

# NEW WAYS OF BEING CHURCH IN A DIGITAL MILIEU

A Pastoral Letter on  
Communications from the  
Bishops of the Antilles  
Episcopal Conference

August 6, 2017



# **A Pastoral Letter:**

## **New Ways of Being Church in a Digital Milieu**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Good News to the poor is the mission and goal of all pastoral communications (see Luke 4:18). Through signs, gestures, words, books, moving images, audio, and social communications, the Church has sought to proclaim her message so that all people will hear it in their own native language (see Acts 2:11). To be faithful to this mission of evangelizing communications to the people of the Caribbean today, we will need a new missionary spirit, one that is built upon participation, dialogue, and collaboration and one that speaks to the heart, soul, and religious imagination of our Antillean people. We need a new way of being Church!

2. It is the Lord who sends: Go proclaim—**communicate**—the Good News “and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...” (Matthew 28:19). Jesus Christ himself communicates, in his mission, on all levels of human interaction. He preaches and teaches to the masses using stories, parables, and statements and shares in smaller groups with his apostles and disciples. He meets individuals like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and others in deep and very personal sharing. Evangelizing communication builds on this example of Jesus Christ, always trying to meet people where they are—at their level of knowledge, feeling, and understanding—to bring them from their own life experience closer to the Father and eternal life.

3. The parable of the Good Samaritan emphasizes the relationship possibilities presented by a heart imbued with charity, mercy, and compassion. If anything, the digital age, with its new opportunities and limitations, has helped us to be able to reflect on this relationship in new ways. The pastoral challenge to the digital era is to ensure that technology serves human interaction, multiplies the opportunities for social relationships, and thus highlights the human need and the Gospel value of being a neighbour.

4. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read: ‘You will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ (1:8). The whole book of the Acts of the Apostles is a report on the continuation of the sending and ongoing communicating of God’s Holy Spirit in the beginning of the Church.

5. Thus, evangelizing communication comprises all levels and means of communicating from interpersonal through group communication to the mass media and the modern means of communicating, through Internet, social media, and digital networks. It is the Church’s ministry and mission to communicate the Good News of salvation and God’s love to all of humanity. The Church’s call to evangelize and her prophetic mission provide the Church with the challenge and opportunity to seek to influence the values, judgments, and actions of Caribbean society. In this

way, the Church invites people to a public dialogue of faith and strives to create an atmosphere conducive to Christian living for all members of the Christian churches in the Caribbean.

6. For the Church, communication is not primarily about technology or efficiency. It is a spiritual responsibility. It is about persons communicating what is most precious, the call to be reconciled to God. ‘We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God’ (2 Corinthians 5:20). Communication for the Church is ultimately about building communion with God and unity among peoples. ‘We are to do this through words of hope and deeds of love, that is, through our very way of life. Thus communication must lie at the heart of the Church community.’<sup>1</sup> As the Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication (*Communio et Progressio*) stated so eloquently: ‘Communication 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.’<sup>2</sup>

7. Seeing the unimaginable rapid developments in communication technology that have taken place in the twenty-five years since the publication of Dawn of a New Era: Pastoral Instruction on Social Communications (*Aetatis Novae*), we the bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC) wish to reflect upon the gift and challenge that contemporary communication has brought to our region and our people. Situating ourselves within this rich tradition of ecclesial reflection upon the rapid development of communication and its integral connection to mission, we celebrate the gift that the development of communication has been to people who live today. Yet we cannot help but notice the serious challenges that the rapid changes in technological development are posing to our Caribbean people and, indeed, to people all over the world. ‘Inasmuch as digital exclusion is obvious, parishes, communities, Catholic cultural centres and educational institutions could foster the creation of network points and digital rooms to promote inclusion, developing new initiatives, and utilizing those already existing by viewing them positively.’<sup>3</sup>

8. It is our hope, in this pastoral letter, to offer a pastoral reflection on the gift and challenge of communications and the rapid development in technology that we are experiencing. Furthermore, we will propose the design of an integral pastoral communications plan for our AEC region to assist our dioceses to more effectively use the gifts of this new technological evolution, ensuring it will always bring Good News to the poor, the marginalized, and those most in need. Finally, we will offer concrete steps to ensure all of our dioceses harness the new opportunities that these emerging and new digital developments have brought us.

9. At the heart of this reflection is the pivotal shift that digital technological developments have brought to the processes through which groups and society communicate and interrelate, that is, the increased need for collaboration and the use of resources necessary to ensure the Church can

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1. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Dawn of a New Era: Pastoral Instruction on Social Communications (*Aetatis Novae*), 6.

2. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Unity and Advancement: Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication (*Communio et Progressio*), 11; John 6:53.

3. V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, ‘The Aparecida Document’, 490.

realize its pastoral mission more efficiently, effectively, and intelligently, taking into consideration quality stewardship of our limited resources. In our fragmented Caribbean societies, each of us—laity, religious, priest, and bishop—labour in isolation while facing the monumental task of deepening our faith and transmitting it to the next generation. Within dioceses, departments work in an isolated way from each other, often duplicating resources but always under using the rich gifts and talents available in their fellow stewards for the Kingdom.

