Pastoral Communication In the Digital Age: Realities And Response

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Abstract

This study examines the reality of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and its effect on various dimensions of society, particularly social and religious dimensions. The rise of ICT into a new digital landscape has offered several concerns and challenged the church's mission. The church has been called to reshape its theological response to understand better ICT and its effects in the light of communication and pastoral communication theology. This study finds that the communication of the Triune God should be seen as a source of strength, inspiration, guidance, and a model for the church in her pastoral communication in the digital age, which, in turn, should set up the church's pastoral responses in the digital era. Centering on the Triune communication model—the Father who creates, the Son who is incarnated, and the Holy Spirit who advocates—ICT may serve as a bridge connecting people and a beacon illuminating the world.

Keywords: *Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Pastoral communication, communication Theology, and pastoral communication plan.*

Introduction

With the rise of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and associated technological advances, there are now new methods to connect with people that transcend space and time. The technological advancements occurring in the world are extensive, rapid, and pervasive. The influence of these advancements and innovations permeates every aspect of life, especially the social and religious dimensions of human existence, and manifests visibly and invisibly. Frequently, these technologies are modified for most life processes and operations.

People's relationships with God and each other have changed because of the Internet and other forms of technology. ICT and its various instruments have much to offer humanity's thirst for fulfillment and expansion. ICT can be used as an instrument for the greater good so long as its users are committed to using it for God's glory and the benefit of their brethren. There are both positive and negative aspects of ICT. Even though ICT services have made life easier and more efficient, areas still require constant evaluation, which can be considered challenges. Even though the challenges listed here are universal, they must be addressed locally. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of communication theology is required to respond to those challenges. This theological communication understanding will result in pastoral responses that can be implemented in dioceses and parishes.

This study's primary objective is to present the general actuality of ICT and how it affects various aspects of society, especially the social and religious aspects. Through the lens of communication and pastoral communication theology, which is the focus of this study, it provides theological reflections on ICT and its effects. For each dimension, pastoral difficulties are described. There are citations for documents published by the church that are pertinent. The final section provides brief responses and general directions for addressing pastoral concerns in a coordinated manner, presenting a multifaceted plan and strategy for pastoral communication.

Method

The research method of this study used a qualitative type (Creswell, 2014) through a literature study (Cawelti, 1969) with a content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A qualitative study through literature study is a method of gathering information and conducting research using library resources. It involves various library materials, such as books, journals, databases, and other resources, to find relevant information on a particular topic. (Cawelti, J. G, 1969). Library research can be an effective method for gathering information and researching a wide range of topics. It allows a

researcher to access a wealth of information in various formats. By assessing these resources, this study found relevant information on the topic of ICT and its developments, particularly the Church's response, using the lens of pastoral communication and communication theology on the impact of ICT in social and religious aspects of lives. The data was collected from the relevant resources and analyzed for the research problem of this study.

Result and Discussion

This section of the study discusses the global digital landscape to provide context for the study. It discusses the impact of ICT on individuals' social and religious lives. This study then examines the church's response to the impact of ICTs using official church documents from pastoral communication and communication theology perspectives. The church's response to the actuality of ICT presents a plan for pastoral communication that can be implemented at the diocesan, parish, or local level.

The Global Digital Landscape

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) applications are expanding exponentially. It manifests in various available goods and services and permeates every aspect of human existence. Due to the advent of the Internet, digital versions of analog communication tools such as the telegraph, telephone, radio, and print media have emerged. Internet capabilities include global broadcasting, rapid information dissemination, collaboration, and interaction.

In contrast to previous inventions, ICT has never been sold as a finished product. ICT and its functionalities continue to evolve through numerous technological phases and platforms. (Chowdhury et al. (2014))

Web 1.0 is the first era in the development of the Internet. It consists of static websites with hyperlinks. Web 1.0 was a one-way communication network.

Web 2.0 provided Internet users the means to generate and distribute content simultaneously. User-generated dynamic content supplanted static web pages. Social media emerged, enabling Internet users to interact in virtual spaces or chatrooms. This phase raised ethical concerns regarding the development and use of websites.

Web 3.0, the third step in the development of the Internet, has made it possible for data and machines to talk to each other. This has produced a web that is data-driven and semantic. Web services at this stage have made it simpler for people to communicate with one another, making web browsing more personal for a more significant number of Internet users.

