforms like Facebook, for instance, are in a sense intrinsically geared toward perpetuating rampant egoism. We can risk becoming so entrenched in the medium that we concern ourselves more with “likes” and “shares” than the souls we are supposed to be leading to Christ: the ultimate end of our expedition into cyberspace. That is not to say that working to build a network is a bad thing, as long as we remain conscious of our motivations.

As in all things, our efforts in new media must be Christocentric, not egocentric. On the wall of our studio at *CRADIO* we have hung a fitting reminder for ourselves from Psalm 127, ‘*Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain*’. If we find ourselves

threatened rather than inspired by the successes of our fellow new media evangelisers, or if we find ourselves reluctant to share ideas, embrace collaborative opportunities or chances to cross promote, then it is a good sign it is time to refocus and take our efforts back to prayer.

Lastly, while there are helpful lessons to be learned from secular case studies, we must always remember what separates our efforts from all others. We are not here to convince consumers that x brand holds the key to their ultimate happiness and fulfilment. We are here because they are our brothers and sisters, and Christ does hold the key to their ultimate happiness and fulfilment. With that conviction we can step out in faith.

*“The Internet causes billions of images to appear on millions of computer monitors around the planet. From this galaxy of sight and sound will the face of Christ emerge and the voice of Christ be heard? For it is only when his face is seen and his voice heard that the world will know the glad tidings of our redemption. This is the purpose of evangelisation. And this is what will make the Internet a genuinely human space, for if there is no room for Christ, there is no room for man”*  
(Pope John Paul II, [Message for 36th World Communications Day](#), *Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel*, 2002).

# Being Frank (de Sales)

*By Gavin Abraham*

**Gavin Abraham** is Media Manager at Catholic Health Australia. His forays into social media have included authoring pieces for blogs ‘*Being Frank*’ and ‘*Catholic Soapbox*’. A former editor of the *NZ Catholic* newspaper, Gavin also podcasts, blogs and tweets.

[www.beingfrank.co.nz](http://www.beingfrank.co.nz)

[catholicsoapbox.com](http://catholicsoapbox.com)

[www.cha.org.au](http://www.cha.org.au)

As someone born in the late 1970s, I am certainly no digital native. I remember living overseas during my university years and joining the World Wide Web along with millions of other people who had no idea what would be achieved in 15 short years or so. I thought being able to send email was pretty incredible. I literally shake my head today when I think about the amazing opportunities that have been created in such a short period.

I am sad to say that the Catholic Church has sometimes been a bit slow in seizing those opportunities. Our Protestant brothers and sisters recognised much earlier and much more clearly the role that the Internet could play in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ using a new medium.

I am only writing this reflection because one of the trailblazers in Catholic new media in New Zealand, a young man named James Bergin, grabbed me by the hand and led me into the mysterious world of blogs and later podcasts.

When James had finished building a new website for the *NZ Catholic*, he quite rightly said having an attractive website was nice, but the world was moving quickly and blogs were the way of the future. That sounded fine, except I didn't know what a blog was. “What is it” and “How much will it cost?” were my first two questions.

Before long, we had hand-picked a team of seven young Catholics, each assigned to a day of the week and given the freedom to write on any topic they chose, and *Being Frank* was born. Seven years later, there have been 2,200 blog posts and almost 49,000 comments.

Then I learnt another new word: podcast. A new panel of content creators was found, a new group of technology gurus was engaged and we have now published more than 200 episodes through *The 15th Station* ([www.station15.co.nz](http://www.station15.co.nz)), with discussion of Catholic news, politics and family life, as well as catechetical shows.

Across *Being Frank* and *The 15th Station*, we have drawn upon the faith, wisdom and generosity of more than 25 people, all volunteers, who love the Church and have been willing to commit time and energy to these humble endeavours.

But the Church still lags behind. James uses the analogy of the Church sitting in a fishing boat and invokes Christ's invitation for the disciples, and us today, to be fishers of men.

The Church has a range of different rods and reels at its disposal. Some reach the pews on Sunday, only finding Mass-going Catholics – an increasingly small proportion of Catholics. Catholic publications and websites might find a broader pool, especially if they are leveraging off the growing Catholic education system.

Those are the fishing tools that the Church uses most, and the tools with which it is most comfortable. But they are leaving large

swathes of people untouched. What about the millions not engaged with a parish or a Catholic school? What about those who don't know anything about the Catholic Church? Or those who dislike what they do know about the Catholic Church? They are 'big fish' that the Church is not seeking to catch if it is just using simple rods and reels. We need to cast the net wide, using the new equipment available.

I do not want to be too critical of the Church in its reluctance – and even fear – of engaging in new media. Other organisations have been equally wary of taking the plunge. There is an expectation that because there are many people who have a beef with the Church, they will use online forums like Facebook and Twitter to air those views.

Pope Benedict XVI's foray into Twitter shows that those concerns are real and must be anticipated, as I am sure they were when the Vatican communications gurus deliberated over the pros and cons of entering the Twittersphere. But Twitter is not the only – and often will not be the best – social network to use, largely because other people's tweets to your account cannot be easily removed.

While working in Auckland, I helped establish a Facebook page for Bishop Patrick Dunn after talking him through all the options. By discerning what the appropriate settings would be for his page, Bishop Dunn now has over 1,300 followers and none of the fears we discussed have been realised.

So what is just one big benefit of having a bishop on Facebook? Well, as I scroll through posts with funny pictures, venting over sports performances and tales of people's Saturday night adventures, I am also seeing posts from Bishop Dunn with a daily reflection or a reminder of what feast day the Church is about to celebrate. Facebook, Twitter and other social networks allow the Church to

inject itself into the everyday life of people – Catholic and non-Catholic alike – in ways previously not possible. It is an opportunity that is too lucrative to turn down.

Surely every diocese in the world has their James Bergin who is ready and willing to lend a hand and a mind to walk the Church into the unknown.

The Church has been seeking to expand its definition of vocation in recent years, realising that people can live out their vocation in ways other than the traditional states of marriage, priesthood, religious or single life. One can find a vocation in the work they do within the family, in the office or in whatever other workplace or volunteer capacity they occupy.

Has the Church come far enough that it can see social media engagement, and especially coordination of Catholic new media projects, as a vocation? If so, that is something to celebrate. If not, we risk continuing to lag behind in meeting people – young people in particular – where they are.

If we believe we hold the Truth, the greatest message there is, why are we keeping it to ourselves?



# See, Judge and Act Online

*By Stefan Gigacz*

**Stefan Gigacz** is preparing a PhD at MCD University of Divinity, Melbourne, on the role and impact of Joseph Cardijn at Vatican II. He regularly writes for *CathNews*.

[www.josephcardijn.com](http://www.josephcardijn.com) (EN)

[www.josephcardijn.fr](http://www.josephcardijn.fr) (FR)

My main experience of using social networks to proclaim the Gospel has come about through my work with the Cardijn Community International, an international movement working to promote the spirituality and methodology developed by Joseph Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers (YCW) movement.

Cardijn was probably the first truly global Catholic personality, travelling to every continent in 24 voyages from 1946 to 1967. He had a huge impact on many of the key players at Vatican II, from theologians such as Congar and Chenu, to bishops and cardinals such as Cardinal Liénart, Bishop Helder Camara and many others, including Australian conciliar bishops such as Bishops Justin Simonds, Francis Rush, James Gleeson and Redmond Prendiville.

Yet since his death in 1967, Cardijn has fallen into obscurity. He hardly rates a mention in the existing historiography of Vatican II despite his influence on key conciliar documents including the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*; the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*; as well as on Chapter IV of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.

Since his death, Cardijn’s writings have also gone out of print, meaning that it is difficult for researchers and others to access his writings. This is particularly so because he wrote, not for academic or theological journals, but for movement publications, magazines for priests and the like.

Out of this problem, I developed the idea of compiling a kind of “complete works” of Joseph Cardijn that would make his work known to a new generation of lay people, youth and young adult ministers, priests and all those working for social justice, and to promote the lay apostolate.

I would like to share how the Internet, the World Wide Web and social media tools have helped us work towards this goal of making Cardijn accessible once again.

I first became aware of the intriguing possibilities of the Internet around 1990, when a friend introduced me to the concept of email. By connecting a computer to a phone line via a modem, you could instantly send and receive messages to anybody anywhere in the world.

At the time, I was working for the International YCW and I was only too aware of the limitations and expense of international phone calls and faxes. Suddenly, there was an alternative on the horizon.

Even more intriguingly, I learned that using the same system, you could ‘telnet’ or log in to other people’s computers, once again in principle, anywhere in the world. That was before the days of the browser and I distinctly remember logging in from Melbourne into the computers of the University of Bratislava in the then Czechoslovakia. I could not understand much but it was amazing to be able to do so.

By 1995, I was studying in Belgium with access to the internet at

the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve. By this time, Netscape, one of the earlier browsers, had also been developed. That was revolutionary; from Europe I could read Melbourne’s *The Age*. In fact, since it was published online in Melbourne at midnight – afternoon in Europe – I could read the Australian news from Belgium before even the locals would see it.

By the power of the Internet and the World Wide Web, you could be in real time communication with the whole world. Indeed, if you could read stuff from the other side of the world, then you could also publish to the whole world - an intriguing possibility. This idea came back to me a couple of years later when I began work on a project to record and publish the history of the International YCW movement, founded by Joseph Cardijn.

Cardijn had died in 1967 and his writings were already out of print. But there was no market or money available to republish them. In any event, how would we distribute the publications around the world? The answer seemed to jump out: publish online. Thus, using an early web editor, Claris Homepage, I launched my first web project: *The Cardijn Website*.

Anyone in the world with access to the internet could read it, and it only cost \$12 per month to host. Even then, we managed to get 200-300 visitors a month. And it was clear that this was the way of the future.

Over the last 15 years, I have continued to gather Cardijn documents in the original French as well as in other languages. There are now over 200 major texts written and speeches given by Cardijn over the course of his life all available on two websites, one in English and one in French. The documents include all his speeches at Vatican II and range from his earliest published article in 1907, to speeches and letters written weeks before his death in 1967.

Moreover, since Cardijn’s writings mostly appeared in training programs, magazines and the like, this was the first time that his writings had been compiled in such a systematic fashion.

The Joseph Cardijn websites now draw up to 3,000 visitors per month, a significant total for a resource and research site catering to a very targeted audience. Even more satisfying is to find visitors coming from countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Ivory Coast. Not only has the web made it possible to publish all of these documents, it also helped me to locate many of them. A history of the YCW movement published in 1990 referred to a ‘now lost’ article by Cardijn on ‘study circles’, which had been published in an obscure Flemish magazine in 1914. It was said to be the first time that he had articulated his famous ‘See, Judge, Act’ method. I always hoped that somewhere, someday a copy would turn up.

And in fact over the last 10 years, Belgian university libraries have gradually developed a nationwide online catalogue of their holdings. Among the listings, I recently found two copies of that missing Cardijn article, ‘How does a study circle work?’ which I have now published online. What’s more, thanks to Google Translate, I was able to publish a rough translation from the original Flemish into English.

Within the Cardijn Community International, we make considerable use of Facebook to keep in touch with our own network. To reach out to new people, we find that Twitter is a much more powerful and useful medium. Taken together, they both greatly assist us in raising the profile of Cardijn’s writings and leading others to access and discover them via our French and English websites.

The major challenge in this project has been the need to learn – and keep learning – new skills, e.g. html, webhosting tools, etc. The good news is that this has become so much simpler over the last 10

years. In effect, anyone who knows how to use Word or to send an email can now easily create a website using Google Sites, Wordpress, Blogger or many others.

The bad news – to the extent that there is bad news – is that technology continues to evolve at an even greater rate; which means that there is a never-ending battle to keep up to date. After all, no-one will come back to a website that still looks like it was created in 1997, or last updated in 2005. In that sense, this promises to be a never-ending project!

Cardijn himself made extensive use of the media available in his time, using newspapers, film and public events to reach out to the laity. I am certain that he would have been even very quick to use the web and social media. I believe he would certainly have made the following words in the Decree on the Media of Social Communications from the Second Vatican Council his own:

*“All the children of the Church should join, without delay and with the greatest effort in a common work to make effective use of the media of social communication in various apostolic endeavours, as circumstances and conditions demand”*  
(Pope Paul VI, *Inter Mirifica*, [Decree on the Media of Social Communications](#), 1963).

# Engaging Well with the Digital Life

*By Bishop Peter Comensoli*

**Bishop Peter Comensoli** is Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney. He was ordained to the Episcopate on 8 June, 2011. He holds a Licentiate of Sacred Theology (STL) in Moral Theology and a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) in Theological Ethics from Edinburgh University. His Twitter handle is [@BishopComensoli](#).

I was born in 1964, a fact which makes me the first bishop in Australia not to have experienced the Church prior to the Second Vatican Council, and which does place me in a particular time and place in the world.

I was born when computers were only just starting to be adopted by large corporations and the idea of personal computing had not even been considered. Yet, when I arrived at the seminary in the early 1980s, I came with a computer-typewriter. By the time I took up my first appointment as a priest in 1992, I owned my own personal computer, despite the parish not having nor wanting one. Then came mobile phones, the Internet, portable computing and now social networking. The digital life has taken hold, and the world will not look back.