10. Communication is essentially giving our self in love and the building of communion for the sake of the Church's mission in our Caribbean region. Therefore, we must face the deficiencies of our current model of being Church with our isolationist tendencies and embrace the opportunities that rapidly evolving digital technology is offering. Before committing to the use of digital resources, we need a conversion towards a new spirit, a new approach, a new way of being Church in the digital milieu. We also need to recognize that these rapid changes in technology are also altering the ways that people—our parishioners, and especially the youth—are gathering and processing information, expressing themselves, and creating relationships. This change provides us with a challenge as Church: how to place this technology at the service of evangelization.

11. Our region faces massive challenges. There is the spectre of growing poverty with the resultant pockets of underdevelopment; the rising threats posed by climate change, making our region the second most vulnerable in the world; the rising national debt of many of our nations; the high level of domestic violence and abuse that our people live with on a daily basis; the rising addiction to pornography; and the most fundamental challenge of passing the faith to the next generation. Confronted with these challenges, we cannot but realize the magnitude of the tasks facing the Church and her mission in our region. 'The Internet is no small factor in our conversation here. It is a simple instrument of communication, which one can choose to use, but it has evolved into a cultural "environment" that determines a style of thought, creating new territories and new types of education contributing also to the definition of a new way to stimulate the intelligence and to tighten relationships. It is a way to live in and organize our world. It is not a separate environment, but it is becoming ever more integrated into our everyday lives.'<sup>4</sup>

12. These challenges must be met by a firm resolve from all of us to ensure the Church continues to be a significant force shaping this civilization. This will only happen if we are willing to act in collaboration, work tirelessly, and use all of our gifts and talents for the sake of the Kingdom. What we are proposing here is nothing less than a personal, ecclesial, and cultural conversion, embracing anew the spirit of the Gospel while using the new evolving digital communication resources available in our time.

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4. Antonio Spadaro and Maria Way Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet. Kindle Edition. Sept 19, 2014. p. 139

## RAPID DEVELOPMENTS

13. Twenty-five years ago, the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Communications issued a pastoral instruction, *A Dawn of a New Era (Aetatis Novae)*. The document celebrated the rapid developments in communications technology since the publication of *Communio et Progressio* (1972) following the Second Vatican Council. The opening of this landmark document states:

At the dawn of a new era, a vast expansion of human communications is profoundly influencing culture everywhere. Revolutionary technological changes are only part of what is happening. Nowhere today are people untouched by the impact of media upon religious and moral attitudes, political and social systems, and education.

It is impossible to ignore, for instance, that geographical and political boundaries were both of very little avail in view of the role played by communications during the ‘radical transformations’ of 1989 and 1990, on whose historical significance the Pope reflects in *Centesimus Annus*.

It becomes equally evident that ‘*the first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a “global village”*. The means of social communications have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large’.<sup>5</sup>

14. The text makes three critical points that are vital for our understanding of the relationship between communications technology and the prophetic imagination of a Caribbean Church. **First**, the development was rapid and has influenced moral attitudes, political and social systems, and education; **second**, the communications transformation was connected to political transformations; and, **third**, the media are now the chief means of education, guidance, and inspiration for individuals, families, and societies at large.

15. The transformation that *Aetatis Novae* spoke of in the preceding twenty-five years now seems insignificant by comparison to the transformation in the twenty-five years since. In 1992, Trinidad and Tobago had just contracted its second TV station and was on the brink of Cable TV and the explosion of media outlets. Internet was not in the Caribbean in any significant way, only emerging for popular use around 1995. Neither were cell phones in popular use. For the most part, the communications industry still had a monopoly in which the emphasis was on connections, not content, and the general population were consumers of production by local big state and privately owned media houses.

16. The emergence of the Internet and opening up of a diversity of communication technologies have changed everything. In Chapter Two of his groundbreaking book *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, Thomas L. Friedman addresses the ten forces that flattened

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<sup>5</sup>. AN 1.

the world: (1) the collapse of the Berlin Wall (1989); (2) Netscape making the Web accessible to everyone (1995); (3) work flow software, allowing machines to speak to machines without humans; (4) uploading—YouTube, Facebook, blogs, and Wikipedia with the dawn of Web 2.0; (5) outsourcing<sup>6</sup>; (6) offshoring—many Caribbean countries have offshore industries; (7) supply-chaining, e.g., Wal-Mart; (8) insourcing, e.g., UPS; (9) informing, e.g., Google now receives 100 billion questions per month; and, (10) the ‘Steroids’<sup>7</sup>—personal digital devices. Over three billion people use the Internet now; by 2020, 75 billion devices will be connected to the Internet. Twenty-four hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute.

17. The fact that the Internet, in all of its manifold forms and applications, has permeated every aspect of modern human society means this form of communication must be reflected upon not only sociologically, but also spiritually and theologically. Pope Benedict XVI wrote: ‘The digital environment is not a parallel or purely virtual world, but is part of the daily experience of many people, especially the young.’<sup>8</sup> Most of these transformations have directly affected the lives of Caribbean people whether we realize it or not. Our access to an enormous amount of knowledge via Internet portals and services has all but transformed the peoples of the Caribbean and our culture. We are no longer simply consumers of media. With a simple digital device, each person is potentially a producer of media.