Web 4.0 is the subsequent and most complex stage. It incorporates numerous recent technological advancements. It is claimed that Web 4.0 services are autonomous, proactive, content-exploring, self-learning, and collaborative. Machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) support agents that generate content. (https://www.igi-global.com).

ICT is instantaneous, pervasive, global, decentralized, interactive, constantly evolving, and scalable in content and reach. It can promote egalitarianism in that anyone with the necessary equipment and modest technical expertise can have an active online presence, have simple access to various information, and create or curate online content. Using digital technology, anyone can be an effective communicator or influencer.

Consider the following data from the "Digital 2022 Global Overview Report" (https://datareportal.com/reports/digital) to understand our perspective on the global digital overview.

- **Global population:** In January 2022, the world's population stood at 7.91 billion, and an annual growth rate of 1% indicates that this number will reach 8 billion by the middle of 2023. Over fifty-seven percent of the world's population currently resides in urban areas.

- **Global mobile users:** More than two-thirds (67.1%) of the world's population now uses a mobile phone, with the number of unique users reaching 5.31 billion by the beginning of 2022.

- **Global internet users:** The international total has increased by 1.8% over the past year, with 95 million additional mobile users. At the beginning of 2022, global internet users had risen to 4.95 billion, representing 62.5% of the world's total population.

- **Global social media users:** in the past year, the number of internet users has increased by 192 million (+4.0 percent), according to available data. However, ongoing COVID-19 restrictions on research and reporting suggest that growth trends may be significantly more significant. In January 2022, there were 4.62 billion consumers of social media worldwide. This number represents 58.4 percent of the world's population; however, it is essential to note that social media "users" may not necessarily represent distinctive individuals.

- **Social media time:** The number of global social media users has increased by more than 10 percent over the past year, with 424 million new users expected to join in 2021. Social media time: the amount of time that individuals spend on social media platforms to an average of 2 hours and 27 minutes per day; social media accounts for 35 percent of our connected

media time. The amount of time we devote to social media has increased by 2 minutes per day (+1.4 percent) over the past year.

ICT and Its impact on the Social and Religious Dimensions

1. ICT and Social Dimension

The widespread adoption of ICT-related services can be attributed to their positive impact on the lives of individuals. ICT has enhanced the standard of living. Various social networking sites have been developed and made available to the public.

In addition, they contain vast stores of knowledge and data in various formats, including text, video, audio, images, and web files. Applications such as WhatsApp, Facetime, and Viber enable users to communicate regularly and remain in touch across the globe. All these websites bring people closer together by facilitating communication and information sharing.

ICT can be utilized for both good and evil. The digital space is not governed, moderated, or owned by anyone, although country-specific regulatory bodies are presumably responsible for cyberspace activities. Among the harmful effects of ICT on human existence are the following:

ICT and life quality. Frequently, the character of interpersonal relationships determines life satisfaction. The obsession with social media and other online tools negatively impacts relationships. Even though ICT provides a semblance of ease in getting to know others and engaging in conversation via digital means, there is a failure in acquiring acquaintances on a personal and social level. Twenty-two percent of millennials have no friends, and 20 percent are lonely, according to research (https://aleteia.org/).

They reduced interpersonal contact. For many individuals, online communication is preferable to face-to-face interactions. This makes them unique and introverted individuals. People frequently use ambiguous emoticons and smiley symbols instead of words to articulate their meaning, so online communication frequently fails to convey genuine emotions. This has weakened the social fabric by shaping perceptions of neighbors from various religions, castes, or nationalities. Reduced personal interaction has led to a social "disconnect" between individuals of varying social standings. In this regard, even households are not exempt.

The current challenge posed by ICT in the social dimension of human lives is establishing and maintaining mediated relationships. As the government has become more reliant on ICT for communication and relationship-building, its efficacy has been questioned. However, research indicates that online social contact with peers and family does not reduce feelings of loneliness as effectively as offline social interactions (Yao & Zhong, 2014).

Numerous adolescents and teenagers evaluate their self-worth and social acceptance based on the number of comments and shares their posts receive. Young people can become jealous and hostile when they do not receive as many "likes" and "shares" as their peers. Social media platforms can set a comparison trap for young users, causing them significant anxiety.

