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## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND MEDIA: PROMOTING THE CHURCH'S PRESENCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA\*

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**Abstract.** Christ's mandate to go and make disciples of all nations requires new ways of evangelization that use the cyberspace, including social media as the most recent technology with an increasing number of users. Spreading the Gospel on social media is clearly different from the ways of the past when preachers had to travel hundreds or thousands of miles, sometimes taking months, to reach their audience. Just as there have been people promoting the importance of social media to the growth and benefit of the Church, however, there have also been those doomsaying about the dangers of social media and the damage that it can inflict on the society's stance towards religion as well as the negative influence that it can have on individuals: making people physically antisocial and destroying the traditions and basic institutions of the Church. Examples of such dangers include not attending Mass to hear the word of God since the Bible and sermons are readily available in the virtual sphere. But the fact is that digital media, including social media, are happening, and it will be to the Church's disadvantage if she chooses to be in denial and not use them for the greater good, thus risking being left behind in a constantly and rapidly modernizing world.

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**Streszczenie. Kościół katolicki a media. Promowanie obecności Kościoła w mediach społecznościowych.** Realizacja Chrystusowego posłania, by iść i nauczać wszystkie narody, wymaga stosowania nowych metod ewangelizacji, które wykorzystują cyberprzestrzeń – w tym media społecznościowe jako najnowszą technologię zyskującą sobie coraz liczniejszych użytkowników. Głoszenie ewangelii w mediach społecznościowych znacząco różni się od tego sprzed lat, gdy kaznodzieje musieli pokonywać setki lub tysiące kilometrów, często wędrując całymi miesiącami, aby dotrzeć do swoich odbiorców. Głosom podkreślającym znaczenie mediów społecznościowych dla dobra i rozwoju Kościoła towarzyszą też jednak inne głosy – roztaczające katastroficzne wizje dotyczące zagrożeń płynących z korzystania z tego rodzaju mediów oraz szkód, jakie mogą one wyrządzić w kategoriach stosunku społeczeństwa do religii, a także ich negatywnego oddziaływania na jedność i powodującego zachowania antyspołeczne oraz niszczenie tradycji i podstawowych instytucji Kościoła. Przykładem takiego zagrożenia może być rezygnacja z uczestnictwa w Mszy Świętej z uwagi na łatwy dostęp do Pisma Świętego i kazań w sferze wirtualnej. Nie ulega jednak wątpliwości, że rozwój mediów cyfrowych – w tym społecznościowych – jest faktem, a wypieranie tego faktu czy rezygnowanie z wykorzystania tego rodzaju mediów do wyższych celów jest dla Kościoła niekorzystne i może sprawić, że będzie on tracił na znaczeniu w nieustannie i dynamicznie rozwijającym się świecie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Kościół katolicki, media społecznościowe, religia, tradycja, Sobór Watykański, komunikacja, ewangelizacja, informacja, misja.

The mission of the Church is to lead souls to Christ, which is why she should desire for more people to be in a personal relationship with Jesus. This approach is more beneficial to Christianity than looking for a larger number of members. It is natural that any church, including the Catholic Church, should want more people to attend their services and actively participate in church activities and church groups. But ultimately, reaching out to the soul of the individual should be the focus. There are traditional methods that the Church employs to preach to her members, such as preaching from the pulpit and following a missionary vocation for evangelism. With the recent emergence of the new media, however, some adjustments have had to be made.

The Church's use of mass media should complement traditional means, such as the use of the pulpit. One should not be surprised, however, that people are increasingly abandoning the pulpit in the Church for

its virtual counterpart that social media and other digital media represent. In the world of an information revolution that constantly changes the way we communicate, it is entirely normal for organizations, including the Church, to interact with their audiences through digital media. However, due to the nature of digital media, which is liberal, even the Church with her traditionally hierarchy would have to align itself to and take a role that is unusual considering her traditional character.<sup>1</sup>

According to Andrew Fisher, there are three major frames – each having various features – which are used by the Catholic Church when it comes to media: seeing media as a tool that can be used, seeing media as a platform that can enable the Catholic Church to achieve her goals, and seeing media as a community of individuals. The author also believes that the Church has the basic understanding of media as having the ability to subject religion, and specifically Catholicism, as content for media presentation. Therefore, the Church should employ media while at the same time exploring the uses for media and developing a better understanding of it.<sup>2</sup>