18. Caribbean people, particularly our youth, upload and have a presence on any number of digital media platforms. As digital natives, our youth navigate the digital milieu with ease and creative precision and, of course, with tremendous frequency. Therefore, as Church, we desire to call forth the artistic giftedness of women and men within our faith communities to assist us in our mission in the digital milieu. In his Letter to Artists, Pope John Paul II wrote:

In order to communicate the message entrusted to her by Christ, the Church needs art.... Art has a unique capacity to take one or other facet of the message and translate it into colors, shapes and sounds which nourish the intuition of those who look or listen.<sup>9</sup>

19. Artists have the ability to enkindle the religious imagination with a freshness that awakens minds and hearts to experience the Good News with a new richness. We encourage collaboration between our Caribbean theologians, artists, and writers and those with digital technical skills for exploring the endless possibilities that are available to us. ‘The Church has always appealed to their [artists’] creative powers in interpreting the Gospel message and discerning its precise

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<sup>6</sup>. Outsourcing is a practice in which an individual or company performs tasks, provides services, or manufactures products for another company—functions that could have been or is usually done in-house. Outsourcing is typically used by companies to save costs.

<sup>7</sup>. These devices include: cell phones, iPods, computers, laptops, etc. They are called *steroids* because they help a nation to become powerful.

<sup>8</sup>. Pope Benedict XVI, World Communications Day Message, 2013.

<sup>9</sup>. Pope John Paul II, Letter to Artists, 1999, 12.

application in the life of the Christian community. This partnership has been a source of mutual spiritual enrichment.’<sup>10</sup>

20. In *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist’s Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*, Thomas Friedman updates his theory. Friedman argues convincingly that there are three forces that are accelerating: (1) Moore’s Law and the rapid acceleration in technological development, (2) the market and rapid globalization, and (3) Mother Nature with climate change and biodiversity. The technological shift in 2007 with the emergence of the iPhone has accelerated this transformation, putting technological power in the hands of many more people. In the Caribbean, many people now have mobile technology as a primary way of interacting with their friends, society, the global community, and the economy. Friedman argues that the shaping forces are affecting five areas: the workplace, politics, geopolitics, ethics, and community. An ecclesial perspective would include the family, the Church, and schools.

21. The rapid transformations we are living through today are unlike anything humanity has ever seen. The consequences are dramatic. The Caribbean is being shaped by these forces and they are transforming who we are becoming—as a people and a region. This has dramatic consequences for how we are Church in a digital milieu. It affects the thinking of the faithful who now come armed with perceptions or expectations already shaped by social media communities.

22. ‘It is not enough to be passersby on the digital highways, simply “connected”; connections need to grow into true encounters.’<sup>11</sup> It calls us to consider new ways of being Church in a digital age.

23. In *The Ever-Present Origin*<sup>12</sup>, Jean Gebser connects new technology to a change in human consciousness, change in the description of our self and change in political organization. He indicates that change in technology today is not just a change in the way we get out information or in the way we communicate with each other. It is more profoundly a change in society and in the way we understand the world and the description we give to ourselves—our identity. The invention of the printing press is now synonymous with mental consciousness—a scientific world view—the birth of industrialization and the emergence of the Nation State. The new technology, the printing press, had a direct impact on the Protestant Reformation. It was not only that the Bible had become more widely available because of the printing press. It was also that a new form of consciousness emerged—mental consciousness<sup>13</sup>. Mental consciousness led to the rise of new sciences. The Enlightenment offered an entirely new way of perceiving the world. It also led to the rise of the nation-state and national religion. With the printing press and the

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<sup>10</sup>. *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>11</sup>. Pope Francis, World Communications Day Message, 2014.

<sup>12</sup>. Jean Gebser, *The Ever Present Origin*, Ohio University Press, 1983.

<sup>13</sup>. Consciousness is the state or quality of awareness, or, of being aware of an external object or something within oneself.

Enlightenment, religion and national identity merged hand in hand. Hence the religion of the Caribbean Island is directly connected to the dominant European nation that colonised.

24. As new communication technologies emerged, new forms of consciousness, descriptions of our self and forms of political organization also emerged; cinema, radio, and television emerged with the rise and spread of Pentecostalism and evangelical Christianity. Religion was no longer identified by nation-state but by how people began to *think alike* within the nation-state. The new communication technologies brought with them many dramatic changes to our world including a new form of human consciousness—integral. With the emergence of Internet, even more dramatic changes emerged. Web 1.0 was a static place in which people were still consumers of media. Then came Web 2.0 in which YouTube and Facebook facilitated active participation, Web 3.0 in which the intuitive web of algorithms is becoming more sensitive to people’s context, and the emerging Web 4.0 in which the sensitivity will be both online and offline. This rapid transformation of the Web is affecting the religious landscape of the Caribbean person. A greater percentage of our population is now claiming to be spiritual with no official religious affiliation. This rising religious trend is connected to the emergence of the new technologies. This is one of the primary reasons we, the bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC), are writing this pastoral letter. We encourage you to collaborate in reflecting on how rapid digital communications transformations are affecting our way of life, how we relate to each other, and how we live our faith within our Caribbean culture.

25. How we communicate faith to the current and next generation is now one of the single greatest challenges the Church in the Caribbean faces. We are no longer in the information age of Web 1.0. We are living in what is called the ‘age of attention economy web 3.0’.<sup>14</sup> This means the designing of algorithms whose purpose is to push at the individual only things of their keen interest. During every online search we do, the algorithms learn our interest and narrow the results to our taste. If our newsfeed was full of the boring and drab day-to-day stuff, we would stop looking at it. So, for example, Facebook shows us the most extreme occurrences in our social network for the simple reason that the extreme events draw the most attention. There are multiple messages competing at all times for the attention of our people. The multiplication of communications channels has exploded the possibilities of reaching people. It has also made it much harder to get and hold our Caribbean people’s attention, especially if they have not previously shown interest in things religious online.