As new ways to talk have become more popular, the quality of the direct human conversation or the social dimension of human lives has dramatically decreased. The challenge is to help people realize how important it is to be fully present with each other and bring the real conversation back into their lives (Turkle, S., 2016).

2. ICT and Religious Dimension

As more and more religious websites and applications are created online, there is an increase in spiritual content. ICT offers a vast online repository of spiritual and religious content. We can obtain a unique spiritual experience by virtually listening to spiritual teachers from various religions and cultures and visiting online pilgrimages and holy sites. Numerous parishes and places of worship have adopted social media tools to communicate with individuals and disseminate information online. Blogs and discussion forums are widely used for counseling and guidance. People who live far from churches or in other countries can quickly and easily locate Eucharist services and spiritual talks in their native language, even if they do not reside near a church.

Users frequently wish for their religious beliefs to be kept from public forums. They consider religion a personal matter. For some, the reality that the Internet eliminates religious identity barriers is a positive development. Some individuals emphasize their spirituality more than their religious affiliations and practices (Campbell & Vitullo (2016). In this circumstance, the Internet provides numerous opportunities for individuals to access spiritually edifying material without joining a church or other religious organization.

There are a few challenges associated with the Internet domain. "The greatest cause for concern is the absence of moral and religious authority over all online content." Since anyone can create post-religious content online, it is often not verified for errors that could mislead as opposed to educating. Radical and extremist groups that publish religious material may cause religious conflict, which is detrimental to religious harmony and comprehension. Many concepts and propaganda on the Internet attempt to convert people and incite hatred of other religions. Islamophobia is one consequence of the online dissemination of anti-Islam propaganda (Chaudhry, 2016).

The digital milieu presented above shows that just as there are abundant opportunities created by the development and propagation of modern information and communication technology (ICT), there are equally many challenges brought to society

and the Church. ICT's pervasive use profoundly affects some of the most basic human relationships and institutions, including Social and religious life. In the words of Lêvi (2001), the world is, by definition, technological, as it is impossible to separate society and culture from the technology field. On its part, the Church has always exhibited a great sensitivity to the happenings in the world, taking into careful account the positive and negative impacts on the well-being of humanity.

In the social dimension of human lives, one cannot deny the rapid development of ICT in both functions and reach. Aside from providing a faster and quicker way to communicate, products have now integrated data technology and connectivity in different aspects of living. Gadgets pervade every possible human function, regardless of industry and need. Online shopping is now slowly becoming one of the main channels businesses conduct their transactions. As a result, new online marketing trends and strategies appear. Of these are online shopping and delivery, and recently, the rise of online sales courtesy of different online shopping sites. These developments have helped foster more accessible and efficient solutions for various needs. However, reliance on data and connectivity is not without effect. The rise of online shopping sites and delivery apps has ignited excessive consumerism. The focus is not so much on the quality of the product but on the number of items one can amass.

Digital connectivity, on the other hand, has created division as determined by one's knowledge and access to ICT. Certain services are set based on location and paying capacity of people. The rich and well-informed have greater access to ICT and enjoy its benefits. Those without access are often ignored or, worse, abused.

In his 2019 World Communication Day Message, Pope Francis affirmed the position of the Church regarding ICT when he said that the Internet is "a resource of our time" (Benedict XVI, 2019). However, just as the other Popes before him have pointed out time and time again, the faithful are constantly reminded to remain vigilant and discerning. The effects of ICT are undeniably evident as it now runs deep in people's daily lives. The different modes and channels of communication and connection have altered even the most basic behaviors, such as eating, buying, and paying bills. ICT has not only impacted businesses and communication processes, but more significantly, it has dramatically affected the human physique and psyche. The fast and easy culture and owning and posting have physical, ecological, and psychological effects, on which the Church turns a keen and loving eye.

In several World Communications Messages (1976, 1977, 1978), Pope Paul VI pointed out the good of every human person as the Church's primary concern. As her mission entails, the Church should care for the faithful as inspired by the very teachings of the Gospel. It is, therefore, of great importance that the different dimensions and effects of ICT be tackled and addressed. One pressing matter is the effect on one's identity and

personality development. Digital natives and digital migrants have learned to identify their worth as dictated by the standards of the digital space.

