

Pope Urges Good Stewardship of the Internet

Christian stewards are called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ and to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. Pope Benedict XVI recently reminded us that the steward's witness extends to the internet as well. In a January message to mark the Vatican's 45th World Day of Social Communications, Pope Benedict gave his blessing to social networking, and urged Catholic internet users to adopt a respectful, Christian "netiquette" when interacting with others online. Etiquette is concerned with rules governing socially acceptable behavior. "Netiquette" is a new term dealing with the importance of appropriate behavior and conduct in the social setting of cyberspace. The pope acknowledged that new technologies were creating unprecedented opportunities for establishing relationships, building fellowship and spreading the Gospel. He wrote: "The proclamation of the Gospel requires a communication which is at once respectful and sensitive."

When communicating via the internet, one danger is to express oneself in word, manner or tone that would never be considered when communicating "face-to-face." Thus, expressing and applying Christian love of others through the keyboard and monitor toward the person on the other end of cyberspace requires more thoughtfulness and consideration. The pontiff maintained that there was "a Christian way of being present in the digital world: this takes the form of a communication which is honest and open, responsible and respectful of others."

The pope observed that with all the internet's positive aspects, which included dialogue, solidarity and the creation of positive relations, there is a downside: "the 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 also expressed concern about the dangers of too much social networking such as "enclosing oneself in a sort of parallel existence, or excessive exposure to the virtual world." He wrote: "In the search for sharing, for 'friends,' there is the challenge to be authentic and faithful and not give in to the illusion of constructing an artificial public profile for oneself." He warned against replacing real friendships with virtual ones as well.

The Holy Father's message is, in part, a call for Christians to exercise good stewardship of others when communicating online, and to remain mindful of one of the fundamentals of the Gospel message when using the internet: to love one's neighbor.

The internet can be a wonderful tool for Christian stewards to give witness to their faith, and knowing proper internet etiquette ("netiquette") is important for exercising good Christian stewardship. Listed below are just a few netiquette principles to keep in mind when communicating over the internet.

Be kind to people. Send messages that reveal a care and concern for others. Avoid posting comments that reveal impatience or lack restraint. Don't use expressions that are vulgar, intemperate or aggressive in tone.

Be truthful. When sending e-mails or using social networks, be sure what you are relating is accurate and do not leave false impressions. Avoid creating or promoting false online profiles or images of yourself.

Be helpful to others. Believe it or not, newcomers to online usage appear every day. If you encounter new internet users, help them. Be patient and help newcomers understand appropriate internet use and "netiquette".

Act with compassion and empathy. It is hard to share feelings on the internet. In person, people can see the genuine concern and love on our faces when sensitive issues arise. On the internet, messages can more easily be misinterpreted or we can respond in a way that appears curt or lacking in sympathy. Practice compassion online.

Avoid gossip. Posting any form of gossip designed to slander, show disrespect or put down others behind their back (back-stabbing) should be avoided. We should also not share personal information about anyone without that person's permission.

Avoid character assassinations. Addressing others using derogatory terms such as "liars" or "morons" is certainly inappropriate for public forums, especially for a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Avoid "flaming" or matching "flame" for "flame." Flaming is an internet term meaning an exchange of inflammatory remarks with another in anger. Pause before reacting to someone's post in anger, and pray before you decide on the appropriate response, or whether it might even be better not to respond in certain circumstances, rather than reacting in anger and posting words in an inflammatory manner. St. Paul wrote that if we bite and devour one another, we'll only be consumed by one another. (Gal 5:15).

DON'T SEND MESSAGES USING ALL CAPITAL LETTERS.

Using ALL CAPS is generally perceived as "shouting" at others. It is considered as rude as it is inflammatory and should be avoided.

Be forgiving of other peoples' mistakes. Mistakes, especially unintentional, do happen. Avoid scoffing or making fun of others' mistakes in grammar. Where a message may be confusing or could be construed in a negative way, give the sender the benefit of the doubt. Ask for clarification where necessary.

Look for opportunities to encourage others. Think of two or three people to whom you can send a brief word of encouragement. Sometimes it is just, "Hi, I was just thinking about you and prayed that God bless you in a special way today." We can enjoy our internet communications and serve Jesus Christ at the same time. A principle of Christian stewardship is fundamental to internet communications: [Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you.](#)

Practical Stewardship: Jesus is our Model

Adapted from an article by Rick Jeric,

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Did you take an accounting of your stewardship of time, talent, and treasure at the beginning of this New Year? I hope this accounting, which is both practical and spiritual, is something which we will do periodically. This personal effort is even more important than regular visits to the doctor or dentist. Our physical health is a top priority. Our spiritual health determines eternal life. So, what is more important? Our journey to heaven and eternal life with God is guided by our good and faithful stewardship.

How we spend our time, how we use our talent, and where we spend our treasure are all efforts by which we maintain the life of a Christian. Jesus is our model.

As Christian stewards, it goes without saying that we have a responsibility to follow the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

The Gospels are filled with examples of our Lord's prayer life, his relationship with family and friends, his teachings and his ministry. Jesus was obedient to his Father in heaven. But he also obeyed and respected his earthly parents. Jesus bowed his head and was baptized by John the Baptist. He preached the Sermon on the Mount, he served those in need. He confronted the rich and powerful. He cured, consoled, healed, and forgave. As Christian stewards we must also be people of prayer; and like Jesus, we must be willing to bow our heads, serve, cure, heal, forgive and proclaim the Gospel in creative ways. We too must be people of action. Let our practical challenge in the month of February be to bravely take steps to model the life and ministry of Jesus, and act in a way pleasing to the Father. No rationalizing. No exceptions. No age Limits. We must live an authentic Christian life each and every day. Pray, act, live, and love. Do all to the fullest, as Jesus did