The Church, ever discerning, often slowly, has engaged tentatively with this development. In the two years I have been a bishop I have watched with interest as my older brothers in the Episcopate have personally adapted to these changing times. Many now receive

meeting papers on their iPads, rather than as a thick envelope of hundreds of pages. I watch from a position of relative comfort as they discern and navigate their way through this strange new world. It has been a graced and challenging time for many of them.

As for me, I suppose I have always been something of an early adopter. I own and use all the usual hardware: computer, laptop, smartphone, tablet. I live a fairly connected life: emailing, messaging, using Facebook, Twitter and Skype. I even have a personal blog. There's nothing terribly noteworthy about all this, in fact these are now all commonplace.

What is worth highlighting however, is the question of how these tools and mode of communicating get used. As a bishop, and more importantly as a Christian disciple, the digital life – especially social media – raises all sorts of questions about bringing Christ to the world. How does having these possessions, and using these resources, fit with a life in Christ, a life of evangelisation and mission and moral living? I am certainly grateful each day for these things, but I am also aware that to whom much is given, much is expected.

So, how do I use these means of modern living? One of the things I have found about social media is that various devices lend themselves to different uses. For me, the computer is mainly used for productive work. The phone is for conversation and texting, and some internet searching. The iPad is mainly for personal use, and not much for social engagement. I use the iPad for researching on the internet and for Skype, and with so many great apps available, I even use it for prayer.

When it comes to social networks, I have become a bit of a fan of Twitter. It is not a bad way of getting a thought or message out there in 140 characters. I have shied off Facebook in recent times, which I now find fairly inane. I appreciate it can get information out

about events and for groups, but it is not much use for one-to-one communication. I used it when it first came out back in the early 2000s but not anymore.

Everyone has their own preferred social networks, and they can be used in myriad ways. Indeed, this is what Pope Benedict XVI spoke of in his Message for the 47th World Day of Communications when he said:

*“These networks, when engaged in a wise and balanced way, help to foster forms of dialogue and debate which, if conducted respectfully and with concern for privacy, responsibility and truthfulness, can reinforce the bonds of unity between individuals and effectively promote the harmony of the human family”* (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 47th World Communications Day, Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization, 2013](#)).

The coverage of the recent election of Pope Francis, shows how various forms of social media can be put to good use, and play a positive role in spreading the news.

One area where I see real fruits of social media is with young people. Social media can be a great way of starting conversations by letting others know what is happening. It is useful for getting information out and for sharing experiences.

However there is the danger that some will misunderstand the power of these new media to lead us astray. While everyone might feel they need to have a Facebook page or Twitter account to be connected, if they are not used well, they can wind up owning us. And sadly, like all things touched by humanity, the digital life can easily lead us to sinful behaviour and harmful habits.



Another aspect to social media is the tendency to use social media to replace person-to-person communication. True communication is always person-to-person, with the *aid* of various mechanisms. This is one of the more significant, big picture things we need to be attentive to; the way digital forms of communication can lead to the dispensing with true communication.

In using these media, we need to carefully discern how we use them, particularly when considering how we might engage with some of the more difficult questions of faith in a very public and often unmoderated realm. This requires knowing the culture of the digital world, and not just being able to speak some of the language.

In the context of social media it is all well and good to have these various technologies at our disposal, enabling us to do all things we only recently thought impossible, but just because something is possible does not mean it is good. At all times, we Christians are called to do what is good for humanity by learning to attune our lives to how God is present in the living of our lives. I believe that with careful judgment, prudence and plenty of faith this is indeed possible through the use of social media.

# Towards a Theology of the Internet

*By Fr. Jaison Paul Mulerikkal cmi*

**Fr. Jaison Mulerikkal cmi** is a Carmelite priest from Kerala, India. He has recently finished his PhD at Australian National University in High Performance and Cloud Computing. He was instrumental in developing the [aussiepopalarm.com](http://aussiepopalarm.com).

Underneath flashy websites and amazing apps, the Internet is turbo-charged by content delivery networks (CDNs), of which most people are quite unaware. CDNs are the third-party providers who host digital content including images and videos on behalf of leading internet giants like Facebook, Twitter, Apple and much more. Akamai.com is the pioneer of this technology and the largest CDN provider that handles a staggering 20 per cent of the total Internet traffic in the world.

On 13 March 2013, *Akamai* reported a little tremor in its digital landscape. According to *CNN Money*, there was a spike of more than 32 per cent of the normal Internet traffic on that day, caused by the event of white smoke emerging from the Sistine Chapel. Looking frequently at the control panel of [aussiepopalarm.com](http://aussiepopalarm.com) on my iPad, I could see its effects even in Australia.

[Aussiepopalarm.com](http://Aussiepopalarm.com) was launched on the eve of the conclave by the Media Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. Its intentions were simple – to fire an SMS message to subscribing mobile phones as the white smoke emerged from the chimney at

the Sistine chapel and, most importantly, to share the excitement of the ‘*Habemus Papam*’ Papal announcement with an Australian audience. It was set up in record time (30 hours) and was expecting a moderate response of about 300 registrations. But it quickly went viral and within the first three hours of its launch, it had exceeded our expectations. We had to unleash the power of cloud computing to keep up with the demand by migrating this web application on the run to a medium-sized Amazon cloud server. By the time we pulled the trigger, after just 30 hours, it had attracted more than 3,000 subscribers. [Aussiepopelarm.com](http://Aussiepopelarm.com) proved that the Internet can be harnessed in more ways than one for evangelisation, for Christ and the Church.

Pope Benedict XVI identified social networks as the new ‘agora’ and therefore new spaces for evangelisation in his 2013 Message for the 47th World Communications Day. Reflecting on this apostolic letter, Bishop Anthony Fisher op of Parramatta commented on his Facebook page that the Pope had discovered a ‘new continent’ called ‘digital environment’. He posted:

*“B16 just called social media “new spaces for evangelisation” and the digital environment a “continent” where the Church must be present and where believers must share with others the deepest source of their joy and hope, Jesus Christ”*  
(Bishop Anthony Fisher OP, Facebook, 2013).

The Internet is the landscape of this new continent; the digital networks are its super highways and the digital content, its resources. ‘Netizens’ are its citizens and its new ‘agoras’ – the social networks – have turned into super cities or nations. Facebook has around one-two billion users monthly and holds more information about its netizens than any other nation state about its citizens. This new world is definitely a continent.

Whenever we discovered a continent in the past, the Church always sent missionaries. The role of those missionaries was to venture into those lands to risk formidable challenges to spread the Good News of Jesus, with great courage and faith. It is the same for today's much-needed missionaries called to venture into the newly discovered 'continent' of the digital environment and proclaim the Good News. The question those who wish to evangelise the digital environment need to do ask is: "What would Jesus do in this new land?"

I believe He would have gone to Capernaum. Capernaum was the 'agora' where Jesus chose to be. There was a special significance and intent in choosing Capernaum as the major field of his public ministry. He spent at least 18 months in Capernaum – half of his public ministry – after his expulsion from his hometown of Nazareth. Biblical historians would agree that Capernaum was the major connecting town on the Jericho route between Galilee and Jerusalem. The greatest roads of the ancient world – including Via Maris (the Way of the Sea, Mt 4:15) – passed through it. Capernaum had the largest Synagogue in the region and a Roman military garrison, where Jesus chose to heal the servant of the synagogue official and the daughter of the centurion. He chose to stay at one of the largest houses in that vibrant city, that of Peter's mother-in-law. I believe Jesus would have imagined that the 'connectivity' of Capernaum would simply ensure the proliferation of the Good News to reach to the ends of the world: to Jerusalem, to Rome and beyond.

The important thing was to be at the crossroads and to sow the Good News, just like the sower sowing the mustard seed, leaving Divine Providence to do the nurturing (Mt 13:31-32).

We could take Jesus' 'Capernaum strategy' as the approach for our missionary work on this new networked continent. The

important thing is that we are there, at the crossroads, saying and doing the right things, influencing the immediate and accessible surroundings in this digital land. Divine Providence will take care of the rest, as throughout the history of commissioning new missions in every newly ‘discovered’ island and continent.

I recommend that this ‘strategy’ involve a strong presence on social media, comprehensive websites, useful apps supported by robust parish and diocesan administrative software.

We do need to further develop this new ‘theology of the Internet’ to be able to address the challenges of this new continent of the digital environment. And as always in the past – Mother Mary – should guide our way to manoeuvre carefully through these uncharted territories to produce good fruits for the kingdom of God.

# Musing on Life as a Digital Missionary

*By Chris Da Silva*

**Chris Da Silva** is a journalism student at Griffith University in Brisbane. He is part of the Frassati Australia community and is actively involved in youth ministry as well as Crossroads pro-life walks down the East coast of Australia. His Twitter handle is [@ChrisDaSilva91](https://twitter.com/ChrisDaSilva91)

My journey with social media began at the age of 16 when I joined Facebook simply because everyone else was doing it. Online, television, radio and print media also enticed me.

But when I experienced the Living Jesus in a personal way, I realised just how much I was letting the media dictate my values; values which in many cases promoted a deep misunderstanding of human dignity.

One thing I love about living in relationship with the Eternal Word, is that He truly is *‘sharper than any double-edged sword,’* (Heb 4:12) who penetrates the heart of all things in our lives, separating truth from falsity. The bright colours and meticulous sugar-coating of the media which had seduced me to follow a life of relativism and self-indulgence were revealed to me for what they truly were; a lifestyle that led to emptiness and ultimately, to death.

I spent two years on mission as part of National Evangelisation Team (NET) Ministries, which fostered in me a missionary zeal and desire to evangelise. I wanted to dedicate my life to fighting fire with

fire through the media, and more immediately through social media.

I was delighted to hear Pope Benedict XVI encourage the Church, especially the youth, to be missionaries on the digital continent, most alive on social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

On contemplating this call to evangelise online, I realised how much a meaningful Facebook status update or tweet could stand out in an endless flow of superficiality or negativity. This motivated me to share on almost a daily basis the inspirations that the Holy Spirit gave me; whether in the form of Sacred Scripture, quotes from the Saints or my own musings on life. Many of my friends said they enjoyed my posts, which reassured me that self-righteousness – although I was not immune to it – was not the reason for my boldness online.

On beginning my journalism degree I joined Twitter and began following numerous Catholic and secular news sources and blogs in pursuit of the truth about current affairs inside and outside of the Church. I was drawn then particularly to some of the most controversial issues of our age: those of life and the family. I felt as though I was putting my head on the chopping block when sharing pro-life and pro-traditional marriage news in the mediasphere. I did, and still do, have to take some vehement opposition to this content on the chin; sometimes even from those I consider closest to me. I have also engaged in some fierce online debates that have raged in the comments section for days.

As someone who is not a ‘fighter,’ this has drained me emotionally and forced me to pry myself away from my laptop. At times, I had to take a step back, look into my heart where the Living Jesus dwells and ask myself the question that they taught me to ask in primary school: “What would Jesus do?” Was fighting to prove that my point is better than another person’s really at the heart of the Gospel?

The smallest ounce of humility will answer those questions with an emphatic ‘no’, but this is where I believe the virtue of temperance is paramount. The baby does not need to be thrown out with the bath water.

Jesus made full use of freedom of speech in the Gospels, to the point of death. I am continually trying to follow His example by not shutting up completely because I handled a situation uncharitably online in the past. Instead I have changed my approach and taken inspiration from St Augustine who said, *“The truth is like a lion. You do not have to defend it. Let it loose; it will defend itself”*.

For me, this approach entails two things: firstly, to keep sharing Scripture, Church teaching and pro-family articles because I believe, as Catholics, we need to take as much advantage as possible of our freedom of speech and contribute to the diversity of voices on social media. Secondly, I decided to resist the urge to get overly defensive with people who challenged what I shared online and instead decided to try my best to respond charitably or sometimes not at all.

The Internet can be a wonderful thing for Catholics. If we use it the right way, there is a wellspring of theology, apologetics and testimony to be seen, heard and learned. But, even after adopting my Augustinian understanding of truth, I found myself on countless occasions scrolling mindlessly through my newsfeed on Facebook, becoming impatient, judgemental and self-righteous at the nonsense appearing before my eyes.

I took this to prayer knowing it would be best for me to give up social media for Lent during 2013. If I was to grow in virtue and in relationship with Jesus Christ, I needed to step away from the aforementioned online wellspring to pursue the one and most important ingredient for a strong faith that cannot be found online;



a humble heart that places God and neighbour first, and itself last. On returning to social media in the Easter season the goal is clear: *As for me and my Facebook (and Twitter); we will serve The Lord*, (a paraphrasing of *Jos 24:15*).

# Navigating the New Media Landscape

*By Michael McVeigh*

**Michael McVeigh** is Editor of *Australian Catholics* and *Province Express*. He is also Senior Editor at Jesuit Communications which publishes *Eureka Street*, *Madonna*, and *Finding God's Traces*.

[www.australiancatholics.com.au](http://www.australiancatholics.com.au)

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A friend once told me that going into print journalism today was like going into steam train engineering early last century – pretty soon my job would be obsolete. It is true that over the last ten years the situation has become pretty dire for professionals wanting to earn a living in the publishing industry. While the internet has given everyone the opportunity to have their voices heard, it has also created enormous pressures on the print publishing model. Even the largest newspapers in the country are struggling to find a way to provide content in the various formats people want it – print, web, smartphone, tablet, social media – while still generating revenue from advertising or sales.

