



**RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE  
CATHOLIC CHURCH  
ON ITS CURRENT AND FUTURE  
ENGAGEMENT  
WITH THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

**ESSAYS WRITTEN BY STUDENTS FROM THE SPRING 2025  
COMM 480: RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION COURSE  
AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY**

**Edited by Dr. Heidi A. Campbell**

***Recommendations to the Catholic Church on its Current and Future Engagement with the Digital Environment***

Edited by Heidi A Campbell

Editorial Assistance by Meg Boone

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***Introduction:  
Considering Catholic Response on Digital Media***

Heidi A Campbell  
Professor of Communication and COMM 480 Course Instructor

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In December 2024, I was invited to be part of one of several special study groups, convened by the General Secretariat of the Dicastery of Communication of the Catholic Church, housed in the Vatican. The group I was asked to join was made up of theologians, professors, digital professionals, and individuals involved in religious education from over a dozen countries, brought together to discuss how features of digital culture and emerging AI are currently impacting the Church. The group met together bi-weekly over a 3-month period, with the aim of developing a set of practical recommendations for Pope Francis, concerning the Church's mission in the digital environment.

This initiative was launched specifically by the Pope and connected to his call to address the challenges and opportunities of evangelization in the digital age, as highlighted in the Synod of Bishops' Synthesis Report published in 2023. The study group engaged in a synodal process of discussion, which emphasized active listening, sharing research and concrete evidence for opinions, and the thoughtful integration of diverse theological viewpoints about current technologies. Guided by five substantive questions, the study group's remit was to carefully consider and discuss the theological, canonical, pastoral, and communicative implications of doing digital missions within the Catholic Church.

The hope was that each of these study groups would contribute and help form strategies to effectively engage young people and diverse audiences on the issue of digital evangelism and ethical approaches to technology. The goal of this facilitated process was to produce a single set of concrete suggestions to enhance the Church's presence and impact in the digital realm.

My role in these discussions inspired me to create an assignment that would engage my students in a similar process of reflection on how the values and beliefs of the Catholic Church inform their beliefs about social media. Students in the Spring 2025 COMM 480: Religious Communication course were tasked with authoring a two- to three-page analytical essay examining the Catholic Church's evolving engagement with digital and social media. This assignment aimed to cultivate critical thinking and scholarly analysis regarding the Church's communication strategies within the rapidly transforming contemporary media landscape.

Students were presented with three of the five questions, which were also assigned to the study group, each designed to prompt nuanced exploration of the Church's adaptation to the digital environment.

- (1) What can a Missionary Synodal Church learn from greater immersion in the digital environment?
- (2) What adaptations to the digital environment does the notion of jurisdiction mainly linked to a geographical territory require?
- (3) What are practical recommendations or proposals regarding the church's mission in the digital environment?

These questions required the students to learn about the Catholic Church's historical engagement with media and its development of a theology of social communication that has informed its views and use of media technology for over a century. To learn more about these issues, students engaged with several foundational Church documents. Specifically students read and reflected on "Communio et Progressio" (1971), a Post-Vatican II document that lays out core Church teachings about its theology of communication; "Church and the Internet" (2001), written by Pope John Paul II on how the church should approach the internet, "Pastoral Reflection on Social Media" (2023), written by Pope Francis highlighting his concerns about social media's impact on the Church. Students engaged with these documents to offer critical reflection on how these beliefs would inform the Church's current concerns and perceived opportunities offered by emerging media.

By drawing on these perspectives, and those gleaned from other scholarly sources on Catholic views of media, students were expected to discuss Catholic understandings of religious communication in the context of evolving media consider offer practical recommendations of the opportunities and challenges digital technology pose, and consider the implications of these issues for a "Missionary Synodal Church" seeking to expand its ministry into new digital space. Through in-class workshops, lectures, and readings, students were expected to produce informed, well-supported arguments that reflected their understanding of the Church's role and challenges in the digital age, fostering a critical dialogue about the intersection of faith and technology.