As defined by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, a social network (medium) is a Web 2.0 site that is solely driven by user content. User accounts are designed in a manner that takes into account the privacy of users' structured and unstructured data and enables user-to-user interaction in the form of comments, likes and direct messages (DMs). Some of the social media giants that can be found on internet sites and as digital applications are: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.<sup>3</sup>

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications considers social media to have a remarkable capacity to solve the problem of distance and isolation, directly connecting people on virtual platforms as they form a virtual community of faith where like-minded individuals can encour-

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<sup>1</sup> Bex Lewis, "How social media is changing the church," *The Conversation*, May 5, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/how-social-media-is-changing-the-church-57405>.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Fisher, "Informing in Order to Form: The Roman Catholic Church and Media" (MA thesis, University of Missouri, 2010), <https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10355/8063/research.pdf?sequence=3>.

<sup>3</sup> "Social Media Guidelines," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed August 29, 2021, <https://www.usccb.org/committees/communications/social-media-guidelines>.

age and support one another. Therefore, the Church can perform an important service to Catholics and non-Catholics by selecting the right platform and transmitting useful data through that medium.<sup>4</sup>

In 2016, during the World Communications Day, Pope Francis acknowledged that social media could be a fully human means of communication and a genuine way to express human thoughts and feelings. In the same vein, Lydia O’Kane cites Pope Francis’s message that “social networks on the one hand, he says ‘help us to better connect, rediscover, and assist one another,’ but on the other hand, ‘lend themselves to the manipulation of personal data, aimed at obtaining political or economic advantages, without due respect for the person and his or her rights.’”<sup>5</sup>

Undoubtedly, social media have achieved widespread acceptance and use, rising in importance above other forms of communication used by people.<sup>6</sup> In addition, social media have taken over many of the social functions of religions such as the Catholic Church, providing guidance in terms of morality and spirituality as well as giving a sense of belonging to a global community.<sup>7</sup> Derick McKinney considers social media as an effective and impactful means of broadcasting Church events, since the primary objective of the Church is soul winning.<sup>8</sup>

## 1. THE CHURCH IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Stephen Bullivant considers the technological and indeed digital revolution that the world is currently experiencing as a golden opportunity for evangelistic endeavors. Unfortunately, however, digital media

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<sup>4</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, Vatican website, February 22, 2002, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20020228\\_church-internet\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html).

<sup>5</sup> Lydia O’Kane, “Pope highlights pros and cons of internet and social media use,” Vatican News, January 24, 2019, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-01/pope-highlights-pros-and-cons-of-internet-and-social-media-use.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Kunle Badmos, “Effects of social media on the church” (paper presented at the 2014 annual conference of theological friends and fellows organized by the Redeemed Christian bible college, Lagos, Nigeria).

<sup>7</sup> Stig Hjarvard, “The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change,” *Northern Lights* 6, no. 1 (2008): 9–26.

<sup>8</sup> McKinney, “Social Media in the Church.”

such as social media are yet to be fully utilized as means of communication in parishes that can help in evangelization like never before. Nevertheless, the author recognizes the fact that the Church has been at the forefront in taking advantage of technological and digital innovations and putting them to work in service of the Gospel of Christ: in 1896, the Vatican filmed Pope Leo XIII, and in 1931, it launched an international radio station; in 1957, Pius XII was the first pope to speak on a TV broadcast; in late 1995, the Church launched the Vatican website, earning recognition as one of the early adopters of the internet; and recently, one has to note the use of social media by Pope Francis, who wrote the following in his Instagram bio: “I want to walk with you along the way of God’s mercy and tenderness.”<sup>9</sup>

Andrew Fisher has quoted Enrico Baragli as saying that despite the importance of communication and media identified by the Catholic Church, with 755 documents produced between 1464 and 1973, there has still been little sociological investigation to comprehend the relations between the Church and media.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Jonathan Crowl notes that “overall, the Church doesn’t seem like the kind of organization that would flock to Twitter and Instagram as part of a global social media strategy. But that’s exactly what the Catholic Church has done in recent years, building a social presence that now has significant influence across multiple major platforms.”<sup>11</sup>

According to a report on USA Today, there is not a lot of available data to quantify and analyze the stance of the Catholic Church’s 1.2 billion members regarding the Church’s use of social media. At the same time, it is important to consider the thoughts of the faithful on controversial concerns such as this, since a report published by Paul K. McClure, a sociology researcher at Baylor University, claims that social media may be degenerating the bond between the faithful and religion. In a situation where people cannot be stopped from using social media, and the word “people”

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Bullivant, *Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Institute, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Fisher, “Informing in Order to Form.”