Not having enough Likes, Followers, Posts, etc., might mean not having a life worth living offline. The online or media persona is given more importance than the living one. One's beauty and worth have become based on one's online profile. Not living up to these online demands causes depression and addiction. Looking for alternative ways, some people draw satisfaction from their needs from pornography or crime. Too much exposure to cyberspace may cause one to lose a sense of connection with the physical environment. People are glued to their gadgets, even in small groups, causing relationships to weaken and eventually fail. Such concerns affirm the very mission of the Church to proclaim the love of Christ "to the ends of the earth." The Church hopes that effective pastoral and evangelizing communication may communicate with and heal the wounds created by digital culture.

The impact of ICT on the religious dimension of human existence has been both positive and negative. This was especially evident in religious practice via the so-called Online Church. The Internet has become a source of spiritual nourishment for some individuals. The Internet is regarded as a meeting place for people from around the globe, regardless of their ethnicities or religions. It implies that cyberspace or the internet fosters community and solidarity among individuals irrespective of their origins. This positive aspect should be emphasized amid the high tension of fragmentation and division between people based on nationality, skin color, language, political preference, religion, country of origin, culture, etc.

Despite many opportunities to nurture one's faith, the advent of cyberspace brings challenges to the life of the Church. The theological challenge offered by cyberspace is related to the understanding of Christ. For instance, the phenomenon of attending a telecasted Eucharistic celebration has been questioned. The most obvious question is whether satisfying our spiritual needs can only be gained vaguely.

The document, *Ethics in Internet,* warns us that virtual reality is no substitute for the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, as well as shared worship of warm bodies in the community. Nevertheless, religious practice in cyberspace cannot be avoided. This phenomenon calls on those in "leadership positions in all sectors of the Church to recognize the need to understand the media, apply this understanding in formulating pastoral plans for social communications with concrete policies and programs in this area, and appropriately use media." (Pontifical Council for Social Communication, 2014).

The increasing number of users of online churches calls on leaders of the Church to sustain it (Dyikuk, 2017). The hierarchy of the Church should show the way in the "effective use of social media for evangelization. (Dykuk, 2017). Also, the Church needs

to provide guidelines for its members to avoid Internet-related pitfalls such as radicalization, pornography, and fraud.

ICT's unstoppable and unrestrained utilization has transformed information into a "killer weapon" in the political environment. Online propaganda aims to mask the hidden agenda of political minds by manipulating public debate and distorting public opinion. One of the media outputs nowadays, whether online or traditional, is the publication of "fake news," which has enlivened news marketing while interrupting the authenticity of the news. Fake news refers to "spreading disinformation online or in the traditional media." It uses "non-existent or distorted data meant to deceive and manipulate the reader" to advance political and economic interests (Pope Francis, 2018).

Pope Francis's Message "The Truth Will Set You Free - Fake News and Journalism for Peace" was issued before the Catholic Church's World Day of Social Communications on May 13, 2018. The Church, through this document, recognizes her missionary role in the advent of fake news thoroughly. The Church denounces the existence and the deployment of fake news. The Church believes that disseminating counterfeit information destroys human civilization, unsettles communal life, and fundamentally denigrates the dignity of humans as faithful beings. The publication of this document emphasizes the Church's public relation role in resisting and surmounting the circulation of fake news. This should be part of her missionary endeavor.

Church's Pastoral Communication and Communication Theology Approach in the Digital Age

1. Theological Foundation of Communication

The theological concept of communication, ICT included, is grounded on the fundamental idea of Christian Theology: The Trinitarian God – Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. In expounding on the notion of the Trinitarian God as the basis of communication theology, German theologian Gisbert Greshake states that Communication is a decisive theological idea that grounds in the Christian revelation, from its origin, which addresses the centers of the Christian perception of God and the World. (Vu Ta & Eilers, 2015). He explains the expression "communication" in the everyday use of the word and from a philosophical perspective. The regular use of communication, according to Greshake, is derived from the root word *mun*, which means something like that of a threshold or circumscription. This root meaning can be applied to a standard room or place for living where everyone depends on everyone else.