This eBook showcases the best essays produced by students in the COMM course. It should be noted that most students in the course came from a range of Protestant Christian denominations (i.e., Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Bible, Non-denominational). Only four of the 24 students in the course identified as Catholic, and several (3) students also self-identified as agnostic/atheist. This means most of these essays are written by individuals outside and often unfamiliar with the Catholic church structure, history, and theology. It is important to keep this background in mind while reading the essays in this eBook, as some responses demonstrate this outsider perspective in their framing of issues and may overgeneralize or lack nuanced understandings of the overall nature and function of the Catholic church. Yet, despite these limitations, this collection of essays offers some interesting insights and interpretations on how core values of Catholicism, communicated via official Church documents on media and communication, create distinct trajectories that students felt would and should guide Catholic response to digital media. I hope this eBook provides some engaging and alternative perspectives to the responses given by the Dicastery study groups on how the Catholic church perceives and responds to the integration of digital media in mission.

## **QUESTION 1**

What can a Missionary Synodal Church learn from greater immersion in the digital environment?



# Question 1, Response #1

Sheyla Hidalgo

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A Missionary Synodal Church, called to walk together in communion and evangelization, must embrace the digital environment as a transformative space for its mission. By engaging with digital tools, the Church can deepen its commitment to communion, a core Catholic value emphasizing unity and collective participation in faith (CetP, 1971). This essay argues that digital immersion teaches the Church to reimagine community-building beyond geographical borders, foster ethical evangelization, and empower lay voices while adhering to its synodal principles of listening and dialogue. The Catholic Church's understanding of community is rooted in its theological identity as the "People of God," called together in shared faith. *Communio et Progressio* reinforces this, stating that modern media offers "men a great round table, as they are able to participate in a worldwide exchange" where "social communication tear(s) down the barriers that time and space have erected between men (CetP, 19 & 20). The digital environment amplifies this mission by enabling global connections. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, online Masses allowed homebound Catholics in rural India to join Vatican liturgies, transcending physical isolation. They embraced online tools to keep congregations connected (Campbell, 2025). This example illustrates how digital media can foster a sense of belonging and unity, even without physical gatherings.

The Church and the Internet cautions that digital interactions must reflect the Church's core value of *Communio*, prioritizing authentic relationships over transactional engagement. The document warns, "The Internet is not merely a medium of entertainment and consumer gratification. It is a tool for accomplishing useful work, and the young must learn to see it and use it as such" (CI, 11). In emphasizing the importance of younger generations' education in the proper use of media in a religious context, the Catholic values of communion and the empowerment of ordinary people can be achieved. The Church must also confront challenges such as algorithms that polarize or online spaces that reduce faith to superficial trends. Here, the value of prudence, a virtue emphasized in Catholic social teaching, calls for educating the laity in digital literacy. As Park et al. (1993) note, "Acquiring digital media literacy and being able to benefit from using digital media competently is one of the ways to achieve social inclusion" (p. 97). Being literate in digital media becomes a service to social communications, in which well-trained media recipients can engage and demand high-quality content regarding the Catholic faith, values, and practices.

This further instills the importance of community and the idea that media allows individuals freedom of expression, creating a bond among those who give and receive information through digital media. Moreover, the Church's mission in the digital environment must be proactive and creative, such as the Vatican's Share the Journey campaign was used to amplify migrant voices embodying synodality by centering marginalized perspectives (Sadowski, 2017). "It offers the potential to attract a far higher participation rate of parishioners than standard evangelization campaigns because vast multitudes are already present there" (Landry, S., p. 2). This initiative demonstrates how digital tools promote justice and solidarity, key themes in Catholic teaching. These examples highlight the potential of digital media to deepen engagement and foster a sense of shared mission among the faithful.

Greater digital immersion teaches the Missionary Synodal Church to prioritize communion through inclusive community-building, discernment guided by prudence, and pastoral creativity. By integrating these lessons, the Church can fulfill its mission as a “sacrament of unity” in a fragmented digital age. As *Communio et Progressio* reminds us, media is a “gift of God” that, when used responsibly, can strengthen the bonds of unity and advance the Church’s evangelical mission (CetP, 2).

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# Question 1, Response #2

Morgan Hunter

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This paper will address the question: What can a Missionary Synodal Church learn from greater immersion in the digital environment? It will do so by looking at Church Documents, including *Communio et Progressio*, *The Church and Internet*, and *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality*. These documents show how the Church can use the digital environment as a tool for evangelism and unity.