In particular, Catholic publishers are experiencing pressures from two directions. Along with the decline in print circulation has come a decline in religious practice, particularly in countries like Australia. So not only are we facing a business model that is becoming increasingly unsustainable, we are also publishing to a decreasing audience.

But it is not quite time to shut up shop just yet. Some religious

publishing organisations are finding creative ways to utilise technology to reach out to Catholics and, importantly, non-Catholics. In making the transition from print to multimedia publishing, it is important to recognise social media’s potential to create new and vibrant Catholic communities.

Writers and publishers will already know the importance of using the right language to communicate with an audience.

One of the things that we try and do at *Australian Catholics* magazine is try to create a ‘voice’ that resonates with a broad section of the Australian community. For example, we know that there is a ‘larrikin’ element in Australia, which often gets turned off by formal Church language and an over-emphasis on traditional religious symbols. So when we published an edition focusing on Catholic moral teaching, we titled it ‘How to be good’, and put a picture of a child in a superhero costume on the cover. Given *The Avengers* and *The Dark Knight Rises* were two of the biggest movies of 2012, we recognised that the parents and children who receive our magazine via their school community would be more likely to be invited into the topic that way.

The most successful websites have also created a ‘voice’ that resonates with a certain sector of the community. One of the more successful Catholic websites is *Busted Halo* ([www.bustedhalo.com](http://www.bustedhalo.com)). Describing itself as an ‘online magazine for spiritual seekers’, the site is a ministry of the Pauline Fathers in the United States. Its editorial team puts out daily content, which includes articles on faith by young Catholic and some non-Catholic bloggers, podcasts and videos. You can tell from its name that its mission is to live in the real, broken world that we inhabit. Its humble moniker alone makes it stand out from many other Catholic sites.

Fr. Dave Dwyer csp, Director of Busted Halo Ministries, told me

when I visited their offices last year that what people like about their publication is its voice. That same voice extends through the articles on the website, as well as the podcasts and the videos. *Busted Halo* has developed a voice that makes ideas around faith engaging, not only to Catholics but to people of all faiths and no faith. Teachers and catechists trust this voice to be able to speak to students and young people, where other resources cannot. The success of this voice is evidenced by the fact that a number of their more catechetical videos – ‘Easter in two minutes’, ‘Lent in two minutes’ – have been viewed more than a 100,000 times.

The other part of knowing and defining an audience is about working out what sort of content an audience wants. The Internet, with its ability to track user statistics, makes this much easier to do. *Busted Halo* produces a range of videos, but their ‘[Catholic topic] in two minutes’ videos are the ones that have reached the biggest audiences.

At *Australian Catholics*, we have been concentrating on building online spaces targeted at specific sectors of our audience. For example, Catholic schools make up a large proportion of our subscribers, and we see the digital world as a place where we can increase the services that we provide to educators. Our site has a specific section for teachers, which includes classroom activities related to the magazine as well as a weekly classroom prayer resource. We have a regular email newsletter which provides materials about the magazine, links to online teaching resources and information about other initiatives which we run for schools including the Young Journalist Award and our media internship.

A website redesign later in 2013 will aim to provide even more content for Catholic teachers, as well as opportunities for them to connect with each other and contribute to the magazine. In addition, our media internship program has helped us begin developing a

network of younger contributors, which may eventually allow us to build online spaces aimed at Catholic students. Importantly, it is the contributors – the teachers and students – who will tell us the sort of content the audience is seeking.

Social media is an essential tool for building communities in today’s world. The more popular internet sites like *Buzzfeed* and *Huffington Post* specifically gear their content to be shared on social media. They know from their statistical tracking the sorts of articles that are more likely to be shared, and those that are less likely to be shared. This is not to say we need to copy those sites, as much of the content they produce would not be the sort of content we would wish to share. However we do need to think about what sort of content will be shared through social media to help define and grow our audiences.

The *Catholic Memes* Facebook page currently has more than 70,000 followers. Each day, the page’s administrators post five or six humorous photos, or memes, aimed at reinforcing the faith and highlighting its more humorous side. The photos attract hundreds of “likes” and dozens of comments, and get shared on other people’s Facebook feeds for their friends and families to see. It is a site with a clearly-defined ‘voice’, which has managed to grow a large community of like-minded people from across the globe.

While humour has proven to be a very successful way to build communities online, it is not the only possible way. People can also be attracted to personalities; and tend to listen to people who articulate what they feel, and who they feel a connection with.

*Eureka Street*, an online magazine, published by the Australian Jesuits, has managed to build a strong community through the expertise and personalities of its contributors. People are attracted to particular writers such as Fr. Frank Brennan sj and Fr. Andrew

Hamilton sj, or to the general editorial direction the site takes on issues they care about such as asylum seekers, the environment or indigenous affairs.

Facebook and Twitter are becoming increasingly important vehicles for bringing new audiences to the *Eureka Street* website. The editors recently began publishing the next day's stories on social media as soon as they are submitted and edited, knowing the important role that these sites play in building a connection with subscribers. When people share *Eureka Street's* stories on Facebook and Twitter, they are increasing the reach of the site exponentially. Most importantly, many of those who are reached through these posts are generally outside the usual Catholic circles.

If you want to build a community, you have to involve your audience in a conversation. I think this is difficult for Church publications to come to terms with. We no longer live in a society where people will listen passively to what people in authority tell them. They will listen to what others have to say but they also want opportunities to respond. We need to find ways to continue to engage people in the conversation. Readers should be asked for their thoughts and feedback. Tweets and mentions could be incorporated onto the homepages of websites. We should not be afraid to blur the lines between ourselves and our audience.

This raises legitimate questions for Catholic websites on how they deal with content that contradicts or questions Church teachings, while still offering spaces for engagement. However, we have to model the sort of Church we want to live in, and people today want a Church that listens and engages, rather than being afraid to open up conversation on difficult topics. We have to find ways to do that courageously, while still being respectful of the teachings of the Church.

Moderated feedback on articles, where people’s disagreements can be aired so long as they show a level of respect and decorum, are becoming more common in Catholic publications. A good example can be seen on *Eureka Street*. People know that someone expressing disagreement with Church teaching is not reflecting the editorial direction of the publication. In fact, it is more than likely another reader will respond to these kinds of comments without the editors needing to say anything.

Even, or perhaps especially, in an online world, it is important that we are out there engaging as human beings. One of the most successful Catholic authors and media personalities in the United States is Fr. James Martin sj. In an interview I did with him last year, he told me that there are three secrets to engaging an audience. These are:

- **Be honest** about your own personal struggles and flaws. Let the audience see that you’re human.
- **Use stories** like Jesus did. “*You cannot approach writing like it is medicine*”, he said.
- **Meet people where they are** as Jesus did. What are people doing in their daily life? How does my message relate to that?

The publishing world may have changed a great deal over the last decade, but human beings have remained the same as they have been for the 2,000 year history of the Catholic Church. We continue to have authentic Good News to share with the world, a world that continues to need the hopes and desires expressed in the Gospels. What we need are new ways to engage with people in a digitalised world.

There is no guarantee that any site will manage to build and reach an audience, and find a way to do so with any financial sustainability.

Many of the Catholic organisations investing in social media are doing so without a concrete plan as to how this will generate revenue. But they recognise the importance of the online space. The great evangelists in the early Church risked a great deal to take the faith into new lands. Evangelists today need to be willing to do the same.



# God Does Not Make Rubbish

*By Fr. Rob Galea*

**Fr. Rob Galea** is an ordained Catholic priest, currently serving in Shepparton, Australia after moving to Australia in 2007 from his home country of Malta. He is a singer and songwriter with an international fan base. Apart from a series of recordings and CD releases, Fr. Rob has also written a number of songs for various campaigns and international conferences.

[www.frrobgalea.com](http://www.frrobgalea.com)

I recently came to the shocking realisation that the average young person I minister to was born in 1998. Just to think that many of the people I spend my time with were only three years old when the Twin Towers collapsed makes me feel quite old. These teens were born after the launch of Google; they were six years old when Facebook was invented and were being confirmed by their bishops well after the launch of YouTube and Twitter. The world and the way it communicates is changing fast and we need to learn the new language involved.

I have lived in Australia for almost seven years now, having moved here from Malta. I often hear stories of the first Maltese immigrants leaving their families behind, arriving in this Great South Land of the Holy Spirit full of hope and with plans for a great future. They settled in their new home, but soon realised how hard it would be to maintain their faith. This was not because there was a lack of Catholicism being practised here, but simply because it was not being practised in their own language and culture. It could have gone

either way; they could have lost the faith and culture that defined them as a people or done something to conserve it. They did the latter. Maltese immigrants began to bring with them priests who would administer the sacraments in their own language and religious who could help them celebrate their Catholic culture.

This is no different to the generation born in 1998. They have immigrated from an analogue to a digital world, from a predominantly face-to-face existence to a perceived virtual reality, leaving their families and their church behind. Living so far away from their roots has caused many young people in this next generation to lose contact with the source of their faith and culture. Their faith is practised around them, but it is not in their own language. This has some implications. They could be denied the opportunity to understand and encounter their faith and culture or something could be done to conserve it.

Truth does not change, but the way we communicate it needs to.

The Church has the responsibility of delivering the fundamental Truth, Jesus Christ, to all of creation and that includes the post-Google generation. We need to speak to them in a language they can understand and accept.

I invest a lot of my time in translating the unchanging message of Jesus Christ and His Church into the language of music, videos and social communication, reaching many more weekly, for instance through my podcasts, than I do in my local Parish. Many are desperate for the Word of God, but few are able to receive it, as we often do not speak their language.

Music has always been a passion of mine. It is the way that I pray; and I marvel at the way a lyric, a chord progression or a catchy chorus can touch people's hearts.

I started recording in Malta when I was in my teens, but it was in Australia that I found some ‘success’, although, as Mother Teresa used to say, *‘God does not call us to be successful, God calls us to be faithful’*. Nonetheless, many people came to know my music at World Youth Day in 2008 where I sang the Italian verse to the WYD theme song, *‘Receive the Power.’* Through that, I came to be known as “the singing seminarian”. While the name was quaint and catchy, and it did raise the profile of my music, I have always been conscious that my message in my music should point to God, to my Creator, the one who gifted me with a voice and the gift of being able to strum a guitar. If I happen to be able to use music and the media to deliver that message, then that is what I will do, for the greater glory of God.

In 2009, when I was in the Diocese of Sandhurst, I worked on a song with my bishop and dear friend, Joe Grech. It was the first time he had been to a recording studio, and we had this idea that we could take some words he frequently used when working with young people and write them into a catchy song.

The song’s lyrics were influenced by the words in Psalm 139, *‘We are fearfully and wonderfully made’* and aimed to let people know about God’s intricate work in creating each of us. To this day, I still believe it is the worst song I have ever written. However, a catchy lyric combined with an easy-to-remember chorus led to the song *‘God does not make rubbish,’* which seemed to speak to people.

Although I had suspected social media and music were useful tools to reach people, with the sudden death of Bishop Joe in December 2010, it suddenly became obvious that their power was extraordinary. It took just days for the song *‘God does not make rubbish’* to move up to number one on the inspirational music charts, and his message was spread throughout the globe.

The impact of Bishop Joe’s death is still very keenly felt for me, but I am amazed at the way in which, even in death, he was able to speak to us in his charismatic way. His words ‘*God does not make rubbish*’ and ‘*we are all wonderfully made*’ give me strength, in my priesthood and my ministry generally. It was through social media that this song became known, and thousands of people downloaded it at the time of Bishop Joe’s death.

Indeed, for many, this charismatic man, who had over 1,500 Facebook friends became known to many of them through that medium of music, at least those who had not been privileged to meet him in life.

By writing this song, we were able to honour him in life and after his death, and share something of his influence of faith and his heart for young people.

I have been using blogs, vlogs (video blogs), YouTube, Instagram, SoundCloud, iTunes, Facebook and Twitter for some time, and I am always amazed at their power to share. My hope is that through these mediums, and more, we can bring the Truth of Jesus Christ to the whole world. We, the Church, have the best message, though some might say the worst marketing strategy, and yet in the Pope’s message for World Communications Day 2013, he finishes with the following:

*“When we are present to others, in any way at all, we are called to make known the love of God to the furthest ends of the earth”* (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 47th World Communications Day, Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization](#), 2013).

So here, armed with the words and actions of Christ, we now

more than ever are given the impetus to ‘reach out’ and go ‘to the ends of the earth’ with social media.

Will you join me on this journey?

# A Fisher of Men

*By Irene Sutherland*

**Irene Sutherland** is the Communications Officer for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. She previously worked as Volunteer Coordinator at St Vincent de Paul Society in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. She has a Master of Marketing degree and specialises in relationship management through web technologies. Irene has been building websites through Joomla since 2006.

[www.opw.catholic.org.au](http://www.opw.catholic.org.au)  
[forms.vinnies.org.au/blog](http://forms.vinnies.org.au/blog)

*“And he said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fishers of men’” (Matt 4:19).*

There was no more apt piece of scripture to encapsulate my job at the St Vincent de Paul Society than this. As volunteer coordinator, my task was to help people engage with the Society through volunteering and its motto to do ‘good works’ inspired by the Gospel message makes the parallel more compelling. But whilst the analogy brings to mind fishing nets, my modus operandi was the internet and more specifically, social media.