26. This emerging culture, reckoning with the acceleration of technological innovation, globalization, and climate change, offers us some clues to this new emerging value structure. This culture is based on Web 2.0 and 3.0. This is a highly participatory e-culture. This is a collaborative culture. But it is a culture in which messages are shaped by the individual’s e-profile. We have far more access to information but sometimes less access to truth. Facts and truth are being threatened on the Internet today, especially in social media platforms like Facebook. Some people are misled to instantly believe what they read, often without verifying, making them vulnerable to ‘fake news’ and other deliberate manipulations by the so-called

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<sup>14</sup>. For an exploration of the attention economy see: Mark Manson, 2014, In the Future Our Attention Will Be Sold. <https://markmanson.net/attention>



‘trolls’ and ‘bots’. We need to educate our people to access truth from this emerging culture in which ‘likes’ are more important than truth.

27. Those who navigate the digital milieu value authenticity highly. Traditional understanding of authority is called into question. This generation wants to keep it real. They want the real deal. They want our words and teaching to match up with our witness and lifestyles. As Pope Paul VI has said: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”<sup>15</sup>. We need to do what the Gospel has always asked: Live the faith! As Church, we need to find ways to form intentional disciples who commit, as imperfect as we all are to living the faith handed on to us, treating each other as neighbours and living the commandment of love. As Pope Francis encourages us: ‘Communication is really about realizing that we are all human beings, children of God. I like seeing this power of communication as “neighbourliness.”’<sup>16</sup>

28. ‘The digital world’, states Pope Francis ‘can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people. The impartiality of media is merely an appearance; only those who go out of themselves in their communication can become a true point of reference for others. Personal engagement is the basis of the trustworthiness of a communicator. Christian witness, thanks to the internet, can thereby reach the peripheries of human existence.’<sup>17</sup>

29. In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II focused extensively on the spiritual foundations for engaging in pastoral planning that is essential for a deeper and responsible communication in the new millennium. ‘It is important however’, John Paul II wrote: ‘that what we propose, with the help of God, should be profoundly rooted in contemplation and prayer. Ours is a time of continual movement which often leads to restlessness, with the risk of “doing for the sake of doing”. We must resist the temptation by trying “to be” before trying “to do”. In this regard we should recall how Jesus reproved Martha: “You are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful” (Luke 10:41–42).’<sup>18</sup>

30. The Acts of the Apostles (4:23–40) indicates the way and shows the concrete steps for a Spirit-based communication. After Peter and John testified before the Sanhedrin and were released, the whole community thanked and prayed to God. ‘As they prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness’ (31). From this, we can deduce the three steps of which any pastoral and evangelizing pastoral communications plan has to be made: (1) prayer, (2) being filled with the Holy Spirit, and (3) speaking the Word of God boldly. Pastoral and evangelizing communication starts with prayer because it is God’s communication. It further must be filled

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<sup>15</sup>Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #41, 1975

<sup>16</sup>. Pope Francis, World Communications Day Message, 2014.

<sup>17</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>. Pope John Paul II, At the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*), 15.

with his Spirit, which brings us the courage to proclaim like the timid apostles on Pentecost, whom the Spirit changed into courageous presenters of his word.<sup>19</sup>

31. In the next section of our pastoral letter, we explore the values of the emerging digital culture for new ways of being Church in the Caribbean.

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<sup>19</sup>. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, *Communicating in Ministry and Mission*, Third Edition. SVD Publications, Philippines, 2008, p. 45.

## A NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH IN THE CARIBBEAN

32. From the time of the Second Vatican Council, we in the Caribbean have sought a Church that was inclusive, a Church in which the laity participate meaningfully, a Church that speaks to the soul and fires the religious imagination of the Caribbean person.

33. We have made many strides in this direction through Schools of Liturgy, Bible, Communications (CSCC)<sup>20</sup>, Evangelization and Parish Renewal Programs. This model of Church ushered in our taking responsibility for our Church, with the first Caribbean bishops and priests. It has served us well in nurturing the Church to our present time. However, the rapid digital communications transformations we are experiencing today require of us a deeper reflection on a model of Church in the 21st century. How do these transformations affect being Church today? What initiatives need we embrace to reflect and witness Gospel values within an expanding digital milieu within our Caribbean region? The Church needs to re-imagine how to communicate faith and to be authentic in our communications. We need to live what we proclaim, conscious of the influence that the digital milieu is weaving into the tapestry of emerging generations.<sup>21</sup>

34. In short, the Church needs to establish a presence in the digital world so that it understands this new cultural frontier—both to learn the culture and to propose the Good News to the digital natives. Failure in this mission may well threaten the life of the Church in our region. As Pope Benedict advised in his address to participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in 2011: ‘It is not only a matter of expressing the Gospel message in contemporary language; it is also necessary to have the courage to think more deeply—as happened in other epochs—about the relationship between faith, the life of the Church and the changes human beings are experiencing... what challenges does “digital thought” pose to faith and theology? What questions and requests?’