The philosophical perspective is based on the Latin word *munus*, which means gift. The expression of communication then refers to the one who communicates in service to

others and passes on to them a facility through which both come into communion. These root words imply that communication is a process of mutual giving, resulting in "communion." Greshake argues that this concept builds on the foundation for a "Trinitarian God who enters into the world and communicates Himself to human beings in Jesus Christ and the Power of the Holy Spirit." (Vu Ta & Eilers, 201:44). In this sense, what God communicates is not something but Godself. Jesus Christ, who had a direct encounter with human beings, is God's self-communication. The Divine self-communication, however, is primarily happening in the Trinity. Greshake concludes that God's self-communication is the basis for a memorable communication theology.

2. Elements of Communication Theology

Bernard J. F. Lonergan (1972), after an in-depth discussion in his book *Method in Theology*, says that communication is a theological concern. In line with this understanding, Karl Rahner discusses God's self-communication in considering theology. In his view, God communicates himself as a person being a gift and giver at the same time as the personification of love (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1 Jn. 4:8). This concept has been further developed by Avery Dulles in which he infers that theology is at every point concerned with the realities of communication. Dulles calls Christianity a communication religion, for God in God's inmost essence is a mystery of self-communication (Dulles, 1992). The secret of God's self-communication shall be further explained in the elements of communication theology, such as the Trinity, Revelation, and Incarnation.

Firstly, *Trinity*. The Christian understanding of God's self-communication is based on God's character as one who relates and communicates with God's creatures. Greshake articulates this concept: "God is the one who is not a static, lonely nomadic. Rather, God is in himself plural: Life, Love and Communio." (Dulles, 1992). Within this circle of relationship, the Father sends his Son and his Holy Spirit, whom themselves possess the exact Divine nature. Through this moment, Franz-Josef Eilers (2009) notes that "the Father 'speaks' the Son and in so doing He generates and communicates everything He is, and He has," and in turn, the "Son calls the Father and gives Himself in totality with perfect obedience." (Eilers, 2009). In the same line of understanding, Carlo Martini (1994) writes, "the intimate life of God as far as we can comprehend a profound and ongoing inexhaustible communication between the Divine persons" (Martini, 1994). There is a dialogue between the three divine persons.

Secondly, *Revelation*. The entire Scripture speaks about God as communicating God. He shares with His creatures. The Old Testament shows the inner Trinitarian self-communication of God involved in His dialogue with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God's communication with His creatures is echoed in the New Testament. The theme

surrounding the Pentecost event, the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-47.), is God communicating yet again with human beings. The communicative occurrence of Pentecost is derived naturally from the Trinitarian communion of love. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are unified in the circumference of Divine communication. As Martini pointed out, the quintessence of God is both "communion and communication" (Marini, 1994).

God's intervention through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost characterizes the Church established by God's self and that the Spirit, who commanded the disciples, enables the Church to communicate and bear witness to the Gospel until the end of time. The Pentecost event, therefore, signifies a precious moment of God's outpouring of the Holy Spirit, giving people a profound communicative ability. It was also a moment through which God re-initiated and restored the divine-human relationship, marked by the gratuitous outpouring of the same Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit-filled each of the disciples with the gift of speaking in tongues. It gave them the ability to be understood in different languages spoken by people all over the world. Pentecost, in this context, would be nothing but communication, and the primary mission of the Church, therefore, is to communicate the Message in the here and now at every time. The gift of God's Spirit would give us today's church a new heart, language, and communication ability. Such is the fulfillment of God's enduring presence through the Church's life and proclamation of the Gospel.

Finally, *Incarnation*. The Biblical underpinning of Christian communication is Trinitarian Communication. The Trinitarian communion shows an ongoing-permanent communication between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father constantly communicates with the Son, and the Son, in total obedience, expresses everything He has heard from His Father to the world. The Logos (Son) shared flawlessly and successfully the message of the Father to the world and the people; therefore, Jesus is known as the Perfect Communicator of God.