The role was a diverse one. It involved responding to inquiries about volunteering, working with the managers of the various works (services) to develop volunteering opportunities and liaising with Society members to support them in attracting new recruits to their conferences. The challenge was to get more youth and young adults

on board as volunteers.

What I loved so much about the job was its perfect alignment with the Gospel values of inclusion. I used to say to people that the Society does not discriminate in terms of *‘who we serve or who we invite to get involved’*. As the former president of the Victorian State Council, Jim Grealish, said in the video I used to train volunteers, *‘participation is open to all’*. The fact that we had people from all walks of life present to volunteer with us meant that we could effectively reach out to everyone. Believers and non-believers, including those from other faith traditions and people from all walks of life (including Society clients) were readily welcomed.

I found out very quickly that there was a seemingly unlimited supply of people wanting to get involved. In January 2011, when I started the job and as the first person to hold the position, I was given the names of approximately 400 people who had inquired about volunteering. Then I found I was getting 20 more volunteering enquiries on average a week. The traditional methods of volunteer engagement that included telephoning everyone to explain what’s what, inviting them to apply with two references followed by a one-on-one interview was clearly not a viable option. This high-volume of interest eventually led to the development of a new system, which relied heavily on social media, which ultimately proved to be enormously effective.

The tools of my trade were a database, email and blogging with readily available software. Here is how it worked: enquiries came through the Society website in the form of an email to which the person was sent a reply via email with a call to action to book into a compulsory two-hour Society introduction. Their details were recorded in the volunteer database.

Forty per cent of people who inquired about volunteering

completed the training. During the introduction, the story of the Society was told and the various volunteering roles explained. Participants were invited to identify their top four choices. Subsequent to the training, an email was sent out to each participant to let them know what they had to do to pursue their volunteering interests.

Whilst a good proportion of volunteers became involved in Vinnies centres, special works and/or conferences where the people in charge took on the relationship building process, I maintained an ongoing role to facilitate the volunteers’ relationship with the Society as a whole. Having captured their details in a database and formed a bond with them in the face-to-face training, the ground was set perfectly to utilise social networking as a means to maintain and strengthen this relationship.

My two main tools for communication at this point were mail merges from the volunteer database and the establishment of a blog called [Volunteer News](#). I used the former to promote volunteering opportunities and develop rosters for events. The latter I used to generate articles to keep people informed about events and news as well as to profile volunteers and their ‘good work’ in the spirit of the Society. In addition, I established a protocol for volunteers to grant us permission to subscribe them to a monthly RSS-email newsletter. For the database and mail merge, I used Microsoft Office. For the blog, I used open-source web software called Wordpress and a free emailing website called MailChimp for the newsletter.

Over my two-year period at the Society, I developed a database of over 1,500 volunteers, with whom I maintained an engagement through social networking. Furthermore, I was able to consistently staff all events with the required number of volunteers.

I have brought these skills and experience to my current role



as Communications Officer for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. One task I have been given is to compile and distribute the *Women Matter* eNewsletter for the National Office for the Participation of Women ([www.opw.catholic.org.au](http://www.opw.catholic.org.au)) This has blossomed into an exercise of developing and segmenting the database of subscribers to target our message and build a relationship with our *Women Matter* community. I have also set up a Facebook page and Twitter account to reach out into the broader community.

Once again, I relish the opportunity to respond to Our Lord’s own call to action to become a ‘*fisher of men*’. Now, for a new organisation – with a different objective – but for the very same purpose: to proclaim the Gospel by bringing together and supporting people of good will with a common goal.

# Religious Engagement

*By Giselle Lapitan*

**Giselle Lapitan** is a freelance editor and writer. She writes for the Australian Jesuits and manages the communications portfolio at Catholic Religious Australia (CRA). She can be found on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Google+, LinkedIn and Instagram.

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I once broached the idea of taking two-minute video interviews of resource speakers and uploading them onto an organisation’s social media page (yet to be created) to drum up interest for a religious conference. It did not take off because there was a reluctance to post content and a perception that it could be used by other people to put the organisation or the speakers in a negative light.

This reluctance to think more proactively about social media in Church organisations is understandable in the current environment where the scandal of clerical sexual abuse has put many religious institutes on the back foot. For professed Religious, who already have a million and one things to do as they manage their ministries or work in mission, social media, which would demand more of their time and resources tends to be seen as a marketing tool instead of as a way to build community.

I remember having a conversation with a religious sister who, recognising the role Twitter plays in expanding the reach of her advocacy and ministry, raised concerns about the apparent lack of reflection in the whole enterprise of publishing tweets. The never-

ending online chatter, lack of context and self-indulgent posts that often typify social media represented a contradiction to the contemplative in action.

I can understand her hesitation. I started using social media in 2012, a millennium late by digital standards. It was my mother who prevailed upon me to get into the game, having herself pounded on an old laptop running on a snail-paced dial-up connection in my rural hometown in the Philippines and learned to navigate the likes of Facebook and Multiply back in 2008 at the age of 65. By the time I gained my Facebook and Twitter accounts in early 2012, my mother already had an established presence on Twitter, Blogger and Instagram.

As a late convert to social media, I do not consider myself an expert. But I offer my thoughts on why Church organisations and institutes ought to think more proactively about social media.

Social media is clearly here to stay. In his 2013 Message for World Communications Day, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI recognises its role in the work of the ‘new evangelisation’. Industry experts describe social networks as watering holes where more and more people hang out and have conversations. Although something will come along to supersede Facebook or Twitter in the future, social media is not about tools or applications, but defined as media that *‘starts conversations, encourages people to pass it on to others, and finds ways to travel on its own’* (The Nonprofit Social Media Decision Making Guide [www.idealware.org/sites/idealware.org/files/2011SocialMediaDecisionGuideFinal.pdf](http://www.idealware.org/sites/idealware.org/files/2011SocialMediaDecisionGuideFinal.pdf) at October 2011).

Indeed social media has evolved so rapidly from only five years ago that now content finds people through their social networks instead of the other way around. If the Church is situated outside these virtual meeting places, we allow others to fill up this vacuum

of content and dialogue. The Church risks being left out of these conversations, and may be perceived as disconnected and out of touch. Church organisations, lay and Religious men and women alike have so much to contribute to this conversation and even become ‘influencers’; leading the conversations and providing credible voices on the Internet.

To do social media well, in the context of Church or Religious institutions, the concern over the use or potential misuse of content is not a problem, at least as far as finding good content. The Gospel message is the content, one that the world needs to hear again and again; this message already gives us the information, context and narrative. Everything we need to say stems from this message, with our usernames as the new bearers.

I think the greater concern for those who are reluctant to use social media has to do with mindfulness, integrity and authenticity in an environment where content is published by the truckload every second and much of it is perceived as mindless, confrontational or as a personal attack. The question we need to ask is: How can Religious organisations maintain authenticity and integrity and strive to ensure that their message stands out amidst the commotion online?

One practical way to address these concerns and ensure our online presence is authentic and integrated is to have a strategic plan. This will require reading up on a lot of basics, thinking about goals, taking stock of organisational resources, drafting measurable targets and organisational media policies, and choosing a model for a social media strategy that is consistent with the organisation’s resources, needs and objectives.

On more familiar ground, much like spiritual reflection or the Ignatian Examen, we can also evaluate our digital footprint on a daily basis. This practice cultivates mindfulness in terms of managing

one's content and prevents us from the danger of hitting 'send' that second too soon.

As we carry the truth that God's love is in us and express our longing and visions of a just world, we are in the realm of the sacred, even in the digital space. Communicating this sense of the sacred more effectively, with brevity and joy, on the various social networks and platforms takes practice, so it is worth getting into it sooner rather than later, remembering to plan ahead for the challenges that await before jumping in.

*“The preacher is not brave enough to be literally silent for long, and since it is his calling to speak the truth with love, even if he were brave enough, he would not be silent for long because we are none of us very good at silence. It says too much. Let him use words and images that help make the surface of our lives transparent to the truth that lies deep within them, which is the wordless truth of who we are and who God is and the Gospel of our meeting.” - Frederick Buechner, writer and preacher.*

# The Web and I

*By Bishop Greg O’Kelly sj*

**Bishop Greg O’Kelly sj** is the Bishop of Port Pirie. As a Jesuit, he has worked mostly in education, including as Principal of St Ignatius College, Riverview in New South Wales and of St Ignatius College in Athelstone in South Australia. He is presently chair of the Bishops’ Commission for Catholic Education.

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Digital networks demand a new type of literacy. I have only recently developed a certain level of digital literacy, so I am delighted to be able to contribute a few thoughts to this collection.

This new type of literacy does not simply refer to knowing the host of strange abbreviations and new words like apps, blog, Android device, memes or podcasts associated with the Internet. Literacy is also a facility, an ability to use the means of language to convey a message. While I struggle along, striving to become more adept at using social networks, these features of our age, the rapidity of development is almost overwhelming.

I can remember back to when I was first made a school principal, and publishing took time and a lot of patience. Back then, we were still using carbons in typewriters. This often meant that if there was just one mistake, the whole page had to be retyped. The photocopier was also just arriving; and in the early days the original was typed onto a wax sheet and then printed on the Gestetner. Before that they were done on the Fordigraph, with carbon and methylated spirits. There were no computers, no mobile phones,

no fax machines and if you really wanted to have a communication delivered quickly, it meant hiring a courier to take your letter personally to the addressee.

Compare that to the office of today, where we move easily between emails, mobiles and electronic documents that can be copied and amended so easily, and then forwarded to any part of the earth at the touch of a button.

Still, in many parts of the world, and before radio in the early 20th century, it was the village well or the market place that was the context for mass communication. The exchange of information about events and people took place at the twice-daily visit to the village well where women would gather. The market place drew everybody, and even more information was exchanged about farming methods, political news, product availability, what was happening with the rulers and the Church, and so on.

Pope Benedict XVI has referred to the present digital social networks as the new ‘agora,’ today’s version of the open public square where information was shared, and which played its own very significant role in building community in the village or the town. The Greek word *agora* means market place; the word ‘agoraphobia’ is also derived from it, which means ‘the fear of crowds’. This new *agora* of digital social networks can produce its own grounds for fear too; what Pope Benedict referred to in his Message for the 47th World Day of Communications as ‘*the din of excessive information*’.

Every priest or deacon or bishop is ordained for the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The Word is integral to who we are as ministers of the Gospel.

Judaism, Islam and Christianity, believers in the One God, are sometimes referred to as People of the Book, because each has their

Holy Scriptures. These days the Word is no longer confined to the Book, but this new digital age spreads it much further.

In my background as a Jesuit, there is great emphasis on the spreading of the Good News. St Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the Jesuits, quickly installed the new-fangled invention of the printing press in the main Jesuit houses in Rome so that the printed word could be disseminated. He saw conversation as an apostolic tool for evangelisation. The conversion of the young St Francis Xavier after conversing with Ignatius is a classic example of what happens when we share the Gospel with others.

It even became a common practice for young scholars and Jesuit brothers to go out in pairs on a Sunday afternoon, like the disciples, ‘to fish,’ they called it. They would strike up conversations with anybody about anything, leading the topics around eventually to matters of the soul. For example, over a five-day period in 1559, some 400 people were inspired to receive the sacrament of Confession after engaging in conversation with these young Jesuits in Rome.

With the digital network now at hand, we have the means to evangelise ‘to the ends of the earth’ and engage in ever more conversations.

With the Liturgy of the Hours now accessible in an iPhone app – via the *iBreviary* – the universal prayer of the Church is immediately available to millions of people, minus the expense and the weight of the heavy volumes in hard copy. It’s amazing to think we can now carry a reference library of prayer books on our iPad or Tablet. The *Universalis* app helps us pray the Prayer of the Church when travelling, with features to look up the Readings of the Day for the Mass, including future feast days for any day of the year.



After learning about this, I starting taking advantage of a few apps developed by Jesuits in England and Ireland. The first was *Sacred Space*, which has daily reflections on the Gospel. This became the *Pray-As-You-Go* app, which offers reflections and meditative music, which can be played on the mobile or PC whilst at work, along with the *Thinking Faith* app, also developed by the Jesuits in England.

Franciscans in America have produced a whole range of internet-based devotions, and the meditations and homilies of the day are available on the websites of all the Catholic Universities in the United States, with Creighton University and Boston College among the most popular. Across the English speaking world, young Jesuits have their own blog site entitled *Jesuit Post*, so that young Jesuits from whatever country can learn what others are doing.

More recently for me, I discovered that EWTN does a service of printing abstracts of the Pope’s homilies. There are some of Pope Francis’ speeches, of which his one at the Chrism Mass 2013 addressed to the priests is a wonderful piece of reflection and teaching.

Locally we have *CathNews*, which serves a very good purpose in spreading knowledge about activities in the Church.

Facebook is something that I am dipping into, and I do use it to reply to various individuals. Bishop Joe Grech at the time of his death in 2010 had Facebook down to a fine art, but had to be strict with himself, limiting his use of it to 30 minutes a day.