The immersion of Missionary Synodal Church into the digital environment means the Church has to be mindful of how they are utilizing the digital environment. In *Communio et Progressio* the article speaks on the church's duty to spread the good news through missions in the digital space by stating, "The modern media offer new ways of confronting people with the message of the Gospel, of allowing Christians, even when they are far away to share in sacred rites, worship and ecclesiastical functions. In this way they can bind the Christian community closer together and invite everyone to participate in the intimate life of the Church" (CP, 128). This quote demonstrates Catholics' views on the media because they see it as a way to unify people. By using the digital environment, the Church can connect people from around the world, which allows for shared worship and community. In this way, the digital world is flattening communication by allowing people to learn and grow in faith with others and not solely depend on a priest for disseminating information. This has allowed people's ideas of what the Church truly is to shift and become more inclusive.

One value the Catholic Church holds is the unity of man. This value is defined in *Communio et Progressio* by explaining the importance of keeping lines of communication between the whole human race. The article explains this can be done when the Church gives information but also listens to public opinion that happens within and without the Church (CP, 3.114). Catholics believe that media, in general, can and should be used as a tool to unify people. The question regarding what a Missionary Synodal Church can learn from greater immersion in the digital environment is partially answered when looking at this value. With greater immersion

The Missionary Synodal Church needs to be aware of how they are utilizing the media to unify the masses. The internet gives the Church an opportunity to reach people they otherwise couldn't have reached. If the Church promotes a safe online space, they have the opportunity to have open dialogue and share the word of God with people all around the world.

Sharing the Good News is something the Catholic Church believes is a duty. The article *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality* states, "The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness the love of God in the midst of the whole human family... In this way, synodality is a path by which the Church can more fruitfully fulfil her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God's kingdom" (*For a Synodal Church*, 1.4). Catholics are able to positively use the media for their goal of spreading the word of Jesus. In another article, *The Church and Internet*, when addressing spreading the gospel online it says, "Consider...the positive capacities of the Internet to carry religious information and teaching beyond all

barriers and frontiers. Such a wide audience would have been beyond the wildest imaginings of those who preached the Gospel before us...Catholics should not be afraid to throw open the doors of social communications to Christ, so that his Good News may be heard from the housetops of the world” (C&I, 4). The Church's immersion into the digital world helps Catholics fulfill this duty and utilize technology in a way that is honoring to God. The Synodal Church is able to learn that greater immersion into the digital environment can positively impact the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the church as a whole.

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# Question 1, Response #3

Grayson Phillips

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A missionary synodal church, by definition, is a church that both emphasizes participation, listening, and shared decision-making, as well as making it its duty to evangelize and spread the gospel. Because of the role it plays within its community and the greater whole of the Catholic Church, it is paramount that these churches learn to utilize the tools they have available to them, the most prominent of which is digital and social media. Anthony S.K. Lam from the Hong Kong Journal of Catholic Studies makes a great argument in favor of this, stating, “Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded his disciples (and thus us subsequently) to spread the news to all the people in the world. So, we can say that the Christian Church has from the very beginning borne the mission of communicating to everybody,” (Lam 99). This mindset is critical for the parishioners and clergy of missionary synodal churches to understand because it opens the doors to accessibility and inclusivity. The most recent example of this occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, wherein people were scared, doubtful and isolated. It was at this time that digital media allowed Pope Francis to address the world in a powerful message and prayer that allowed millions to be united and share communion with one another. (TFP 4). Another great example again from the current pontiff, who uses X (formerly Twitter) to reach tens of millions faithful worldwide, spreading wisdom and proverbs to the masses.

Of course, while digital media is an incredible way to reach those who were previously thought to be unreachable, it continues to be of use beyond just evangelization and into protecting the identity and clarifying potential misinformation about the church and the clergy, which is a common issue amongst those outside of the church. It was just this that concerned the Canadian Conference of Catholic bishops which warned, “Even if we do not use social media ourselves, we are impacted by the role it plays in the spread of misinformation, the coarsening of civil discourse, the radicalization of political systems, and the mental health crisis that is especially prevalent among our youth. As such, we realize that social media is worthy of our special attention and reflection. (Pastoral Letter 3). Christianity is an inherently communicative topic, as Christians are told to “Go into the world and preach the gospel to all creation” according to Mark 16:15. In fact, the whole Bible is in its own right a story that exudes communication as stated by Antonio Spadaro, the author of *Cybertheology*. Antonio compares the heavenly messengers, Ten Commandments, the burning bush and other notable miracles as a realization of how they can be compared to their modern equivalents, such as digital media (Cybertheology 7).