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Crowl, “How the Vatican’s Social Media Strategy Became a Surprise Success Story,” Skyword, June 12, 2018, <https://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/how-the-vaticans-social-media-strategy-became-a-surprise-success-story>.

in this context includes Catholics on social media, there is a phrase saying that “if Jonah won’t go to the fish, then the fish will come to Jonah,” which in this case translates to “if people don’t go to the church, then the church must go to the people.” In fact, the Vatican’s experts have discovered that people are on several social media platforms which now serve as digital houses of worship.<sup>12</sup>

The Church’s use of the media has not been all easy, and even with the media’s advantages, there have been mixed feelings and concerns. One of the worrisome aspects of the use of social media has been noted by Bex Lewis: “In contrast to the conventional top-down model of preaching Christianity via trained priests, social media is enabling many ordinary Christians to have one-to-one conversations about their faith with non-believers.”<sup>13</sup> John Coleman argues that if Catholics wish to engage in using social media, then it is sacrosanct they have a good understanding of the effect of social media in the society on religion.<sup>14</sup>

Father George Nwachukwu cautions that social media may be burdensome for individuals who are spreading the message of the Gospel, an example being when non-believers try to oppose or even silence their efforts. But because of Christ, believers should refuse to give up and should resist defeat in the virtual space whenever negative and displeasing reactions are lashed out by the opposition, including non-Catholics. Ultimately, faithful Catholics must take the Church’s message of love, faith and belief to the same social media in which attacks are imminent. He notes that instead of preaching from the rooftops, some want us to simply lurk in the shadows with the message of Christ. Still, he urges Christ’s social-media ambassadors to consider social media as their own rooftop, with the encouragement to resiliently stand firm and preach on.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, as docu-

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<sup>12</sup> Kim Hjelmggaard, “Preaching to Facebook faithful: Vatican looks past the pulpit to social media,” USA Today, accessed August 30, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2016/11/07/web-summit-lisbon-technology-vatican-religion-social-media/93412358>.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, “How social media is changing the church.”

<sup>14</sup> John Coleman, “The Sociology of the Media,” in *Mass Media*, ed. John Coleman and Miklós Tomka (London: SCM Press, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> George Nwachukwu, “The Church and Social Media: Application of Social Media in the Church’s Mission of Evangelization,” RECOWA/CERAO, October 11, 2019, <https://recowacerao.org/the-church-and-social-media-application-of-social-media-in-the-churchs-mission-of-evangelization>.

mented by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pope John Paul II gave a speech in 2001 in which he said that Catholics should not be afraid to reveal Christ in social communications platforms so that his Gospel may be heard across the world.<sup>16</sup>

Yet again on Church and the media, Jay Newman refers to the relationship between religion and the media as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. Notably, the call for the use of the media by religion in the Western world has not been a normative focus; rather, the relationship between them has often been competitive, which has always stirred criticism. And while critics of the media recognize that the media can be, and in some cases have been, of service in promoting religious beliefs, teaching and events, they nonetheless regard the media as the primary threat.<sup>17</sup>

While scholars call attention to the negative effects of the advancement of technology against the Church, Andrew Fisher also observes in his literature review that, interestingly, some scholars who have explored the relationship between the Church and the media portray a less dire situation, focusing on all forms of media as a cultural and social phenomenon that complements the mission of the Church rather than as an alien or secular institution designed to be at enmity with and fight against the Church.<sup>18</sup>

As Christians, we are enhancing people's lives by granting them easy access to Christian resources by taking the Gospel to social media. Replying to the question of why the Church should use social media, Jesse Wisnewski writes: "When Jesus issued the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), he said to go into all the world. In other words, He wants us to go where people are, no matter where they are. Right now, at this moment in history, more people are on social media than ever before. If we want to reach them, we need to show up on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and the rest."<sup>19</sup> Then, there is also the question of how the Church should use so-

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<sup>16</sup> *The Church and Internet*.

<sup>17</sup> Jay, *Religion vs. Television: Competitors in Cultural Context* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Fisher, "Informing in Order to Form."