The Diocese of Port Pirie is vast in area, one million square kilometres, the same size as France and Germany put together. It extends to and includes Uluru and the Olgas in the Northern Territory, and borders the states of Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. It is a Diocese of 58 parishes. With

these parishes often vast distances apart, email and SMS are a very important tool for pastoral communication in our Diocese, and ably assist in overcoming the tyranny of distance. As I wrote this reflection, I had just emailed the parish priest at Roxby Downs to wish him a happy birthday. I had tried to reach him by phone but since he was away, I had to resort to email. In days gone by, a missed phone call would have meant a missed or delayed message.

The development of a diocesan website has allowed us to share our history online and provide up to date information for those who wish to get in touch. All our parishes are listed with Mass times details along with contact information for all our priests and religious. The Bishop’s diary, homilies and addresses are also made publicly available. Interestingly, the section that gets the most hits is the Mass times.

Social networking has enabled the Diocese to communicate on a scale simply not possible before. I have email groupings which collect together the addresses of everyone engaged in leadership positions in the Diocese; the priests and deacons and seminarians; the religious; the school principals; the heads of charitable works like Centacare, St Vincent de Paul and BoysTown and the homes for the aged. A fortnightly circular can go out from me to all these people, giving bits of information, and suggested websites for their consideration. It means I can forward something like the Pope’s homily at the Chrism Mass to all the priests of the diocese with one click. They do not have to wait for a magazine to arrive in the post.

The two disciples who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus reflected as they rushed back to Jerusalem how Jesus had described many things to them along the way, and that their hearts burned within them. May the new part of the “fabric of society”, as Benedict calls it, be a blessed means for the spreading of the Word, and the love of Christ being able to warm the hearts of all who hear it.

# Among the Wonderful Things

By Annie Carrett

**Annie Carrett** is the Communications and Information Manager for the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay. Annie has a Masters degree in Communications and has worked in the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery prior to commencing with the Church. She is currently President of the Australasian Catholic Press Association and a member of the Australian Catholic Media Council. Annie is married with two children.

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Nearly half a century ago, Pope Paul VI exhorted us, *‘without delay’, to make ‘effective use of the media of social communications whose effectiveness reaches beyond national boundaries’ and ‘has an impact on individual members of the whole human family’* (Pope Paul VI, *Inter Mirifica*, [Decree on the Media of Social Communications](#), 1963).

This was the age of television, of radio, of press, and of cinema. How could communications be any more marvellous than this golden era?

As we came to grips with the complexities of that age, early forays towards an international computer networking system were taking solid (if not ethereal) shape, and would soon become the basis for technologies that would redefine our traditional communications mediums.

Today, as we plan to celebrate the 47th World Communications Day in the Church, we are again reminded of the importance of

reaching beyond our boundaries,

*“Believers are increasingly aware that, unless the Good News is made known also in the digital world, it may be absent in the experience of many people for whom this existential space is important ...”* (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 47th World Communications Day, Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization](#), 2013).

This chapter provides the background and detail for the eConference – an ongoing project emanating from the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, and The Broken Bay Institute in partnership with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

With new tools at our disposal, and the simple yet authentic message of the Gospel at hand, this innovative project has reached into homes, parishes, schools, businesses, universities, prisons and aged-care facilities (just to name a few) across Australia and the world. The extraordinary feedback we have received has highlighted a deep hunger for faith formation in our people.

In 2008, on the eve of the Feasts of Sts. Peter and Paul, Pope Benedict XVI declared a commemorative year of celebration to mark the 2000th anniversary of the birth of the Church’s great communicator, St Paul. In fact, a Jubilee Year for the Church was called, to be a time of celebration with particular focus on ecumenical inclusion reflecting the Saint’s commitment to unity and harmony among all Christians.

As we entered this great year with a mind to evangelisation and celebration, our Bishop, David Walker, asked that we find the best way to bring the energy and passion of the Word of God to the 219,000 Catholics that populate our Diocese.

Our Diocese of Broken Bay has always had a strong commitment to furthering adult faith formation, regularly hosting conferences as a part of its outreach, often attracting 50 - 100 participants. A conference seemed an obvious solution, but in that Year of Jubilee, it did not really rise to anything more remarkable than what we had hosted before.

As we explored our options, we looked to St. Paul for inspiration. To walk in his footsteps we knew we had to go beyond our usual approach, and like Paul, step outside our comfort zone.

Initially we wanted to reach the people of our Diocese, particularly those not always in our regular audience. Our key planning hurdles included:

- **Distance** - Always a challenge, and not just in terms of geography. What of those distanced by age, illness or work commitments?
- **Cost** - This always limits participation. How could we make this event available to people for little or no cost?
- **Access** - As the use of an online solution was beginning to take shape we looked at the equality of that technology. Despite their marvellous nature, new technologies do limit participation. Not everyone has access to a device or the Internet; not everyone is comfortable to negotiate with the technology and some struggle with the pace at which the technology changes. Experts one day can struggle the next.
- **The Experience** - This last challenge was perhaps our most important. We knew from previous conference experiences that greater learning, understanding, and ultimately ongoing support, is fostered through dialogue and discussion. If we could capture an actual conference live, make it available

to people across the Diocese and somehow give them an opportunity to interact and respond with each other, and with the lecturers, this could be an event with enormous impact. Of course, if we could do this for our people, why not all Catholics spread across the seven million square kilometres of our nation who are never given the opportunity, through remoteness or financial constraints, to explore and grow their faith? The possibilities were enormous, as were the challenges.

As a Diocese, our core strength is building the content, not technology, so we took our wish list to established video and network experts, and asked them to think in imaginative ways as well. We found a technology that could minimise the burden on both bandwidth and user experience, and married this technology to expertise in television production and ensured that both providers were committed to our goals of quality, simplicity and accessibility. We found partners that, even today, are still excited by the new ways we find to use their technology.

As our technological and creative people assembled the tools, we kicked off a program that would later prove fundamental to the project's success. It is all too easy to just throw information up onto the Internet and hope for the best, our research suggested that without giving people the key to unpack and discern the material, it can again become a one-way conversation.

So through every bishop with a Diocese or Archdiocese in Australia, we invited facilitators to come and train with us. After the training, they would understand the rundown of the day's event, be confident in operating the technology, could set up rooms and have the skills to create ongoing discussion and support for their participants. This would then enable self-supporting groups, like satellites, to be established and administered around Australia, under their own control. It would be akin to hosting a myriad of individual

Conferences, simultaneously right across the country.

Eighty people trained in our first group. These people went back to their dioceses and trained further people to lead auxiliary groups. By the time the eConference went to air, we had more than 170 official sites registered to participate. Many of these wonderful facilitators are still with us today, four years on.

We hosted our first eConference, *St Paul - the Man and his Mission*, on 30 June 2009. The live program consisted of six lecture-based sessions from renowned Pauline experts Fr. Brendan Byrne sj and Sr. Michele Connolly rsj, interspersed with questions and panel discussions, and, importantly break-out time for facilitated discussion at the local hubs. This was essentially a live event, but an important addition allowed immediate archiving of each session so those in different time zones could adjust their participation accordingly.

As the opening prayer went live, a rush of calls came in from the more than 1,700 participants eager to congratulate us and to ask our expert speakers questions about St Paul. The feedback was overwhelming and emotional.

As more than 4,000 groups logged in for the day (many of those groups represented more than 50 people), we found we were joined by those in other countries including New Zealand, The Philippines, Samoa, Japan and Vietnam; Canada and the United States of America; Guatemala, Peru and Brazil; Malta, Italy, Greece, Belgium and Spain; Ireland and South Africa.

Estimates would be that around 20,000 people participated live. In an online survey that was sent out to around 5,000 known participants: 96 per cent stated that they would overwhelmingly participate in another eConference and 95 per cent stated they would strongly encourage others to join.

The success of the day came down to some very key elements:

- **A clear message for the audience:** We knew we would be reaching a broad audience, many who had never explored their faith since school. With this in mind, content needed to be relevant to all people with a balance between academic and grassroots.
- **Short, concise presentations:** We limited the sessions to 20 minute segments to allow for short online attention spans.
- **Discussion time:** When people want to gather, they also need and want to be able to talk and articulate their ideas. After every short presentation, we scheduled break-out time for facilitators to encourage round-table discussion.
- **Easy technology:** The only requirements for participation were a computer or laptop and access to the Internet, and perhaps speakers and a data projector if you're hosting a gathering. The website housed diagnostic information that allowed people to work through any online difficulties and we provided a contact phone number to resolve any issues.
- **Ownership:** By training and encouraging facilitators, and thus building up groups across a network, people took ownership of the local event they hosted in their own dioceses, agencies, schools or parishes. This has provided us with a strong foundation to launch further projects.
- **Active support and encouragement:** We personally contacted everyone who registered officially or who expressed interest. We then encouraged them to test their equipment through the website, explore study questions and generally to feel confident and supported in what they would be embarking on.



With these lessons, and spurred on by the feedback and intense interest for another event, we hosted our second eConference in November 2009. The continued success now sees us about to host the 8th eConference, this time on St. Mark’s Gospel, with another planned for later in the year on St. John.

This is a good news story – one of dreaming big and without having any doubt in what can happen when you combine good communication with the clarity and depth of the simple message of the Word that underpins our lives. It is also a story of hard work by a dedicated yet very small, number of people.

As Catholics, we have exceptionally strong networks for communications. Building on these avenues, we persevered, we maintained contact and provided support for those who became part of the eConference network and this was definitely rewarded.

These eConferences started as a gift. We asked people to unwrap and explore it. And, with great joy they took ownership and shared.

For us, this all started with St Paul; he stepped outside his comfort zone and took the Word of God to all peoples.

I encourage you to do the same.

# Conclave 2.0

*By Robyn Fahy*

**Robyn Fahy** is the Managing Director of RMF Consultancy, and a member of the PR Advisory Group of the Catholic Women's League of Victoria and Wagga Wagga.

[www.cwlvicww.org](http://www.cwlvicww.org)

As the world's secular media voraciously devoured every conceivable detail of the recent Conclave, the Catholic faithful were able to engage in a dynamic worldwide dialogue via Twitter, Facebook, Orkut, Viber and so on. For those of us involved in #SmokeWatch, we no longer had to rely on the coverage provided by the mainstream media, with its sometimes biased slant, but had immediate access to well-informed Catholic commentators via social media. It was inspiring to be part of, and to witness some of the creative, and unifying, uses of social media and online applications such as 'Adopt a Cardinal' and the 'Pope Alarm'.

A 'new dialogue' between the secular media and the Catholic faithful seemingly emerged during this period, with many Catholics offering timely factual corrections as well as invaluable insights into the unfolding events and the teachings of the Church, not only via social media but also traditional media platforms. The witty, yet incisive, commentary provided by @ConclaveChimney—purportedly tweeting 'live' from the roof of the Sistine Chapel—rapidly led to a large following and even a mention in the *Huffington Post*! Locally, Catholic Voices Australia, modelled on its very successful British counterpart, was welcomed by the secular media as it provided them with ready access to well-informed, practising young Catholics

who represented the Church truthfully and passionately during this historic event.

The ‘*Habemus Papam*’ announcement broke Twitter’s record of tweets per minute about a particular subject. In the hours following the election of Pope Francis, eight of the top ten subjects ‘trending’ worldwide on Twitter were related in some way to the Catholic Church. So much for the Church being out of date and irrelevant!

The Conclave proved to be a wonderful opportunity for members of the Catholic Women’s League of Victoria and Wagga Wagga to use social media to engage in the work of the New Evangelisation—to speak of Jesus Christ and of the joy of living in Him.

Each night during the Conclave, I handed over the League’s #SmokeWatch duties to Fiona Basile who was in New York as our Youth Observer to the United Nation’s 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. When the first plume of white smoke wafted from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel, Fiona was attending a side session with the Holy See’s delegation to the UN. Catholics from all parts of the world huddled together around laptops in various parts of the UN, watching and waiting. In a series of powerful images shared via social media, Fiona captured their anticipation and subsequent joy when Pope Francis emerged onto the balcony over the entrance to St Peter’s Basilica more than an hour after the first puff of white smoke. In that brief period, strangers had become friends and their evident joy as Christians had been witnessed by countless thousands.

CWL Victoria and Wagga Wagga’s foray into social media began a few years ago. It is a wonderful case study on what can be achieved with minimal resources. The key to our success has been a well-developed social media strategy and the involvement of highly skilled

experts. In response to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's invitation to '...join the network of relationships which the digital era has made possible...', the Catholic Women's League, both nationally and locally in Victoria and Wagga Wagga, established several social media platforms. We now have a social network of more than 23 million, where we actively engage with our followers and their friends to build a culture of life and love. Our social media efforts are firmly anchored in the New Evangelisation, and this has informed both the nature of our content and our visual style.

Believing in the redemptive power of beauty and given the increasing pictorial focus of social media, our visual style has also been strongly influenced by Blessed John Paul II's *Letter to Artists* where he said:

*“In order to communicate the message entrusted to her by Christ, the Church needs art. Art must make perceptible, and as far as possible attractive, the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God. It must therefore translate into meaningful terms that which is in itself ineffable”* (Pope John Paul II, [Letter to Artists](#), 1999).