It is this that propels the modern Catholic church to use all available tools to spread the good news to anyone who will hear it. It is especially critical that missionary synodal churches heed this as well, as digital media has and will allow these churches to evolve to better suit the community they serve in order to encourage a more connected participatory community of faith.

The *Communio et Progressio* makes the perfect argument in favor of missionary synodal churches using digital media. Indeed, it would be difficult to suggest that Christ's command was being obeyed unless all the opportunities offered by the modern media to extend to vast numbers of people the announcement of his Good News were being used. (*Communio et Progressio* 126). With

these guidelines in place and the goal clear, Missionary Synodal churches will be able to be the metaphorical spearhead of the Catholic church, strengthening their communities and ensuring the spread of the gospel through every medium as to lead every soul to salvation.

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# Question 1, Response #4

Claire Russo

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In an age dominated by the presence of digital media and technology, the debate of how different religious groups will respond arises. For the Catholic Church, a Missionary Synodal Church, their response may be viewed through the lens of community, prioritizing fellowship with God and their church body. This is so they may be a united front to face the dangers as well as advantages of immersing themselves in the digital environment. The term Missionary Synodal Church means they are a church that engages with culture while maintaining a centralized church with a unified mission statement. To further define the term, “The word, synod, derives from two Greek words, sun (together, with), and hodos (path, way). It means ‘journeying together.’ Synodality is not so much an event or slogan as it is ‘the form, the style, and the structure of the church.’ It is the church’s manner of being and mission in which all the faithful journey together as the one People of God” (Okoye, 2022). By the Catholic Church embracing the title of a Missionary Synodal Church, their leadership and church body must be on the same page about how to handle an online presence to spread accurate information and honor God. With truth being one of their core values, the Catholic Church must strive to uphold honesty and integrity while utilizing the internet and social media.

Community is a core pillar of the Catholic Church, experiencing a personal relationship with God and maintaining a close-knit body of believers. The *Communio et Progressio* states, “As a result the individual is bound more closely to his fellow men and can play his part in the unfolding of history as if led by the hand of God. In the Christian faith, the unity and brotherhood of man are the chief aims of all communication, and these find their source and model in the central mystery of the eternal communion between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who live a single divine life” (CP, 8). The ultimate model of perfect community may be found in the trinity, communication between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While impossible to attain perfection, the Catholic Church mimics this relationship within their church in how they communicate internally and externally. If the church lacked community, their online presence would be a loss cause, struggling to have a centralized source of digital media practices. Instead, the Catholic Church gathered and produced documents for their leaders and members to learn from and adhere to. In addition to *Communio et Progressio*, the *Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media* was written to priests and bishops to give advice and warning of engaging with the digital world. The emphasis was on promoting truthful communication, avoiding division within its members, to remain a harmonious community. The document describes, “As believers, we are called to be communicators who move intentionally towards encounter. In this way, we can seek encounters that are meaningful and lasting, rather than superficial and ephemeral. Indeed, by orienting digital connections towards encountering real persons, forming real relationships and building real community, we are actually nourishing our relationship with God” (PRSM, 24). The pastoral reflection encourages Catholic Church leaders to teach their members to not let the internet and social media divide their church body, but rather remember their core values of being honest and intentional communicators. By resisting the temptation and trap of digital media being divisive and hostile, the Catholic Church may learn to set a good example of kindness, trustworthiness, and love for God.