<sup>19</sup> Jesse Wisnewski, "How to create a Church social media strategy," *Tithe.ly*, June 22, 2020, <https://get.tithe.ly/blog/how-to-create-your-churchs-social-media-strategy-in-minutes>.

cial media, in response to which Brady Shearer proposes that social media should be used as an intersection between faith and culture.<sup>20</sup>

According to Father Francis Rosario, “at recent times, the media has played a huge role in disclosing some of the hidden facts to make the Church more transparent and accountable. Social media in a way is responsible to push some of the recent agendas of the church towards transparency and standing by the side of the victims. Thus, the issues of reform in the Church, both financial transparency and on sexual abuse, social media has disclosed many hidden facts. No one is spared due to media attention and its investigative style of finding out those who perpetrated such violence.”<sup>21</sup>

Pope Francis’s message on social media states that while governments look for legal ways to regulate the web and preserve the initial vision of a liberal, open and protected network, we all have a moral responsibility in fostering its positive use. According to the Pope, statistics show that one out of four young people is involved in cyberbullying. To curb this phenomenon, the Vatican will set up an international observatory on cyberbullying.<sup>22</sup>

In its document, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications raises a reflection on the implications for Catholic religion of accommodating its traditions to cyberspace, noting the fact that there are no sacraments on the internet and that virtual reality is not and cannot be a substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.<sup>23</sup> While Father Nwachukwu believes in the potential of social media if well harnessed by the Church, he reiterates the basic knowledge that the best communication is interpersonal, not through social media or a website.<sup>24</sup> Shearer holds the same view, although he adds that offline and online ministries should work together as allies rather than adversaries, since both aim to affect and change lives.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Brady Shearer, “Social Media Policy for Churches: The Definitive Guide,” Nucleus, May 25, 2022, <https://www.nucleus.church/blog/social-media-policy-churches>.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Rosario, “The Role of the Social Media in the Catholic Church and Society” (paper presented at the National Consultation On Challenges and Crises in Indian Church, Kolkata, India, February 9–11, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> O’Kane, “Pope highlights pros and cons.”

<sup>23</sup> *The Church and Internet*.

<sup>24</sup> Nwachukwu, “The Church and Social Media.”

<sup>25</sup> Shearer, “Social Media Policy for Churches.”



Authors agree that there is a decline in Church attendance globally and that it is the right time to take the Church online. Bullivant acknowledges the gross decline of Church attendance in Europe and America,<sup>26</sup> and Father Nwachukwu concurs while making a further reference to the situation in Africa: “In Europe and America for instance, Church attendance is generally on a rapid decline and there is a need for an immediate solution. Even for the Churches in Africa that presume to gain large attendance, these Churches only host some Christians for about 1–3 hours per week.” Since that special time of Mass only lasts for one or two hours, social media can allow the faithful to extend that experience, making it available to everyone any day, any time.<sup>27</sup>

Father Rosario believes that the Church should use social media to proclaim the Gospel, thus spreading Catholic values, love and other good works of mercy to all and sundry. In his opinion, social media offers much more room for greater engagement of the congregation, like sharing photos of church activities and posting them online or continuing discussions of past events on any day. He suggests that church members can use social media to share insights from the Bible or personal experiences in ways that inspire, and they can also share their views on local, national and international politics from a Christian standpoint.<sup>28</sup>

For Father Nwachukwu, rich social media content designed to captivate the audience is a veritable tool for evangelization that can be used in addition to preaching. In his view, it is important to know that social media platforms can be used to invite people to Mass, adoration, confession and various other Catholic events. Furthermore, he believes, social media must be used to minister to and feed communities by offering them content which will capture their attention and, eventually, help them encounter Jesus. This could be an inspiring or comforting quote from the Scripture, a live stream of a Mass or another event, or even a catechetical video in which the richness of the Catholic tradition is shared. Whatever the case, it is necessary to offer something meaningful to the audience, whether targeted or not. Father Nwachukwu views social media merely as an instrument. As he notes, “these tools allow the Church to engage in con-

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<sup>26</sup> Bullivant, *Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus*.

<sup>27</sup> Nwachukwu, “The Church and Social Media.”