So, those who follow the Catholic Women's League of Victoria and Wagga Wagga on social media get a 'daily dose' of faith, hope, love and beauty!

If the Church is to 'run so as to win the race' (1 Cor 9:24), we need to actively embrace social media and new ways of communicating our timeless message. Do not be frightened to engage in the digital continent and 'start a conversation' with people whom you may not otherwise reach. It is well worth the time and effort!

# To Faithful Ends

*By Anita Parker*

**Anita Parker** is the Director of Youth Ministry in the Archdiocese of Perth. An adopter of social media to expand her ministry with young people, Anita strongly believes in only using new technology to the point where it allows us to meet face to face with God, and others.

The New Evangelisation is a call for the Church to re-propose the Faith and God to those who have drifted away or have never heard the Gospel message using new methods, new enthusiasm and new expressions.

Social media has so many new possibilities every day. I really enjoy hearing about new initiatives, watching new ideas grow into realities to essentially spread the Gospel message in the digital continent. When passionate people jump online and commit to making something work, so many people begin to “like” or “follow” their ministry. We can see that this method works for good causes and for bad causes too. I have seen Atheist and anti-Church groups spring up on social networking platforms and that concerns me. I do wonder at times about how strong our Church presence really is in this forum. For every pro-Church meme I see appear, I see many more anti-Church memes appear.

We cannot leave it to a few people to start getting the Church voice out into this digital continent. Indeed, all of us who work in a Church setting, need to look at ways we can personally help spread the Good News. Simply “sharing”, “liking” or “retweeting” inspiring

Church messages, events, articles, podcasts, videos and so on can be a powerful way to spread our message.

I am constantly surprised by people who are not Catholic or Christian who write to thank me for providing their Facebook newsfeed or Twitter stream with positive messages – generally Church news. We never know who needs to hear or see a Gospel message each day.

Fr. Dave Dwyer csp, Director of *Busted Halo*, presented at a leadership forum for the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association in the United States of America, in November 2012 on ‘*Young Adults and the New Evangelization*’. His opening question which carried as a theme throughout the two-day presentation was ‘*Why does Coke advertise?*’

The 2010 *Wall Street Journal* statistics Fr. Dwyer referenced in his presentation showed that *Coke* holds a majority of its market share for soft drink sales, yet continues to spend three times more than its closest competitor *Pepsi* on marketing. Why?

Think about past *Coke* advertising campaigns: What do polar bears and songs from the past have to do with telling us that *Coke* tastes great? Absolutely nothing! When there’s a group of happy people on the beach, or sitting in a movie theatre, drinking *Coke* these images tell you nothing about how it tastes, it gets you to connect with a company who you relate with and who connects with your everyday life and happy times.

In today’s field of social networking our question is not necessarily about the budget we have for advertising, but how much effort we place on re-proposing the Catholic faith in these fields?

The Church does connect with our everyday life, there are daily Scriptures that speak to all of us in our different situations. Our

faith life is a source of joy for us and something we can share with others. The generations who are not connecting with the Church are the key target groups for the New Evangelisation. They need the faith re-proposed through new methods, new enthusiasm and new expressions.

The Catholic Church can be loosely paralleled to the market-share of *Coke* in that it is the largest Christian Church. *Coke* continues to pump a large volume of effort into advertising. There are many choices out there today and the company cannot simply assume that the teenagers of today will choose *Coke* over *Pepsi*.

So, Catholics, and particularly as Catholics who work for the Church, we all have a vocation to help spread the Gospel message. If we spend some time assessing how we use social media to share the faith, we can potentially share the faith across generations, and especially with the younger generation who are still learning about their faith.

Having said that, we need to remember a balance in our lives and that we should not completely bombard people with exclusively Catholic news.

We need to remember at the core of social networking is using this as a tool to connect with people, so that their ultimate goal is to actually disconnect from technology to connect with God. This could include inviting people to a local Church for Mass, a prayer night, a youth rally or a retreat. Places where we actually turn off our social media and spend time with God.

Our chaplain in the Youth Office said he had overheard us in the office one day debating “Which is the best smart phone to have?” He said we need to remember that the best phone is not a Samsung, Blackberry or an iPhone, but the best phone available is prayer.

Prayer is the **ULTIMATE** connection we seek in our lives. So we need to remember that social media is only a tool and our end point is to connect people with God.



# Be an Aussie Catholic Celebrity

By *Emilie M. Ng*

**Emilie M. Ng** works in Brisbane as a Journalist for their Archdiocesan newspaper, *The Catholic Leader*, and also as a Cross-Platform Communications Strategist for Integrated Marketing and Communications (IMC) Agency, Virtual Shout. She was the producer and co-host for relationship podcast *Love Talks Back* and blogs on *You Should Gnaw Better* and *Being Frank*.

[youshouldgnawbetter.wordpress.com](http://youshouldgnawbetter.wordpress.com)

[www.beingfrank.co.nz](http://www.beingfrank.co.nz)

As an Australian media professional, I have to admit that we Aussies are a little slow on the uptake of social media. As a young, Australian Catholic, it is even more obvious that Australian Catholics are not clearly present online, at least, not like the Americans. Perhaps our genuine laidback nature has kept us from really embracing all that social networking can do to help us evangelise, because for the most part, it is the Americans who are leading the way.

I follow many American Catholics on Twitter and I see them as holy celebrities. There is Fr. Robert Barron, Jennifer Fulwiler, Brandon Vogt, Thomas Peters, Matthew Warner, Jeff Geerling, Fr. Pontifex, Dan and Angela Sealana, Jason Evert, Matt Maher, Audrey Assad, Sr. Helena Burns and so many more.

There is an interesting observation that Australians know the names of more American Presidents than they do Australian Prime Ministers. The same observation applies to my knowledge of social

media evangelists – I know more American ones than Australian ones. Not only do I know them, but I have conversations with them about the Catholic faith and how to live my faith in an increasingly secular environment online and offline.

While these tweeting lay and religious American Catholic folk have provided me with the formation, encouragement and inspiration I need to speak boldly about the Catholic faith, they cannot help me be a better Catholic in Australia. They just cannot speak into the situations and circumstances I experience in the Catholic Church in Australia because they do not live here.

So, I think that there is a definite gap that needs to be addressed: we need more Australian Catholic celebrities.

There are two media terms that I will use to clarify what I mean by ‘Australian Catholic celebrities’. Firstly, there is platform, and secondly, digital footprint.

Let’s talk about your platform. A platform is what makes your message louder and clearer than any other voice. It is your connections, contacts and followers; and the way you create dialogue with them, remembering that dialogue is the most essential part of social media especially for . The online world is loud and crowded with many voices, and unfortunately, the dominant voice is not Catholic.

Let me share my own experiences here. I work as a reporter for the Brisbane Archdiocesan newspaper, *The Catholic Leader*, and I am a communications assistant for an integrated marketing and communications company, Virtual Shout. On the side, I write for my own personal blog, *You Should Gnow Better*, and an NZ-based blog, *Being Frank*.

These works, while good, cannot stand alone. In order for the

messages in my writing to be noticed, I need to work hard at building rapport and a connection with the people who will read my message. I recently registered the domain name emiliemng.com, I am increasing the number of people I follow and dialogue with on Twitter, and I am posting more regularly on my Facebook profile page.

While I build my platform, I am also working on my digital footprint. A digital footprint is the size of a person's online presence, and the culmination of all that a person publishes online. It is your product, which is supported by your platform.

There is no denying that the online and offline spaces are connected these days. The internet is an integrated part of modern men and women's lives. Since the dominant voice online is not a Catholic one, the outcomes of much dialogue feeds into the way society is ordered politically, socially, culturally and economically.

We see it in Australia today where we must fight for the rights of the human person to stop our government introducing laws that allow abortion, euthanasia or embryonic stem cell research.

Taking the threat to life as an example, we must do all we can to be a voice for life and for human dignity, using the talents God has blessed us with. We must use the technological means now available to create online videos that show the beauty of old age, write blogs with powerful testimonies of women who choose not to have an abortion or record podcasts that speak with experts on the consequences of contraception.

Are you ready to be an Australian Catholic celebrity?

In my experience of trying to be an Australian Catholic celebrity, I have noticed that it takes perseverance and that I need a lot of support from other Catholics; this is one of the reasons why I want

to encourage more Aussie Catholics to be present online. This means, you have to persevere with writing your blogs, even if nobody is commenting on them. You need to get to conferences, meet ups or other events where you network - and if you hear of a Catholic event, even better!

Being a celebrity is difficult; while you may not have hounding paparazzi, you will have hounding atheists, relativists and plenty of spiritual battles to fight.

My hope for the future is that more Australian Catholics will be inspired to proclaim Christ's message online so that we can work together to better share the Good News in the digital era.

# Xt3 – The Message of Christ in the Third Millennium

*By Mary Elias*

**Mary Elias** works for Catholic Communications in the Archdiocese of Sydney, and is the Content Manager for the youth website Xt3.com. Mary and her team help train youth leaders, parish staff and clergy in the use of social media. Mary also writes on religious, ethical and social issues on various online publications, and has studied Communications, History and Law at Macquarie University, Sydney.

[www.xt3.com](http://www.xt3.com)

*“Believers are increasingly aware that, unless the Good News is made known also in the digital world, it may be absent in the experience of many people for whom this existential space is important” (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 47th World Communications Day, Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization](#), 2013).*

In late 2007, I received a phone call from someone in the Sydney World Youth Day office, asking me if I would like to help manage a social network called Xt3.com for pilgrims planning to attend WYD 2008. At the time I was well up to speed with the benefits of Facebook, YouTube and MySpace for promoting a cause – Twitter had not quite caught on at that stage – and believing that I was signing up to a project that would only require a few hours a week online, I eagerly said yes.

It is 2013 and I am still here! Why? Because Xt3.com is breaking ground in this exciting new era of online Catholic communications and I want to be part of it.

Xt3 stands for ‘*Christ in the Third Millennium*’, inspired by the words of John Paul II during World Youth Day in 1989 in Santiago de Compostela:

*“You young people have in a special way the task of witnessing today to the faith; the commitment to bring the Gospel of Christ - the Way, the Truth and the Life - into the third Christian Millennium, to build a new civilization - a civilization of love, of justice and of peace.”*

Sponsored by the Archdiocese of Sydney, Xt3.com was launched as a social network for World Youth Day on 12 June 2008 by Cardinal George Pell. Pilgrims were able to create profiles online, share ideas and resources with Catholics from around the world, and ask questions about the Catholic faith using the popular ‘*Ask a Priest*’ forum, which continues to be one of the most used functions on Xt3.com to date. In this way, Xt3.com played an integral part in connecting pilgrims before, during and after WYD08.

Following the success of WYD in Sydney, we realised that the passion in the hearts of WYD pilgrims burning brightly after the week of Catholic formation, risked becoming simply embers as they returned to their ordinary lives. To keep fuelling this fire of faith, Xt3.com evolved from being a networking tool to a content-driven site providing formative Catholic and secular resources geared towards our target audience of young people. An expansive multimedia library was developed, featuring articles, videos and podcasts to provide pilgrims with a go-to portal for faith formation, no matter where they are in the world. From updates about the Pope and the Vatican, to catechesis talks recorded at local events in Sydney, to the

latest video craze or meme, the Xt3.com library has a truly global appeal.

Furthermore, by linking the resource library with online interaction on social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, Xt3.com has become a popular resource portal for youth around the world. Users are motivated not only to access the content, but to share it – because the seemingly small act of tweeting an article, or sharing a video on Facebook, is truly the act of a missionary in our digital world. To paraphrase Pope Benedict XVI in his 2013 Message for World Communications Day, *“if your friends are not hearing about the Catholic faith through their social networks, where else are they going to hear it?”*

As the demand for online Catholic content expanded, so too did the demand for live content. Over the past few years the Church in Australia and around the world has been blessed with historic events such as the Canonisation of Mary MacKillop, the Beatification of John Paul II, World Youth Day 2011 in Madrid, and recently the ‘Habemus Papam’ and Inauguration of Pope Francis. And through impressive advances in technology, audiences around the world were able to witness these events via live webcasts on Xt3.com. The introduction of Xt3.com’s webcasting facility has been fundamental to our mission to connect the global Church online – and what an honour it has been to play a role in bringing these incredible moments to the living rooms, laptops, smartphones and tablets of Catholics everywhere!

With the huge growth in smartphone use over the past four years, we also realised that the valuable resources on Xt3.com could no longer be confined to online use. Thus the next phase of development began – and Xt3.com’s popular Lent and Advent Calendars for iPhone, iPad and Android devices were launched.

At a local level, the Xt3.com team is working with youth ministers from dioceses around Australia, helping these groups make the most of social networks in order to promote their events. Based on the feedback and advice of several youth workers, and led by Xt3.com employee and youth minister Laura Bradley, we developed the Xt3.com Event Calendar. This user-generated tool for youth ministers is being used effectively in several Australian dioceses, as it hands over the responsibility of promoting local events to youth ministers and volunteers, instead of solely relying on the youth coordinator of a diocese. And keeping in mind the fact that nearly every young person is on Facebook, the Xt3.com Event Calendar can be embedded and shared on a Facebook page, as well as any parish or diocesan website.