A core value of the Catholic faith is truth. Since Catholics believe lying and deceiving are sin, their goal is to remain pure and honest when communicating, especially to the public. This value of truth inspires how the Catholic Church can learn from greater immersion in the digital

environment because in an age where there is rampant misinformation, Catholics may remain loyal to what they believe and how to spread truth to their audiences through media channels. Due to the popularity and dominance of the internet and social media, there is plenty of information spread supporting or discouraging religious speech. Many individuals share their faith in an evangelical effort, whereas others enjoy refuting different religious beliefs. An example of how the Catholic Church can learn to immerse themselves in the community of the digital environment while holding fast to truth is sharing their beliefs and rituals with the world to attract others to the faith. By educating the public on what they believe and know to be true, the Catholic Church is leveraging the internet and social media in a positive way.

Despite the potential pitfalls the rise of the digital age may be, “the Catholic Church has prevailed to a remarkable degree throughout this extended period of extreme disturbance, and remains the largest singular church and denomination in the West” (Robinson, 2021). Through the Missionary Synodal focus of the Catholic Church, there may be a unified perspective and effort to properly use the internet and social media. There is a great opportunity within the Catholic Church to demonstrate a united community, founded upon truth, to the online public.

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# Question 1, Response #5

Holly Simpsen

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The Missionary Synodal Church is a new concept, and compared to the history of the world and religion, so is digital media. In this day and age, two things are inevitably starting to come together, so now the question is not how to escape it, but rather how can the Church use it to its advantage. One important Catholic value discussed in *Communio et Progressio* is education, and this can be related to digital media in two ways, the use of media itself to educate the masses and the need for the content that is consumed on digital media to be educational.

The Catholic Church takes education very seriously. They believe that everyone has a right to education, specifically a Christian education. "A Christian education... has as its principal purpose this goal: that the baptized, while they are gradually introduced the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become ever more aware of the gift of Faith they have received, and that they learn in addition how to worship God the Father in spirit and truth..." (GE, 2). This is a simple explanation of the expectation of Christian education as proposed by Pope St. Paul VI in *Gravissimum Educationis*. Though written in 1965, it still applies to educating Catholics in the digital media age.

Making use of digital media is a very advantageous way to spread the Christian word in recent times. One Catholic who has fully embraced the digital age is Pope Francis himself, who makes it a point to be very active on platforms such as Instagram and X. This might seem very unusual at first, but he is embracing the Church's transition into a fully digital world. "Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to spread the Good News of Salvation to all the peoples in the world. So we can say that the Christian Church has from the very beginning borne the mission of communicating to everybody." (Lam, 100) The internet offers countless ways that the church can immerse its people into their faith teachings, such as influencers on social media, websites, Bible apps, YouTube videos, live streams of sermons, and so much more.

The other side of the education that the Catholic community values is the need for the digital content that their people consume to align with the rest of their values. In a digital age that is filled with misinformation and content that is misaligned with Catholic values, it becomes important to care about finding media that aligns with faith rather than distorts it. "The idea is not to impose censorship but to offer Internet users a reliable guide to what expresses the authentic position of the Church," (CI, 11) and, "If, however, men's minds and hearts are ill disposed...this outpouring of technology may produce an opposite effect...as a result, evils are multiplied," (CeP, 9) are both illustrations of this value presenting itself in religious texts. Through these ideas and needs, Catholic educators can use digital media to their advantage and teach people with content that is built up from their faith-based ideals.

As the Catholic church continues to navigate the ever-expanding digital age, there are many things they can do to embrace these changes rather than think of them as harmful. The importance that they place on proper education does not have to change, and faith-based content and media literacy can be taught to ensure it stays that way. The Church can now provide this education to far more people than ever before, while preserving its original teachings.

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## Question 1, Response #6

Grant Tomlinson

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One of the most important functions of the Catholic Church is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with those who have yet to hear it. While spoken word and literature remain some of the more effective forms of communication, it's hard to reach a lot of people unless given a physical platform to do so. Today, with so much information available at our fingertips, the Church needs to navigate the landscape of social media in order to best accomplish their mission of spreading the Gospel. Through a greater immersion in this digital environment, the Catholic Church can begin to understand the new ways in which the public converses with each other and forms diverse online communities.