35. With all the bizarre circumstances of our Caribbean history, family has been one institution, imperfect as it is, in which our ancestors have engaged in culture building against all odds. The plantation system attempted to brutally eradicate family among the slaves. As B. W. Higman<sup>22</sup> has demonstrated, our ancestors were resilient in building culture around family. With this in mind, we are proposing a model of Church based on family. The Roman Catholic Church in the Caribbean is a family of missionary disciples, traveling on the journey to holiness, building a civilization of love, and proclaiming Good News to the poor. Pope Francis said: ‘Here too, parents are the primary educators, but they cannot be left to their own devices. The Christian

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<sup>20</sup>. Caribbean School for Catholic Communications

<sup>21</sup>. Generation Z, the generation born after millennials, is emerging as the next big thing for market researchers, cultural observers, and trend forecasters. Right after this is Generation A. Born after 2008, they were born into the rapidly accelerating world.

<sup>22</sup>. An Australian, he lived almost thirty years in Jamaica, teaching at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies. Higman’s interest in food history began in the Caribbean and resulted in *Jamaican Food: History, Biology, Culture* (2008). Most of his earlier books were concerned with the history of slavery, and his most recent is *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (2011).

community is called to help them in teaching children how to live in a media environment in a way consonant with the dignity of the human person and service of the common good.’<sup>23</sup>

36. **The Aparecida Document** challenges us to look more deeply into the issue of the family and the media. ‘Most of the mass media now present us with new, attractive, fantasy-filled images, which, although everyone knows that cannot show the unifying meaning of all aspects of reality, at least offer the consolation of being transmitted in real time, live and direct, and with up to date information... the information transmitted by the media often only distracts us.’<sup>24</sup> The document continues, ‘Our cultural traditions are no longer handed on from one generation to the next with the same ease as in the past. That even affects that deepest core of each culture, constituted by religious experience, which is now likewise difficult to hand on through education and the beauty of cultural expressions. It even reaches into the family itself, which as a place of dialogue and intergenerational solidarity, had been one of the most important vehicles for handing on the faith.

37. ‘The mass media have invaded every space and every conversation, making its way also into the intimacy of the home.’<sup>25</sup> ‘Still, it is clear that these media cannot replace the need for more personal and direct dialogue... We know that sometimes they can keep people apart rather than together, as when at dinnertime everyone is surfing on a mobile phone, or when one spouse falls asleep waiting for the other who spends hours playing with an electronic device. This is also something that families have to discuss and resolve in ways which encourage interaction without imposing unrealistic prohibitions.’<sup>26</sup>

38. Communications is also the solution to building unity as Pope Francis writes: ‘The walls which divide us can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another. We need to resolve our differences through forms of dialogue which help us grow in understanding and mutual respect.’<sup>27</sup> Dialogue is the way to build communion and the civilization of love and to engage all people of good will in a respectful manner. Dialogue is also another way of speaking about salvation. *Aetatis Novae* states: ‘Here, in the Word made flesh, God’s self-communication is definitive. In Jesus’ words and deeds the Word is liberating, redemptive, for all humankind. This loving self-revelation of God, combined with humanity’s response of faith, constitutes a profound dialogue.’<sup>28</sup>

39. The dialogue has an end in mind. Pope Paul VI called that end ‘authentic development’.<sup>29</sup> It is the development of all people, every person and every dimension of the human person. It is a

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<sup>23</sup>. Pope Francis, 49th World Communications Day Message, 2015.

<sup>24</sup>. V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, ‘The Aparecida Document’, 38.

<sup>25</sup>. *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>26</sup>. Pope Francis, On Love in the Family (*Amoris Laetitia*), 2016, 278.

<sup>27</sup>. Pope Francis, World Communications Day Message, 2014.

<sup>28</sup>. AN 6.

<sup>29</sup>. Pope Paul VI, On the Development of Peoples (*Populorum Progressio*), 14.

process or a journey from less human to more human conditions. It integrates our work of charity with our journey to holiness, holding the dynamic tension between these two dimensions of the faith. Pope Benedict XVI recovered this notion, from Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*<sup>30</sup> and stressed the point that integral development is the vocation of the Church and affirmed that the whole Church, in all of her activities, is called to authentic integral human development. Exploring this idea Pope Paul VI says:

What are truly human conditions? The rise from poverty to the acquisition of life's necessities; the elimination of social ills; broadening the horizons of knowledge; acquiring refinement and culture. From there one can go on to acquire a growing awareness of other people's dignity, a taste for the spirit of poverty (Matthew 5:3), an active interest in the common good, and a desire for peace. Then man can acknowledge the highest values and God Himself, their author and end. Finally, and above all, there is faith—God's gift to men of good will—and our loving unity in Christ, who calls all men to share God's life as sons of the living God, the Father of all men.<sup>31</sup>

40. In this text, Pope Paul VI explores how communications as dialogue are both Good News to the poor and also a journey to holiness. It is the movement from less human to more human, from material, moral, and spiritual scarcity to giving ourselves to God in the service of development of people. Being Good News to the poor needs to become a deep and profound spirituality for all of our people. This too is part of the journey of development. In South Africa, they will speak of '*Ubuntu*'—our interconnectedness as human beings—I am because you are; it is a call for radical generosity. In Trinidad, it is the heart of the concept of '*Guyap*'—where people of a village will come to build a house and the owner will cook for them as the only exchange.