However, Xt3.com is more than just another website for the anonymous cyber sphere. It is a personal experience. Although the bulk of our content is available to the public, the more active and committed users continue to create profiles on the site, establishing a very real online community for Catholics. They support each other, they pray for each other and they encourage fellow members in their search and discovery of the faith. A few years back we had a member from a remote part of Australia display signs of being at risk of suicide, and the Xt3.com community was quick to come to her aid. We were able to find out the name of her local parish and alert the parish priest, who in turn was able to provide pastoral support. We have also had young Catholics log onto Xt3.com in search of answers when they experience a crisis in their faith. The encouragement of the online community along with the opportunity to discover formative resources has brought many young Catholics back to Church with a stronger understanding of their relationship with God.

My personal experience with Xt3.com has shown me the true potential of social media. You really can make a difference to the



lives of people around the world. In recent years, the Church has come under scrutiny and criticism, and all too often we have to put up with slander and untruths in the secular press. There is immense satisfaction to be found in being able to promote the truth about the Church, and having an effective platform to do so is invaluable. The Church is more than the distorted picture we see in the public sphere, and my experience with Xt3.com has given me the confidence, and the faith, to stand up for the Church and share the true message of Catholicism with the world.

Xt3.com has been providing Catholics with an easy-to-use forum to obtain answers to moral and ethical questions regarding everyday issues facing life in the 21st century since its launch in 2008. The website will continue to evolve alongside the latest developments in technology. It is more than a social network – it is a news hub, a resource library, a World Youth Day information centre, a webcasting channel, an App provider ... and it is Catholic. Have we answered John Paul II's challenge to bring Christ to the third millennium? I think so!

# The Changing Marketplace

*By Neil Helmore*

**Neil Helmore** is Media and Vocations Officer in the Diocese of Townsville. He formerly held a Community Relations and Marketing position at Ryan Catholic College, Townsville.

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*“Jesus said to them, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (Jn 4:34).*

The human race is a strange group, we like things to be easy, normal and we generally don't like things to change too much. We are creatures of habit. A case of this in Queensland is the Daylight Savings debate. Queenslanders have been very vocal about their rejection of change. But without change how do we learn?

I became a Catholic five years ago and over this time I have come to learn that the Church is very similar, we do not like change. I worked in mainstream media for 22 years before taking up a Community Relations and Marketing position at Ryan Catholic College in Townsville.

As a parent, I have often observed how schools do the same old things they have always done to communicate to families. After some time I realised that as a parent, I did not want to be communicated with in the same old ways. I was a busy person and if I was busy so were the majority of the families. I had an opportunity to change things for the better, and thought that social media had lots of potential.

I was using social media to communicate with my friends and family, so I thought, why shouldn't the school? After much apprehension, we launched into social media and new technologies. Within 12 months I had built an iPhone app to communicate with our mobile parents and students, launched a Twitter and Facebook page, and WOW, what a response. We were communicating with our parents and community in a whole new way.

Now, let's look at the ways the Church has communicated with its parishioners over our history. I have been walking into our parish church for many years and collecting the weekly parish bulletin, sitting down and having a read of what is happening and who is doing what and when. What about all those people who do not come in through those doors each week, how are they being engaged with the Gospel? How are they being inspired to be God's messengers of hope and love?

I have been inspired by the way the worldwide Catholic Church has embraced new media. We only have to look at the events of the past few months to see how active people in the Church are. Who would have thought that the seagull that sat on top of the chimney leading from the Sistine Chapel would have its own Twitter feed? Or someone would create an automated way that people would be alerted to the fact that we had a new Pope?

One of the interesting aspects about the most recent 2013 conclave was the activity on social media, which had people fully engaged in following the age-old, traditional process of selecting a pope. From the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI to the pre-conclave meetings and throughout the conclave and afterwards, people were getting their news on mobile devices and computers via text, tweet, and post, as well as through the traditional media of TV, radio and print.

In my role as a Media Officer for the Diocese of Townsville, I am excited by this opportunity we have to use these technologies to share the Gospel not only with people who identify as Catholic but also with the wider community. The resources are now available online and at our fingertips wherever and whenever we need them. Whether it is on Twitter with a short passage from the Gospel of the day, or with a click of a link, you can potentially be taken to a place that you never thought you would be and find inspiration from the simplest message.

Websites like XT3.com, *Salt and Light*, and *CRADIO* share in a particular way the power of the Gospel. Priests no longer have to wait until Sunday Mass to preach the Good News; they can share their words of wisdom via a tweet, a Facebook post or a blog.

At the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference’s Media Congress last year, Monsignor Paul Tighe, Secretary to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, made the most powerful statement and I now reflect on it every day in everything I do. He said *“Jesus was a storyteller, he would use the best available resource to spread the Gospel. We are all called as communications people to do the same.”* I have taken that challenge and looked at every situation and opportunity and embraced it.

At Easter I asked our Bishop to record an Easter message that could be shared with the people of the Diocese. With serious health problems, Bishop Michael Putney has been unable to travel around the Diocese to visit parishes in the way he would normally have done. We sat down and recorded a simple message for Easter. I put it together and uploaded it to YouTube, shared the link with all of the priests and parishes, Catholic Education staff and Catholic agencies. Such a simple act created an opportunity that would not have been available in the past. Modern technology means it is now possible for bishops to speak to the people of their diocese who are

geographically miles away; in our case, Bishop Michael Putney could reach people as far as 800km away in Mount Isa, Proserpine in the south and Ingham in the north.

As a Diocese, we have joined the social media landscape with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Tumblr. But I want to do more. E-Newsletters and Blogs are exciting opportunities that I want to explore also. I see them as ways of sharing the activities and news of the Diocese to the wider community and evangelising.

# The Power of the Word

*By Anne Walsh*

**Anne Walsh** was a pioneer of innovative online communication through Fraynetwork Multimedia, producing award-winning multimedia resources for many Church organisations. She is currently the Director of Online Communications for the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

[www.sosj.org.au](http://www.sosj.org.au)

[www.mercyworld.org](http://www.mercyworld.org)

For me, it has always been about the words: the power of the utterance, the depth of the feeling and the silent spaces in between. *“For speech and silence together form the path that leads to the presence of God”* (David Wolpe).

My entry into the digital world began as a writer and subject matter expert and, not surprisingly, text remains at the core of what I love and, fortunately for me, of what I continue to do.

Words so often are the basis of a concept that is to be given creative expression. Being able to enunciate online, on screen and, yes, on paper still, the vision, the mission and the values of those church organisations, Catholic education bodies and religious orders I have worked with, for and alongside, is a remarkable privilege. While it taxes the head, it stirs the heart. The opportunity to make visible their expression of the Gospel message for me, unfailingly, as Mary Oliver puts it, *“lifts the latch and gives a glimpse into a greater paradise.”*

This work is an expression of my faith.

Eighteen years ago I was invited to become involved in what was then a new and fledgling ministry of the Church and of the Sisters of Mercy – Fraynetwork Multimedia, founded by Adele Howard rsm. Today there are many opportunities to become engaged in digital media creation in a faith-based setting. Increasingly, Church organisations and religious orders have grasped the importance of online communications, responding to the call as Ronald Herzog says, to ‘*think, live and embrace life on the digital continent*’. Recognising, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, that:

*“Our pastoral presence in that world must ... 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’”* (Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the 44th World Communications Day, The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word](#), 2010).

Now, through the vision of Pope Francis, this call is being reiterated. In Cardinal Ortega’s Notes from Cardinal Bergoglio’s Pre-Conclave Speech, *“The Church must come out of herself and go to the peripheries”*. And as Pope Francis said in his first General Audience on 27 March 2013, the Church must *“reach out to others... go to the outskirts of existence, to be the first to move towards our brothers and sisters ...”*

Back in 1995 the communications world within and beyond the Church was a vastly different place. Internet-based technologies were embryonic or newly emerging and what is commonplace today was still far away. 1995 was the year the Internet first became a mainstream phenomenon. A high-speed internet connection was a 28.8 dial up modem. Less than .04 per cent of the world’s population

had email. No one knew what a DVD was, or an iPod, let alone an iPad. The words ‘face’ and ‘book’ meant having your head in a novel, not being among the one in seven global users of the social media phenomenon. And it would be ten years before YouTube was launched.

But people had started to think differently, behave differently and live differently in this new world of digital possibility. We in the Church and at Fraynetwork, now had exposure to and an opportunity for new ways of expressing this timeless message and new means for carrying out the instruction of Jesus to *‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole of creation’* (Mk 16:15).

So we became missionaries, committed to sharing the Good News on the ‘digital continent’. This meant learning new languages, new cultures, and new ways of relating to achieve the same end. It also meant mastering the many technologies as these became available; inventing new ways to carry the message and creating elegant, intuitive and visually beautiful designs that in and of themselves invited exploration. Their ease of use so often belied the complexity of thought, research, content creation, detailed planning and architecture that was all part of the production process.

As a believing community, the Church has always understood the power of the medium to carry the message. High crosses, stained glass windows, music, text, sculpture, statues, painting, fabric, canvas, photography; in every age and in every place the Church has used – to remarkable, profound and enduring effect – the multi-media of the day. Excellence and artistry have always been the hallmarks of the Church as a patron of the arts, so the highest quality production values were our Catholic inheritance, not simply our professional stance and our intellectual positions.

Three issues motivated us to push through the challenges



and difficulties this new media presented to accomplish creative, imaginative and technical ways to:

- bring the Gospel to life on the web
- give voice to the voiceless
- support communication of the Mercy story

These gave rise to a number of important learnings for me. Let me single out just two.

- Having an online presence is very different from being present online

Over those years I became very clear on the important distinction to be made between ‘having an online presence’ and ‘being present online’. Having an ‘online presence’ is a technical reality requiring a website, hosting environment, servers, applications and so on, all of which are fundamental and without which there would be no virtual presence. Being ‘present online’, however, is a human reality. It requires having people with vision, understanding and dedication engaged in the effort of communication.

Early adopters of web communications often saw the two as interchangeable; they thought that simply by having a website they were present online. Not so.

‘Being present’ is about ‘being present to the other’ or ‘being engaged with the other’. Although taking place virtually, it is a human encounter in that the connection is with people and by people. In the Catholic Christian tradition, ‘being present’ is about ‘ministering to’ and ‘giving witness’. It is about enlightening the world with the message of the Gospel. It engages us in carrying Christ’s grace to others in the community.

This interpretation of ‘being present’ provides the purpose and the checklist for the methods of presentation, types of content and points of engagement that Catholic websites and social media should offer in order to reach out to, to attract and to retain site visitors. We need to keep looking at our online presence and asking ourselves the questions: To whom are we speaking? Who are we reaching? How well are we saying those things that are ours to say?

The second thing I learnt was this:

- If you make a resource about something important and make it well, it will be watched and used and will help affect change

From the beginning, that vision of giving voice through the new media to those who are not heard in our world, because of poverty, social exclusion, gender, race or geography informed the work as a practical application of both reconciliation and social justice principles.

Multiple formats provide multiple entry points. The more entry points there are, the more possibilities there are for people to enter into, understand and find meaning for their own lives in the story being told. It is the technical, imaginative and creative equivalent of making a place for everyone at the table. All of us had to develop and use the new ‘literacy’, understand a new concept, ‘multimodal’, and master the interface between written, oral, visual, audio, musical, gestural, tactile and spatial patterns of meaning to heighten users’ awareness, enrich their understanding and deepen their appreciation.

A few of our major resources we produced included:

- *The Ursula Frayne* video and print resources (1995-96) and the *Sorry Kit* as that work we produced for the first National Sorry Day (1998) became known.

- *Lore of the Land* (1999), an interactive CD-Rom and accompanying website, was designed to encourage us as indigenous and non-indigenous Australians to live in harmony with each other and with the land we each call home.
- Using a theological reflection process, *Mercy and Justice Shall Meet* (2004), complimented by the [mercyworld.org](http://mercyworld.org) website and Mercy E-Newsletter; took users into many different Mercy ministries across the globe; a means to engage with the challenge of the Gospel call to act with justice and compassion. It also invited a personal commitment to the implementation of the UN millennium development goals.
- *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ* (2010), an interactive DVD, was an invitation to all members of the English-speaking Catholic Church to encounter the depth, richness and layers of meaning in the Eucharist through an exploration of its history, spirituality and theology.
- The website *Together at One Altar* ([www.togetheratonealtar.catholic.edu.au](http://www.togetheratonealtar.catholic.edu.au)) (2010) subsequently created for Australian students in years F-12 to assist them in the ‘*full, active and conscious participation*’ in the liturgy.

Of the many hundreds of simple and complex multi-media creations from those years, these, along with the St Mary MacKillop website [www.marymackillop.org.au](http://www.marymackillop.org.au), are the best known.

Each one was an award-winning production, which was encountered and used internationally.

Education online through ‘clicks and mortar’ had replaced the constraints of learning environments confined to ‘bricks and mortar’. We educated aspiring and inexperienced users, mainly from religious orders, to understand the language and behaviours of this new

world of the Internet in order for them to be able to participate confidently and for their congregations to be present online.

Our major resource creations were all teaching materials because they educated the purchasers (and the audiences in the many hundreds of presentations) about worlds near and far from their experience.