In order to stay effective and relevant, the Church needs to stay savvy on emerging forms of communication. As the world (secular society) turns into new forms of media, the Church should also do the same. The Church sees the Internet as a "gift from God" to unite men digitally and provide a medium for them to advance God's plan for the Earth (C&I 1). While it is of the utmost importance for Catholics to maintain strong and healthy relationships within their own religious communities, it is also a stated belief that Catholics should keep and maintain relationships with the whole human race, which is done by spreading their own messages as well as listening to the public's opinion in and out of the Church (CP 114). With a greater immersion in the digital environment, the Catholic Church will become slightly less centralized. By creating online communities of Catholics from all walks of life, all over the globe, this allows members to practice their faith – still within a community – but removed from the rigid hierarchical structure of the Church (Kołodziejska 2018).

According to *The Church and the Internet* from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, the Catholic Church's practice of communication should be "exemplary, reflecting the highest standards of truthfulness, accountability, sensitivity to human rights, and other relevant principles and norms." (C&I 3) Every form of communication will foster certain kinds of relationships, as well as inhibit others. For example, communication via word-of-mouth allows the listener to be engaged with the author in real time and for the listener to be able to speak back to the author in real time. However, face-to-face communication limits the reach of the author's message. With online communication, a message's potential reach is virtually limitless, but the ability for listeners to dialogue with the author grows increasingly small with large audiences. Due to religious gatherings being forced online during the COVID-19 pandemic, churches who hadn't already done so were forced to modernize their communication practices (Gauxachs 2021). This further emphasized the need for the Church to be well-educated in the use of digital media and how to broadcast their messages clearly and effectively for all audiences.

With a cell phone in the pocket of nearly every adult, the idea of networked individualism needs to be taken into account. Put simply, the concept of networked individualism shows that with modern media technology like cell phones, we no longer live in our own little "boxes," (families, neighborhoods, etc.) but in a woven society where everybody is connected together, and where everybody has the freedom to personally tailor their interactions. (Rainey, Wellmann 2018). And with direct lines of communication to the pockets of the people, this facilitates the

creation of online communities where people can come together from all over the world without the need for any larger sort of governing body (the Church, the government, etc.). It is necessary for the Catholic Church to not only use modern media to spread the Gospel, but to also understand how the rest of the world uses these media.

The Catholic Church has a history of top-down communication, from the Vatican to the members of the Church. Online communities, however, exhibit a two-way form of communication. From this, the Church can learn to listen attentively to more diverse viewpoints, as well as learn to create meaningful personal relationships with the public.

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## Question 1, Response #7

Ashlynn Veach

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The three goals of a Missionary Synodal Church are to prioritize communion, participation, and mission. They work together as a community to make decisions that serve the will of God and spread the gospel. As our world continues to expand and become more dependent on technology to communicate and form relationships, it becomes nearly impossible for the Church to ignore it. The Missionary Synodal Church could greatly benefit from a deeper immersion in the Digital Community by using these resources to foster participation and dialogue, expand their reach, and further evangelize throughout the globe.

The digital world only grows and thrives due to engagement. It often acts as a space for individuals or groups to share their ideas, build off one another, or have an open discussion. Incorporating an active use of social media within the church would allow members or believers to engage with others in these ways. Technology allows for a larger demographic to share their ideas and use their voices. Using social media as an asset for the church allows for broader collective participation, "Already, the two-way interactivity of the Internet is blurring the old distinction between those who communicate and those who receive what is communicated, and creating a situation in which, potentially at least, everyone can do both." (The Church and Internet 6.24). The internet offers a space for people to not just share their opinions, but also learn from each other, which is extremely beneficial to foster participation and dialogue in the Synodal Church.

An immediate and obvious benefit of utilizing the digital community is the ability to reach a wider audience. Using traditional methods of communication only allows for outreach to occur in physical presence, which can be extremely limited due to geographical barriers. Using technology allows the church to reach more underrepresented and niche groups. The Synodal Church believes "During His life on earth, Christ showed himself to be the perfect Communicator" and that it is now their job to do the same, "It is now necessary that the same message be carried by the means of social communication that are available today." (CetP, 2.126). The most effective way to be the "perfect Communicator" is to use the digital world for your benefit. By actively participating in these digital spaces, the Church can offer spiritual growth and support to those who might not be able to be reached through conventional means.