<sup>28</sup> Rosario, “The Role of the Social Media.”

versations, share interests, and generate their own content.”<sup>29</sup> In contrast to this view of social media as a means to an end, Shearer believes that the reason why most churches struggle with social media is that a majority of the posts are promotional. Therefore, he reemphasizes that social media should be seen as a ministry rather than a vehicle to promote ministry.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. AN ANALYSIS OF OFFICIAL VATICAN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS FROM THE DICASTERY FOR COMMUNICATION

*Inter Mirifica*, a document solemnly promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1963, proposed that as part of the pastoral activities of the Church, a good press should be promoted: in order to instill a fully Christian spirit into readers, a truly Catholic press should be set up and fostered. Such press should be directed by ecclesiastical authorities or by Catholic laymen, with the clear purpose of forming, supporting and promoting public relations in adherence with natural law and Catholic teaching. Such press should disseminate and properly explain the events and traditions of the Church.<sup>31</sup> In this article, we would like to focus on the main and most popular social media sites: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. In addition, we will analyze the official accounts that the Vatican Dicastery for Communications presents on these social media sites.

### 2.1. FACEBOOK

As reported by Reach Right Studios, Facebook had 1.45 billion daily users worldwide as of March 2018. It is clear that many of the users are Catholics, which makes it an object of interest. Facebook is regarded as a very important social media platform for the Church due to its large number of users and, therefore, high popularity across the world. Reach Right

<sup>29</sup> Nwachukwu, “The Church and Social Media.”

<sup>30</sup> Shearer, “Social Media Policy for Churches.”

<sup>31</sup> Paul VI, *Inter Mirifica*, decree on the media of social communications, Vatican website, December 4, 1963, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19631204\\_inter-mirifica\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html).

wrote that “creating pages and groups on Facebook brings people of common interest together,” and suggested that churches should use Facebook if they intend to use only one network. Also, Father Nwachukwu pointed out that according to [internetworldstats.com](http://internetworldstats.com), more than 270 million people in North America use the internet. Another website, [b2bsocialmediaguide.com](http://b2bsocialmediaguide.com), claims that 73% of internet users in the United States access Facebook, which Father Nwachukwu referred to as the chief social media giant.

*Vatican News* is an official account of the Dicastery for Communication that shares information on the activities of Pope Francis and the Vatican as well as on the life of the Church in the world, giving messages of hope according to the Church's teachings. The site had about 4,479,907 followers as of August 30, 2021. The Holy Father's General Audience of August 25, 2021 had 22,000 likes, 17,000 comments and 4,700 shares and counting as of five days later. At least two posts are posted on the site every day.

*L'Osservatore Romano* is another official account for the daily newspaper first published on July 1, 1861. It had about 32,491 followers as of August 30, 2021. A post of May 25, 2021 had 92 likes, 26 comments, 23 shares and 2,600 views (recorded on August 30, 2021). At least three posts are made every day; a single post may be made on very rare occasions.

*Libreria Editrice Vaticana* is an unofficial Vatican account on Facebook with 1,161 followers as of August 30, 2021. Run by the publishing house, its July 8, 2021 post had 20 likes and 16 shares (recorded on August 30, 2021). It typically posts once per day, sometimes skipping a day or more before another post.

## 2.2. TWITTER

According to Reach Right Studios, there were 330 million active users every month on the platform as of 2018. The platform is considered great for making flash or inspirational posts, sharing trending posts, and more. The Church can use the platform to create different accounts for different purposes.

**Pope Francis:** With the official name @Pontifex, the account is the official Twitter page of His Holiness Pope Francis, although it was launched by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI a month before his resignation. The account was created on the platform in July 2012 and had around 18,814,631 followers as of August 29, 2021. The accounts generates one to two posts a day, with 8,000 to 30,000 likes, 200 to 700 comments (sometimes more than 1,000) and 1,000 to 8,000 shares.

**Vatican News** is an account with the same purpose as that on Facebook. The account was created on the platform in March 2010 and grew over time to 344,595 followers as of August 29, 2021, with few posts per day, 80 to 200 likes, 20 to 70 shares and not a lot of comments.

**L'Osservatore Romano** is also an account with same purpose as that on Facebook, and with the official name @oss\_romano. The account was created in December 2011 and had around 79,986 followers on August 29, 2021. It generates several posts per day, with likes rarely exceeding 20, few shares and few or no comments per post.

**Libreria Editrice Vaticana** is an account with the same purpose as that on Facebook; it is also not an official account. The name of the Twitter account is @LVaticana. It was created in November 2020 and had around 1,412 followers as of August 29, 2021. There are several posts per day, with few likes and comments.

**Radio Vaticana** is an official account on the platform with the official name @Rvaticanaitalia. The account was created in March 2010. As of August 29, 2021, the number of followers was about 47,010. It generates a few posts a day, with up to 40 likes, a few comments (although sometimes more than 100) and occasionally more than 10 shares.