Jesus' fundamental mission to the world is to reveal the face of the Father, to reveal to us His love. The fourth Gospel shows us the biblical foundation of Jesus as the sole revealer of the Father as it says: "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is the Father's side, has revealed Him" (John 1:18). The source of Jesus' love for us comes from the Father's love through the Trinitarian relationship. The love of the Father thus becomes flesh in the Incarnation of the Son. The Father, who is love, sends the Word, which communicates His love and his very self. As the sole revealer of the Father, Jesus does not simply share the concepts or ideas, and instructions with His listeners. Jesus' communication, as described eloquently by the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, is "more than the expression of ideas and the indication of emotion. At its most profound level, it is the giving of self in love" (*Communio et Progressio* no. 11).

How did Jesus, as the perfect revealer of the Father, communicate this "giving of self in love" in His mission? The Gospel of Mark shows us the spiritual life of Jesus, in and through which, He revealed the love of the Father. "Rising very early before dawn, He left and went off to a deserted place, where He prayed" (Mk. 1:35). In other accounts of the Gospels, in a profound moment of silence, Jesus prayed solemnly before making important decisions in His life. Not only that, but Jesus also taught His disciples how to pray (Mt. 6:9-15). In His profoundest belief, Jesus, through constant prayer, received the Love of the Father and thus received the spiritual nourishment for His mission to communicate the Good News to the people.

3. Two Approaches to Communication Theology: Pastoral and Evangelizing Communication

In its comprehensive understanding, the concept of communication theology closely corresponds with other sciences, including social communication. This does not necessarily mean that in discussions about communication theology, which also covers social communication, the topic only covers communication media. Eilers (2008) says communication theology "does not start with the media or technical means but rather with the center of theology, with God Himself. Communication does become the eye through which the whole of theology is seen because the Christian God is a communicating God" (Eilers, 2008).

This concept implies that communication is brought into the center of theology. Communication becomes a theological principle. Here, God is taken seriously as communicating God, and both Divine revelation and salvation are considered communication happenings. A logical inference within this understanding is that "communication theology considers the whole of theology under the perspective of communication" (Ciudadano, 2015).

Pastoral and evangelizing communication are two approaches of communication theology to expound the concept on a more practical level. Religious communication is the communication *ad intra* for the Christian community and the Church. The understanding of rural communication is part of pastoral theology which refers to the application of theology into the lives of people and society as seen and manifested in the preaching, catechetical, Biblical as well as liturgical apostolate of the Church. The concept of pastoral communication derives from the word "pastor" or the shepherd who shares with and relates to his flock using different methods, means, and contents. Within this framework, "pastoral communication is communicating for pastoral care, shepherding, building up, maintaining and deepening of faith." (Eilers, 2009). In a strict sense, pastoral communication is communication for and with the members of the Church. While in a broad sense, it refers to all activities of the Church and its members (Eilers, 2008).

On the other hand, evangelizing communication is the extra communication to those outside the Church, especially those who have not been baptized or have not known Christ yet. The Church exists not only for the community of believers. She is also sent to share and proclaim the Good News to all the world. This reflects the ways and means of mission for people outside or at the margins of the Church. It concerns communicating the Kingdom of God beyond the narrow Church boundaries. Its fundamental concept lies in the "Kerygmatic, proclaiming or missionary communication" (Eilers, 2009), in which dialogue is essential. Dialogue, in the light of evangelizing communication, is "the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation. Any sense of mission not permeated by such dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and the teaching of the Gospel." (Eilers, 2008).

The publication of *Nostra Aetate* reaffirms the importance of dialogue with other religions to evangelize communication. *Nostra Aetate* has a sense of prophetic imperatives for Catholics to promote the spiritual values of other faiths, Jewish, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It also inspires a humbler yet creative way to speak with the integrity of God's revelation to human beings. Without ignoring the substantial differences between Catholicism and other faiths, *Nostra Aetate* focuses more on all believers' things in common.

Through the pope's message and the church's official document, the second section of this paper has examined the church's responses to the ICT issue. These responses must be contextualized and adapted to the context. The Church and its members should continue their pursuit of truth and happiness while marveling at God's special provision through ICT. ICT may serve as a bridge connecting people and a beacon illuminating the world despite its challenges.

Pastoral Communication Plan

This pastoral plan must demonstrate two essential qualities: (1) an awareness of the new theological and pastoral communication context presented by the digital age; and (2) updated pastoral standards and approaches that effectively respond to the new milieu.