41. Social media can also offer us opportunities for such a kind of neighbourly way of living. 'Social networks can facilitate relationships and promote the good of society, but they can also lead to further polarization and division between individuals and groups. The digital world is a public square, a meeting-place where we can either encourage or demean one another, engage in a meaningful discussion or unfair attacks.'<sup>32</sup> There is no doubt that the digital milieu can be used as a way of building a society that is healthy and open to sharing, caring, and serving one another. Our communication messages must share the joy and the hope of the Gospel that comes from being unconditionally loved by Christ. An authentic voice speaks from the heart.

42. In the Gospel, Jesus gives us one commandment—Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another' (John 13:34). Jesus gives the test of discipleship as the visible sign of love: 'This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35). This love must be communicated through our genuine commitment to

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<sup>30</sup>. Pope Benedict XVI, Love in Truth (*Caritas in Veritate*).

<sup>31</sup>. PP 21.

<sup>32</sup>. Pope Francis, 50th World Communications Day Message, 2016.

development of all people. This is the Good News to the poor. This is inclusive of our commitment to nonviolence for which we need a formation process.<sup>33</sup>

43. These are the challenges the Church in the Caribbean faces today. The Caribbean Church needs to see the laity's role evolve with a robust collaborative and participative encounter within the Church and greater awareness of our co-responsibility for the Church's mission. Pope Benedict XVI says:

Co-responsibility demands a change in mindset especially concerning the role of lay people in the Church. They should not be regarded as 'collaborators' of the clergy, but, as people who are really 'co-responsible' for the Church's being and acting. It is therefore important that a mature and committed laity be consolidated, which can make its own specific contribution to the ecclesial mission with respect for the ministries and tasks that each one has in the life of the Church and always in cordial communion with the bishops.<sup>34</sup>

44. This requires a bold and courageous pastoral communications formation programme for our laity to become missionary disciples in the digital milieu. It requires people who are committed to the mission of the Church and who bring their professional knowledge and their depth of skills to the mission of the Church in the 21st century.

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<sup>33</sup>. Joseph Harris, CSSP, "Foundations for Pastoral Leadership and Non-Violence", delivered to Theology in the Caribbean Today Conference, 2001.

<sup>34</sup>. Pope Benedict XVI, Message to the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action, 10 August 2012.

## **A Pastoral Application:**

### **Designing an Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan**

45. Our current Caribbean cultural context described above is being influenced by the rapidly evolving digital cultural milieu. In the face of this reality, the Catholic Church in the Caribbean, needs to embrace a bold, prophetic, missionary stance for both understanding the digital milieu for communicating faith and for re-imagining how to nurture collaborative ministries within the Antilles Episcopal Conference and each member diocese. This initiative offers the potential to maximize the impact we can exercise for faith formation and development of peoples and for nurturing a profound sense of faith community within our region. Collaboration, community, and communication are the foundational blocks for a healthy Catholic faith community within each parish, diocese, and the Antilles Episcopal Conference.

46. Pastoral communications planning is not something that a few people with greater status, power, and authority do for the rest of us. Quality and effective pastoral communications planning animates vitality and vibrancy within the diocese and parish. The creation of an Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan is to be a cooperative exercise, involving all the ministries of the diocese (family, liturgy, communications, social justice, catechesis, Catholic education, vocations, permanent diaconate formation, etc.) around three values: collaboration, communion, and commitment.

47. The Integrated Pastoral Communications Planning Process will identify the diocese's specific goals and priorities for integrating varying forms of communication resources to support and promote the diocese's mission and vision. We seek to increase participation via effective communication for practicing and non-practicing Catholics across the Caribbean. Effective communication includes listening—our people must be listened to, consulted, and engaged by the Church, priests, and ministry leaders. How are the messages being received? Effective communication must occur in homilies, liturgies, and celebrations. How effective we are in communicating will also depend on the quality of our submissions and our actions—are we walking the talk? This builds authenticity. The digital world is an environment in which people do not pay attention or believe simply because a Church leader is speaking.

48. In his first World Communications Day Message in 2014, Pope Francis said:

‘We have to be able to dialogue with the men and women of today.... We are challenged to be people of depth, attentive to what is happening around us and spiritually alert. To dialogue means to believe that the “other” has something worthwhile to say, and to entertain his or her point of view and perspective.’

49. Nothing is more characteristic of an Integrated Pastoral Communications Planning Process than its collaborative nature. This is planning that we do together within and among ministries—based on the gifts with which our parish and diocese have been blessed and the needs of the faith community. Finally, vital faith communities have an amazing ability to sense and respond to change. Their members understand the need for both stability and adaptability. Faith communities are ‘ever new and ever the same’ because they have developed ways of thinking

about what must always stay the same and what must always be in transition.

50. The (arch)bishop is the cornerstone of the Integrated Pastoral Communications Strategy and is as essential to the process as to any successful integration of a new system into the diocese. An Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan for the AEC is important for the future of the Catholic Church and the Church's diverse ministries because 'the use of media is now essential in evangelization and catechesis.' The plan is focused on strengthening all the ministries within the dioceses and throughout our Caribbean region through improving and enhancing communication.

51. The bishops' pastoral priority is the New Evangelization, with the purpose of the pastoral plan for communications being to foster a theology and spirituality of uniting the AEC region. The Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan, therefore, plays a key role in creating the framework for all commissions (at both the diocesan and AEC levels) to act in a coordinated way towards the fulfillment of the mission and priorities of the AEC bishops.