These resources did not harangue or lecture or proselytise. They evangelised in an invitational way that called for thoughtful responses in action. They treated their intended audiences, young people and adults alike, as intelligent, thoughtful, compassionate and concerned individuals and community members; they invited the audience to come on a journey to the place of the other, to experience the conditions of exclusion and to hear others' points of view.

These resources enabled their audiences to be present to the issues of injustice of our time through virtual means. Through the power of video, viewers who were prepared to listen could not fail to be moved by the honesty and sincerity of the authentic voices speaking directly to them. Through the power of the internet, site visitors were invited to engage with the Church online and in the world; they had unfettered access to content-rich inspirational and educational materials. They also had opportunities to respond online – they could post thoughts, comments, reflections and prayers on the websites and social media and be responded to in return.

It's almost 18 months since my time at Fraynetwork. I have continued to work with Mercy International Association and the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart to support them in their 'being present online' in dynamic relationships with the members of their respective communities, both internal and in their worlds at large. They continue to draw their online visitors in for inspiration, connection and interaction, sending them out with gifts of interiority,

insight and participation.

Being present online is an act of reciprocity. One of the great tasks, perhaps the task, is to use these digital platforms to tell the Good News in new, fresh and surprising ways, issuing an invitation to users into right relationship with each other, our environment and our God.

*As David Whyte says, ‘People are hungry and one good word is bread for a thousand.’*

# The Church and the New Public Square

*By Adrian Middeldorp*

**Adrian Middeldorp** is the Social Media Coordinator for the Diocese of Parramatta. He holds a Bachelor in Media and previously worked in traditional and new media in Adelaide, Sydney and the United States. His Twitter handle is [@socialmediaparr](https://twitter.com/socialmediaparr).

Cathedrals in the Christian world have dominated the skyline of cities for centuries and are a constant reminder that the Church is an integral part of the life of the world. If you ever have wandered around the churches and cathedrals of Europe, or even St Mary’s Cathedral in Sydney, I am sure you would have been captivated by their resplendent aesthetic beauty.

Seeing firsthand an ancient Bible or liber, with gold leaves and dynamic colours that leap off the pages, has the same effect when you imagine the countless years of work carried out by monks all those years ago.

And yet, whilst these things have been said to present a beauty which seems earthly, rather than ethereal, people of faith know that these things, be they buildings, manuscripts, music or works of art, assist us in our journey of faith.

Similarly, the Church has relied on those who are able to communicate God’s message effectively, to preach the good news to help bring about a conversion of heart and mind.

Today, our modern public square has become the Internet. The World Wide Web is a web we are now stuck in whether we like it or not. The Internet provides forms of communication that provide a challenge to the Church, a challenge it is still coming to terms with. Like the ‘ogive’ (the pointed arch) is to Gothic cathedrals, so too is the internet to modern forms of communication.

Whilst some valiant attempts have been made by the Church to enter into this realm, the Church does need to overhaul the way it thinks about its embrace of social media. As a result of following the trends of the early days of the web, the internet is often seen as a place to “stick” a brochure or give the Mass times. The web is seen as function over form. Similarly, the framing messages and production of materials follow this path. Parish websites are full of information, news and homilies but would not likely receive any awards for their design.

The simple fact is, the way the people are using the web now, be it through website, Facebook, YouTube video or Twitter, the web is for many the first point of engagement with the Church. The web may be for someone who does not have faith the first place they look for answers. This is why the Church and dioceses need to invest in social media and web communications like never before.

Anyone who has studied communication will know that the old ‘propaganda’ or silver bullet method of communication: ‘*we tell them and they will understand*’. This is the wrong, yet unfortunately dominant way of thinking about public communications. It simply does not work that way. Human beings come with a wide range of experiences and in any communication ‘exchange’, the ‘other’ brings their life experiences with them.

Many within the Church already realise that although they may not completely understand social media and technology, they must

engage with those who do. Like the painters of old, the Church needs to seek out the graphic designers, the social media and communication experts.

Our Catholic universities need to place importance on finding educators who can educate students in design and communication who are grounded in faith. In fact the Church was ahead of her time at Vatican II when she considered this in the Decree on Social Communications:

*“Importantly, laymen ought to be afforded technical, doctrinal and moral training. For this purpose, the number of school faculties and institutes should be increased, where newsmen, writers for screen, radio and television and all other interested parties can obtain a sound training that is imbued with the Christian spirit, especially with respect to the social teaching of the Church”* (Pope Paul VI, *Inter Mirifica*, [Decree on the Media of Social Communications](#), 1963).

Anyone who has seen online progressive movements will realise that they have some common traits: the combination of visual design, in conjunction with a pithy message which is hard for those not engaged with the topic on a regular basis to ignore.

As Catholics, we need to get better and smarter in this area. If we look at the Gospels, Jesus kept His message simple, he used parables to explain his message and he left himself open to questions and challenges from his audience at that time.

So must we in social media.

In this age of the New Evangelisation, Catholics must learn how to communicate with others the message of Jesus Christ, and live out his message. So that yet again the Church can rise above, and be seen and heard in the new public square.



# The Technology Train

*By Daniel Saban*

**Daniel Saban** is a ‘media evangeliser’ based in Brisbane, Australia. He is production manager for Transverb Studios and makes digital media products including websites, video and music content for Catholic agencies around Australia.

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I remember the first time I placed our neighbour’s rotary phone receiver on a modem cradle and dialled into a Bulletin Board System or BBS to chat online. I was connected to people across the globe in real time, sharing real ideas, in the real world. What a rush!

Technology has, since then, advanced a little.

Today I find myself typing this article while filming it for my YouTube channel and Facebook page. I have a friend on my iPhone via Facetime who I am bouncing ideas off. And I have even let my Twitter followers know when it is all going to go live. It is communication at the near-speed of thought!

Ok ... so I am not really doing all of that at once, but the point is ... I could.

First, let me introduce myself. My name is Daniel Saban and I am Production Manager at Transverb Studios, a Catholic production house in Brisbane.

I am passionate about creating film and music resources for the

New Evangelisation. I have had the privilege of producing videos for everything Catholic under the hot Australian sun; from our Archbishop’s keynotes, to videos for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, to World Youth Day videoblogs, to promotional DVDs for ministries and music videos for emerging Catholic artists.

I must confess I resisted social media, in particular Facebook, for several years. I thought I would become addicted to creating and maintaining my online persona. I finally risked it and gave in after I realised I was missing out on important events such as marriage announcements and social invitations.

I distinctly remember walking into band practice after using Facebook for the first time and thinking, “I know exactly what all of you did this weekend”. It was strange. I instantly knew more about the people around me: their relationship status, who was feeling happy or sad, what bands they were listening to and what they had just eaten for dinner. I felt like I had superpowers.

Since then I have learned to embrace social networking, but not just for the sake of it. I see technology and social networking as tools, which in and of themselves are not good or bad, but which anyone can use for good or evil. I believe discernment and wisdom are very helpful allies when it comes to posting anything that can be seen by the world on social media. In fact, I’ve developed the habit of pausing before I hit that little send button to ask myself: “Do I really want this out in cyberspace?”

For me, one of the most empowering and potentially daunting commands Jesus gave us is *‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations’* (Mt 28:19). I would like to think that I take that command and its implications seriously. As I reflect on the Gospels, I see Jesus reaching out to the marginalised by entering their space. I do not read of him inviting people to his house for dinner or the temple but

rather entering their experience and community.

It is this reflection that gives me the impetus to reach out and share the gospel message with the human beings typing behind their computer screens. Only after reaching out do I feel I can genuinely begin to invite them into my community and church.

I believe there are two main ways I do that.

Professionally, I strive to produce videos and music content for YouTube, Facebook, Church websites and iTunes that carry the gospel message in a way that is engaging, creative and compelling. I have seen some beautiful advances in how we, as a Church, are investing and reaching out into these virtual communities by providing content that is accessible and addresses real issues in a pastoral way.

I used to be embarrassed at times by the quality and triteness of some of our online media content. I now see us as having an awesome opportunity to communicate the gospel message in new and fresh ways. We have such gifted speakers, theologians, lay missionaries, musicians and young people in our Church. I do not have to imagine the impact they will make through their blogging, messaging, posting and uploading, I am already seeing it.

Personally, I strive to lead a cyberlife that reflects my real life. I try to share my gospel values by sharing updates, pictures and videos which are life-giving. For me the biggest challenge has been on Facebook. I wanted to share my faith in a way that was authentic, positive and non-alienating. I started by creating a random thought of the day (RTOTD) Facebook page. Every day I would use a lyric from a popular song, and write a short reflection expressing gospel values in a non-confronting way. I really enjoyed the process and the page was well received until I ran out of time to actually write the daily

reflections! I learned quickly to plan ahead when using social media!

Time has not been the only challenge I have faced in social networking. I also have had to deal with everything from tweaking privacy settings, time wasting, overuse, a false sense of connection and almost being scammed. However, I believe taking these risks is worth the infinite potential of sharing the Gospel provided by social media.

When I run multimedia workshops, I always end by saying: *“You have no idea the impact you can make on someone’s life by sharing the gospel online through your creativity via a photo, a video or a thought”*. I say that to empower people and remind them that social media is not about numbers; it is about being bold, creative and cooperating with the Holy Spirit. So be bold, creative and allow the Holy Spirit to move you. Grab that camera, write that poem, post that blog in a way that will give life and allow that person to have an authentic experience of God; even if they are half way around the globe.

# What’s on your Mind?

*By Michaela Hillam*

**Michaela Hillam** is the marketing and sponsorship officer for the *Ignite Conference* run by Emmanuel Community in Brisbane and marketing officer for Christian Supplies Brisbane. She has a Bachelor of Mass Communication with a major in Advertising and Television and has a particular interest in writing and storytelling.

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As I travel to and from work each day I notice something about the people around me: their eyes are glued to their phones. Personally I am finding it increasingly difficult to make eye contact, exchange a smile or a friendly nod let alone strike up a conversation. We can no longer rely on being a witness to Christ on the streets, on the train, or in the staff lunchroom. I say so not to dishearten you, but to bring hope: for all we must do is apply the number one marketing principal and go where the people are.

Of all the ages Christianity has lived through, this is the diamond age of communication. We actually have a supreme advantage in the Internet. It is organic and unpredictable. No one knows what the next trend, app or innovation will be. What does seem to be occurring, however, is that this organism has formed a beating pulse around Facebook. I long ago assumed that something bigger and better would have surpassed it by now, just like with Hotmail Messenger, just like with MySpace. But no, not Facebook, it has bled its way into everything. In Australia, Facebook is here to stay at least

for some time yet.

My role as *Ignite Conference* Marketing and Promotions Officer is best summarised by this: get as many people to the *Ignite Conference* as possible. I have to constantly remind myself why I am doing what I am doing: that through God’s work at the conference, people will experience the loving power of Jesus Christ. They just have to get to the conference first. If I do not remind myself, I would feel like I spend all my time on Facebook for myself!

I suppose you could say that Facebook, and all other promotional mediums are a means to an end for my particular scenario, however, that is not so. For those fans of the *Ignite Conference* page, how many more are they connected with? Of the seven billion people worldwide, there are one-two billion monthly active users on Facebook (Facebook, 2013). If we can create content that is entertaining, captivating and thought provoking – content that has viral potential – could we not truly impact thousands upon thousands of lives with the Gospel message?

Because what I have learnt about Facebook is that it is not a marketplace; it is more like dinner and a show. People do not go there to be sold to; they go there to meet their friends and to be entertained but also to share what is on their plate.

Alas, Christians working in media and the arts do not have this luxury of creating content that is for the self, nor even content that is entertaining for the sake of entertainment or viral for the sake of being viral. So, from my perspective as someone who is trying to sell something – the *Ignite Conference* – Facebook becomes a place of engagement, entertainment and relationships with the welcome challenge to ensure that the underlying reason behind any content creation be for God and His work.

My job remains to marry this all together: content that has the

ability to speak the Gospel message – even indirectly – but taps into the users’ need to feel a part and be seen as being a part. This is all done in the hope that some of these lives will be influenced enough to come to the Ignite Conference and there experience the love of Christ and make a firm commitment to follow Him.

The beauty of such a task is that, in regards to social media, we have an engaged audience. It is not unconscious consumption like billboards or passive consumption like TV ads. I am talking about interactive consumption; people who are ready to receive whatever we have to give them and to respond immediately in some small or large way. Now, granted, we may have them for only half a second as they scroll through their news feed, but that is our golden opportunity, that half a second is vitally important. And who is sending the message is just as important as what the message is. For, if you, your organisation or ministry repeatedly post irrelevant, uninteresting, unattractive content, people will quickly learn to scroll right past anything you have to say. On the other hand, create really good content and watch as the comments, “likes” and “shares” grow! Watch as you create, not a following, but a community of people who care about what you care about and want to share that with you and with everyone else they are connected with.

What a blessing to be living in such an age that gives us the ability to reach so far, wide and deep. Never has the Gospel message been so accessible. I only hope that it is received well. Though, no doubt between the clutter of angry posts about the traffic, pictures of your best friend’s breakfast and what the weather is like on any given day, Christ’s shining light is bound to break through. Imagine if all Christians made a conscious effort to promote the love of Christ – directly and indirectly – on Facebook alone? There are billions of people ready and waiting to engage with our message – the loving power of Jesus Christ. So why don’t you do it? Tell them what’s on your mind.

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