A thorough examination of ICT reveals that the Internet is a communication tool and a new reality with dimensions the average person does not fully comprehend. Cyberspace, a figurative space in our imaginations, has materialized by technology. We conceptualize cyberspace as the physical location where our online interactions with other people occur. Cyberspace is not corporeal, but it is not always virtual. It is accurate,

and an infinite number of events can occur within this reality that has parallels and differences with the physical environment.

Second, theological reflections must naturally result in new pastoral approaches and programs that effectively address contemporary issues. This is because the digital milieu is a setting with many never-before-seen characteristics.

The following section of the paper is a multifaceted plan for pastoral communication that attempts to satisfy the first two criteria.

1. Digital leadership

The example Pope Francis demonstrated in digital leadership is a true inspiration for Church leaders at all levels. Only a few days after Pope Francis took office, he began to tweet regularly. Pope Francis' English Twitter channel indicates that he has tweeted over 2,000 times and amassed over 18 million English-speaking followers. In 2019, Pope Francis launched his app, "Click to Pray." According to the Vatican, the app would make it possible for the faithful to "accompany the pope in a mission of compassion for the world." Through the app, which is part of Pope Francis' Worldwide Prayer Network, users would know what the Pope is praying for on a particular day and join him in praying for that intention. This app is one of many examples of how Pope Francis is attempting to harness the power of technology to create a community of prayer and to expand the evangelizing mission of the Church.

Even though social media has been an essential tool to the Pope and numerous other world religious leaders, its true potential has not always been taken advantage of by Catholic leaders. Many religious leaders refrain from engaging with this technology because they need to gain knowledge and competence in using the various applications. Others shun social media because they fear it will infringe on their personal life and privacy. Some use only their favorite social media outlet or the one they are most acquainted with while refusing to diversify and update themselves with new, potentially more effective, and far-reaching platforms than the ones they feel comfortable using.

It is also the case that only some who use ICT to communicate have a fundamental understanding of pastoral communication theology. In parishes, religious congregations, and dioceses, individuals charged with communication work tend to focus on the technological aspect with various gadgets rather than take the time to study and reflect on the theological principles that drive communication work. Digital religious leaders, to be truly effective, must have not only technical competence but also excellent theological understanding to undergird their communication work.

It is now well-known that content is essential for the Internet platform. Engaging content could attract people to pay attention to their website or amass a significant

following. For Catholic leaders, having appropriate content is essential to evangelization. The content must adhere to religious and ethical standards, and what is uploaded must also demonstrate following cultural and social norms. Religious leaders can only freely upload photos they wish, especially if they need clarification regarding their lifestyle and relationships.

Therefore, prudence is essential for the digital religious leader in deciding what content to upload to the public. A photo can tell a thousand words, but those words often depend on the person looking at the picture and conjuring up those words in their mind.

Therefore, the pastoral communication plan should give due importance to developing digital leadership by taking care to include the following:

- They are helping religious leaders to adopt a balanced disposition towards ICT and become aware that digital leadership is a natural and essential component of spiritual leadership in the present milieu.

- Ongoing formation for religious leaders should include the topics such as pastoral communication theology and ICT and its ethical, theological, and pastoral implications.

- Seminary and religious formation should include seminars and workshops addressing ICT's various dimensions.

- Parishes and dioceses should organize workshops and seminars on ICT for lay leaders.

- Helping religious leaders integrate online and offline pastoral activities into a unified pastoral plan in which these activities support one another.

2. Digital literacy

Because the Internet is interwoven into the fabric of modern life, no one could be immune to its impact, directly or indirectly. Whether you grew up with the Internet or came to it later, you need digital literacy to understand the pros and cons of the Internet and get the most out of it as a tool and a place to meet people. Digital literacy is essential for daily life and needs to be given priority in the pastoral plan of the Church.

2.1. Digital education for the parish priest

Church pastors need to attain digital literacy to be in tune with events taking place in the world. Nowadays, it is often the case that things happening on social media become news sources in mainstream media. Video clips and live-streaming activities often go viral on social media, after which mainstream news outlets report them. Therefore, if pastors are to be in tune with the life of the people, they cannot shun the Internet and its associated applications.

The pastoral communication plan aims at promoting digital literacy in Church pastors by:

- They provide workshops and seminars for priests and future priests on ICT and various social media platforms. Different platforms are popular in other countries, and pastors need to know how to select venues that best serve their purpose.