**52. Collaboration is vital for the process. It means**

1. The identification, release, and union of all the gifts, particularly those that are central to the ministry within the parish, diocese, and Conference for the sake of mission.
2. 'But one and the same Spirit produces all of these [spiritual gifts], distributing them individually to each person as he wishes. As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ' (1 Corinthians 12:11–12).
3. Taking quality time to discern, dialogue, pray, and to be open to sharing resources.
4. Keeping in mind people do not fear change, people fear loss!

**53. The integration of new digital communication technologies into our ministries reminds us that they**

- Are emerging tools (resources) for transferring and processing information (Web 1.0) and interaction between people (Web 2.0) but, more importantly, the sensitivity to people's context and needs (Web 3.0), which also affects, in a growing way, any Christian community.
- Require the Catholic Church (parishes, dioceses, and the Antilles Episcopal Conference) to cultivate 'an active, listening presence' (AN 8) so as to better understand the subtle needs and points of interest of our Caribbean people.
- Can, through careful understanding of the subtleties of the different generations, help us engage in a prophetic and inspiring social media presence that is responsive to where our people are and what interests them.
- Offer opportunities for the Church communications to tell the Church's story, interpret the events and structures of the world, and maintain good public relations by providing accurate information and news of the Church.



- Can enhance quality faith formation and should be present in cyberspace not only to present itself but rather to help and serve people in their lives and way to God.
- Call for a collaborative approach within the different communities and those responsible for their leadership.
- Call for the Catholic Church to be innovative and flexible, adapting as the social media culture evolves.
- Offer opportunities to design programmes to better understand youth and develop awareness and training for new technical (social media) possibilities, especially in the fields of learning, sharing, and support, but also in e-learning and evangelization.
- Challenge us to be willing and determined to bridge the ‘digital divide’ that still affects many Caribbean communities.
- Awaken us to be aware of the moral implications of the new digital resources (technologies) and help move us towards a proper approach to serve the wellbeing of human society.
- Call us to be alert to the psychological and spiritual implications of these rapid developments on the world, culture, taste, and expectations of young people.
- Call us to research and understand what these developments imply for our ministry, online and offline. Given, for example, that attention is becoming more limited and precious, what are the implications of this for homilies, for the way we carry out Church communication offline?
- Need to be learned and used actively by all ‘communicators’ in the diocese—including priests, persons in ministry, and believers.

**54. The Vision of the Antilles Episcopal Conference’s Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan (IPCP)** cultivates quality collaboration, communion, and communication within and among the dioceses of the region in order to promote a dynamic Catholic social communications media presence within the Caribbean.

#### **55. Desired Outcomes**

- To proactively use the expanding social communications media milieu for creating a robust, prophetic Catholic Church presence within the Caribbean for addressing the emerging pastoral needs within the Church and society.
- To inspire and stimulate a ‘new mature spirit of living faith’ within our Caribbean faith communities through the support of diverse means of social communications media.
- To integrate social communications media education into all ministry formation programs (e.g., catechesis, New Evangelization, liturgy, social justice), inclusive of Permanent Diaconate and Seminary Formation Programs.
- To establish the Catholic Church’s Caribbean Social Communications Network of

creative thinkers or ‘imagineers’ for keeping abreast of the rapidly evolving social communications media research and developments for connecting diverse peoples within our Caribbean culture.

- To encourage, support, and reward diocesan ministers to pioneer new methodologies by collaborating within the diocese to support a fresh perspective for implementing an Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan (financial, technical, and personnel support).
- To ensure that a comprehensive demonstration of collaboration, communion, and communication is woven into the life and fabric of the mission and vision of the AEC and each member diocese.

### **56. Why is an Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan for the AEC (Arch)Dioceses important for the future of the Catholic Church and Catholic Communications in the Caribbean?**

1. ‘The Church therefore must maintain an active, listening presence in relation to the world’ (AN 8).
2. ‘...the Church always must communicate its message in a manner suited to each age and to the cultures of particular nations and peoples, so today it must communicate in and to the emerging media culture’ (AN 8).
3. ‘The Church needs to be concerned for, and present in, the world of communication, in order to dialogue with people today and to help them encounter Christ. She needs to be a Church at the side of others, capable of accompanying everyone along the way. The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God.’<sup>35</sup>

### **57. According to *Aetatis Novae*, an Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan means**

1. Integrated = involves all forms of communications media.
2. Integrated = involves all entities of ministry within the Church (Arch)Diocese.
3. Integrated = is a comprehensive plan for quality ‘stewardship’ of both finances and resources for animating and supporting the vision and mission of the Catholic Church.
4. ‘Catholic media work is not simply one more programme alongside all the rest of the Church’s activities: social communications have a role to play in every aspect of the Church’s mission’ (AN 17).
5. ‘Church personnel require at least a working grasp of the impact which new information technologies and mass media are having upon individuals and society’ (AN 18).
6. It is focused on ‘strengthening’ all the ministries within the dioceses. It is a ‘collaborative ministry’.
7. ‘We therefore strongly recommend that dioceses and episcopal conferences or assemblies

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<sup>35</sup>. Pope Francis, 48th World Communications Day Message, 2014.

include communications component in every pastoral plan' (AN 21).