### 2.3. INSTAGRAM

Reach Right Studios considers Instagram to be an ideal social network for young people under 24, with a high demand for user visibility as

it is a very competitive ground to flaunt a flamboyant lifestyle. The Church can consider the platform as a way of showcasing her rich traditions, doctrines and events in feed posts, story highlights, IGTV videos or reels.

*Franciscus* is the official account of Pope Francis on the platform, with 8.2 million followers and 1,113 posts as of August 30, 2021. A post of April 2, 2021 had 611,459 likes, 4,110 comments and counting as of August 30, 2021; another video post of March 28, 2021 had 431,864 views, which in some cases can be up to 900,000 views. Typically, only one post is made per day and one to four days may be skipped before another post.

*Vaticannews* is the official account of Vatican News with the same purpose as described earlier. As of August 30, 2021, it had about 615,000 followers, 878 feed posts and ten stories. A post of March 28, 2021 recorded 52,081 likes, and 521 comments; another video post of April 23, 2021 recorded 85,093 views, and some videos can have about 150,000 views. Feeds are posted at irregular intervals.

## CONCLUSION

In the document titled *The Church and Internet*, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications makes a reference to the Second Vatican Council and observes that “although we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress clearly from the increase of the kingdom of Christ, nevertheless ‘such progress is of vital concern to the kingdom of God, insofar as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society.’” Thus, the Pontifical Council concurs with *Inter Mirifica*, which considered the media of social communication to “contribute greatly to the enlargement and enrichment of men’s minds and to the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God.”<sup>32</sup> As Pope Paul VI said, “the Church would feel guilty before the Lord” should she fail to use the media for evangelization.<sup>33</sup> According to Pope Francis, throughout history, in order to com-

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<sup>32</sup> *The Church and Internet*.

<sup>33</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, apostolic exhortation, Vatican website, December 8, 1975, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html).

municate with us and to communicate Himself to us, God has conformed Himself to our language and established a real dialogue with humanity.

Andrew Fisher also gave the frames by which the Catholic Church can engage media. He established that media cannot on its own compete against the Church, and it is instead the purposes for which it is used that create the competition. He further analyzed that according to the view of sacramental liberalism, media is a development which the Catholic Church should embrace, since it is a gift from God and should be seen and utilized as such.<sup>34</sup>

It is important that the Church develops guidelines for the use of social media by Church personnel, requiring them to adjust their own thinking and practices. In order to curtail the recognized danger that social media poses and the disadvantages that it potentially wields, *Inter Mirifica* teaches that for the right to information to be properly exercised, it is crucial that the information should always be true and complete within the confines of justice and charity. In addition, the manner in which the information is communicated should be proper and decent. In other words, “in both the search for news and in reporting it, there must be full respect for the laws of morality and for the legitimate rights and dignity of the individual.”<sup>35</sup>

*Inter Mirifica* notes that there is a need to educate priests on the use of social media and that laymen should also be provided with technical, doctrinal and moral training. Hence, the number of school faculties and Church institutes should be increased. Furthermore, to provide for the effective application of this recommendation, priests and church members who are equipped with the right skills in utilizing these media for the purposes of the apostolate should be appointed as appropriate.<sup>36</sup>

Among his proposals concerning creative and inventive ways of running parishes, Stephen Bullivant highlights the use of the internet and digital technology. Going beyond only having a parish website where Mass can be uploaded and where the faithful can attend Mass online or providing a web link to download the parish bulletin, he also suggests that parishes should include social media accounts in a broader communica-

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<sup>34</sup> Fisher, “Informing in Order to Form.”

<sup>35</sup> Paul VI, *Inter Mirifica*.

<sup>36</sup> Paul VI, *Inter Mirifica*.

tion plan to reach those who cannot be there in person, such as during the time of the Coronavirus.<sup>37</sup>

How can we grow our church? As Tom Pounder notes, this is a question that every church would ask and one which those working as church staff or sitting on a parish council, whether part-time or full-time, have most likely already been asked. While some may propose that sharing information about events or conferences may grow the church, there is a way that could really be of help without even costing much. Yet, it is still underutilized and not fully appreciated as an effective tool: social media.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Bullivant, *Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus*.

<sup>38</sup> Tom Pounder, "How You Can Use Social Media To Help Grow Your Church," Church Communications, November 10, 2017, <https://churchcommunications.com/can-use-social-media-help-grow-church>.

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