- We are providing training on the appropriate and ethical use of ICT according to legal, social, and cultural standards designated by the Church and society.

- Helping leaders understand the benefits and pitfalls of ICT to use it in their personal life and pastoral work.

- Helping pastors use prudence in online activities to protect their privacy while working.

2.2. Digital education for parents, grandparents, and other caregivers

As grandparents and many parents are digital immigrants rather than digital natives, it is often the case that children "teach" the adults how to use the Internet and various applications rather than the other way around. This role switch is worrying because if adults need to learn more about how the Internet works and what young people do online, they are less likely to keep an eye on what they are doing.

The pastoral communication plan that aims to promote digital literacy for parents, grandparents, and other caregivers should focus on the following elements:

- Understand the essential workings of ICT and its applications to maneuver the Internet and communicate with others via the applications.

- Understanding the danger of excessive use of digital gadgets on mental development and physical and emotional health better regulate children's use of devices and online time.

- Recognize signs of abuse of and addiction to the Internet to intervene promptly.

- Recognize signs of cyberbullying (either as a perpetrator or as a victim) to take steps to deal with the issue.

- Know how to appropriately monitor their children's Internet use and content being downloaded and uploaded online to regulate appropriate behavior.

- Know how to model good behavior for young people using ICT.

2.3. Digital education for the youth

Even though young people know a lot about the Internet and what it can do, using it well only means using it wisely. Young people could spend less time using the Internet for productive or educational purposes. Many young people, even those studying at the tertiary level, need help to discern between real and fake news.

Digital education for young people involves a whole host of topics, including:

- How to make sound judgments about information that flows through the various online platforms.

- How to use ICT for personal growth and maturity and maintaining physical and mental well-being.

- How to enrich online relationships while maintaining personal privacy and security.

- How to be open in sharing and communicating while maintaining standards of decency and truthfulness in words.

- How to engage in the benefits of the online world without neglecting the joys of the nature of physical space.

- How to use ICT beyond entertainment, such as evangelization and engaging in social and civic issues online.

- How to exercise self-control in the amount of time spent online.

Conclusion

Whether in the analog world or cyberspace, Christians must be inspired by education and example to model our communication on the exemplar of Jesus as the communicator par excellence. Jesus the Communicator offers a paradigm for communication practice when he refers to Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In these three elements, we find proper communication's meaning and goals.

First, when Jesus Christ declared Himself as the way that led to God, the trustworthy source of life, He spoke about a new way of being and doing things in the world. For Christians, the method of Christ includes repentance of sins, loving God and neighbor (even enemies), and proclaiming the Kingdom of God characterized by harmony, peace, and justice. Our communication must serve as GPS directions that lead others on the right path, leading to the ultimate destination—the heavenly home of God, the Almighty Father.

Second, when Jesus declared Himself to be the Truth, He told his disciples what was necessary for freedom (John 8:32) and fullness of life. Jesus affirmed that He came into this world with no purpose but "to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37).

Christians are at their best and most relevant when they courageously uphold the truths taught by Jesus and through the Church. Misinformation and untruths are detrimental to going down the right path and present an even more significant obstacle to getting back on the right track after taking a wrong turn.

Finally, Jesus declared, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). To have life to the fullest, we must travel on the right path, enlightened by the truth.

It requires actions like the Good Samaritan who communicated her stance towards the Jewish victim of a robbery on the road when he drew near to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds, dressed his wounds, lifted him on his animal, and took him to the inn to take care of him.

Communication, therefore, is not just about making connections through words and sounds for "special or cosmetic effects" but through actions that relieve pains and gladden hearts. (Pope Francis, 2014).

In the digital age, the pastoral communication plan must imitate Jesus' three-fold depiction of himself as "the Way," "the Truth," and "the Life," which embodies the Christian message that is proclaimed in both words and deeds.

As the Body of Christ, the Church, and its members are mandated to speak on behalf of Christ and simultaneously imitate Christ in its actions. The communicative value of activities seen by Church leaders and members and words heard cannot be underestimated.

A comprehensive pastoral communication plan for the digital age reflects this communication paradigm and is concretized in actual actions on behalf of the people of God.

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