8. 'Furthermore, communications ought to be taken into account in formulating and carrying out all other pastoral plans, including those concerning social service, education, and evangelization' (AN 23).

## **58. Steps for Developing an Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan**

59. There are four key steps for navigating toward an effective Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan. Each of these steps involves collaborative dialogue, discernment, and action for paving the way for the following phase.

### **1. Research Phase**

- a. Explore what is currently 'active' within the diocese or the region
- b. Explore what is currently 'available' within the diocese or the region
- c. Be familiar with and appreciate the new social media communication culture
- d. Study the technological profile of those in ministry and those in the pew as this has significant implications for communications and ministry online and offline
- e. Address opportunities and challenges

### **2. Design Phase**

- a. Sharing of resources (collaboration/networking with 'all ministries' within the diocese)
- b. Dialoguing among the various diocesan ministries for effective, collaborative use of social media resources
- c. Educating (preparing individuals for intellectual and professional social media development—CSCC); promoting 'professional training in the culture of communications in all pastoral agents and believers' (The Aparecida Document, n. 486b).
- d. Providing spiritual formation of those engaged with the Church's media (retreats and spiritual formation via traditional + virtual)
- e. Networking with secular media to support the Church's 'integrated pastoral communications plan'
- f. Advancing new 'synergy' for public relations to support 'all the ministries of the local Church'
- g. Supporting ongoing social media research for visioning the Church's ministry in a digital milieu

### **3. Implementation Phase**

- a. Put into action
- b. Define evaluation criteria
- c. Continue networking/collaboration (flow of communications)
- d. Praxis for impact—overall mission/vision

#### 4. Evaluation Phase

- a. Determine if the IPCP design/implementation addressed the mission and vision of the parish, diocese, or AEC
- b. If not, how to adjust, adapt, or shift an element of the design
- c. If yes, how to enhance, strengthen, and expand implementation
- d. Confirm and lay out the next stage development/implementation

60. We realize that the Church is immersed in a new communications milieu. This milieu has vast implications for how people are being formed, informed, and transformed in the present day. This same milieu is affecting not only how the Church communicates faith today but how we are to be Church in the 21st century. Without a doubt, opportunities and challenges lie ahead of us. The Church needs to engage in careful reflection, discernment, and creative pastoral action to ensure that its presence contributes to the reality of the digital milieu in a prophetic manner. This is most effectively realized when we work in collaboration and communion with one another.

61. Pope Francis wrote: ‘It is not technology which determines whether or not communication is authentic, but rather the human heart and our capacity to use wisely the means at our disposal. Social networks can facilitate relationships and promote the good of society, but they can also lead to further polarization and division between individuals and groups.’<sup>36</sup> The choice is ours to make. How we prepare those who minister and serve the Church is not a luxury but a growing necessity today.

62. ‘In a world like this, media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which can in turn inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all.’<sup>37</sup>

63. Let us be bold and courageous as we move forward. Let us open our minds and hearts to read the signs of the times and listen attentively to one another. Let us explore and discover new methodologies and possibilities for communicating faith and awakening our Caribbean culture to the needs of the poor and all those who strive to live an authentic human life in the 21st century. We must be committed to our communication mission to help people experience conversion through God’s grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis articulates our vision well. He says:

Let us boldly become citizens of the digital world. The Church needs to be concerned for, and present in, the world of communication, in order to dialogue with people today and to help them encounter Christ. She needs to be a Church at the side of others, capable of accompanying everyone along the way. The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the

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<sup>36</sup>. Pope Francis, 50th World Communications Day Message, 2016.

<sup>37</sup>. Pope Francis, 48th World Communications Day Message, 2014.

beauty of God.<sup>38</sup>

64. We entrust this bold initiative to the maternal care of Mary our mother, the mother of the Word who became flesh. The first one, who, through her yes received the Word. She was the first to present the Word to the world. We beseech her intercession as we seek to make her Son manifest to all Caribbean people through quality collaboration, communion, and communication within and among the dioceses of the region.

**SIGNED:**

Bishop Gabriel Malzaire, Bishop of Roseau, President

Bishop Charles Jason Gordon, Bishop of Bridgetown

Archbishop Patrick Pinder, Archbishop of Nassau

Archbishop Joseph Harris, Archbishop of Port of Spain

Archbishop Robert Rivas, Archbishop of Castries

Archbishop David Macaire, Archbishop of St. Pierre & Fort-de-France

Archbishop Kenneth Richards, Archbishop of Kingston

Archbishop Emeritus Charles Dufour, Apostolic Administrator of Mandeville

Bishop Emmanuel Lafont, Bishop of Cayenne

Bishop Francis Alleyne, Bishop of Georgetown

Bishop Luis Secco, Bishop of Willemstad

Bishop Jean-Yves Riocreux, Bishop of Guadeloupe

Bishop Burchell Mc Pherson, Bishop of Montego Bay

Bishop Wieslaw Spiewak, Bishop of Hamilton

Bishop Karel Choennie, Bishop of Paramaribo

Bishop Gerard County, Bishop of Kingstown

Bishop Robert Llanos, Apostolic Administrator of St. John's-Basseterre

Bishop Lawrence Nicasio, Bishop of Belize City and Belmopan

Bishop Clyde Martin Harvey, Bishop of St. George's in Grenada

Port of Spain, Trinidad.

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2017 – the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

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<sup>38</sup>. *Ibid.*