The Synodal Church could greatly benefit from a greater immersion in the digital community by the way it provides more opportunities to evangelize and foster relationships through the media. As our world evolves, it becomes more and more dependent on the digital world as a whole. Churches and religious groups often use the media for their benefit, streaming church services, creating community, finding group studies, or even using AI to answer questions or act as a guide. While the media can have many dangers that go against the morals of the Catholic Church, it can also be seen as a melting pot of ideas that can help them grow and share beliefs. In "Communio et Progressio" the author writes, "The modern media of social communication offer men of today a great round table. At this they are able to participate in a worldwide exchange in search of brotherhood and cooperation." (CetP, 1.19). The

opportunities to evangelize that are offered through a presence in the digital community immensely weigh out the downfalls and would be a great learning experience for a missionary Synodal Church.

A Missionary Synodal Church that actively utilizes the digital word as a means to enhance participation and dialogue, reach a broader audience, and effectively evangelize is in the best position to fulfill its goals of communion, participation, and mission. By embracing the benefits of the digital community rather than focusing on the negatives, the church will be able to grow with our world, instead of being left behind. With a strategic outlook on this, the Synodal Church will be able to push to achieve its goal of spreading the gospel to all corners of the world.

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## **QUESTION 2**

What adaptations to the digital environment does the notion of jurisdiction mainly linked to a geographical territory require?

## Question 2, Response #1

Madelyn Brandt

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The digital age has significantly reshaped the notion of jurisdiction, specifically for institutions like the Catholic church who have historically relied on the ideology associated with geographically organized authority structures. The rise of the internet has created a community that operates within a borderless environment therefore challenging the traditional territories the Catholic church has been confined to for centuries. As the church navigates this conversion, it faces the challenge of adhering the social media standards.

The Catholic church's sense of authority has been clearly laid out for centuries, operating within a simple pyramid system where the Pope has supreme authority, followed by bishops overseeing specific dioceses and priests and local clergy managing community-level religious activities. In the past the idea of authority has maintained this pyramid approach, working within designated territories to spread the teachings of the Church. "Here communication moves from the center to the members, in the theological sense, as a descending process beginning from God and passing through the papal and episcopal hierarchy to the other members of the Church." (Soukup 34). Within this system each territory has had autonomy while maintaining unity in its teachings through instruction from the Vatican. Media usage mainly remained localized within each respective jurisdiction as enforced by local priests and clergy.

However, this notion has been disrupted by the rise of the digital age, where theologians are urging the Catholic church to adapt to this uncharted world of media and incorporate the Church's values into media usage. One saying "But the Church is more than this" (Soukup 34), in regards to the traditional authoritative hierarchy observed. One of the greatest values held by the Church is to spread the good news of the gospel, it is indicative of their missionary pursuit. "all baptized believers are bearers of the message"(Soukup 34).

Knowing the opportunity to expand their value of missionary advances, the Church has shifted towards an environment which allows for a widespread missionary expedition, the media. In *A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media*, the Church acknowledges the opportunity to spread teachings globally, expanding traditional jurisdictional territories. "Examples of faithful and creative engagement on social media abound around the world, from both local communities as well as individuals who give witness to their faith on these platforms, oftentimes more pervasively than the institutional Church." (PSAM 2). Their recognition of the incorporation of communities and individuals opportunities to uniquely share their faith indicates an acceptance of how media can foster missionary success widely, compared to conventional methods used prior.

While the Catholic church has certainly acknowledged the worthwhile opportunity at hand, this has not been without reservation.. The Church has shown its objective to remain reserved in how it approaches media use, while also embracing progress, saying "As the Second Vatican Council remarks, "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””(CI 2).

Though the Church has subscribed to the notion that individuals can impact their overall mission profoundly, it has still centered its use of digital media in a sense of hierarchy. “A televised and live-streamed transmission allowed Pope Francis to lead a transformative global experience: a prayer and message addressed to a world in lockdown.”(PSAM 4). When facing a moment so desperate for unity, the COVID 19 pandemic, leadership depicted their fixation on upholding the traditional hierarchy within the Pope's jurisdiction, globally. This expresses the ideology that the Pope holds the jurisdiction of a global scale. Comparatively, an opportunity to embrace unity through highlighted local territories could have displayed the Church's embodiment of dismantling jurisdictional authority in a way that captivates the essence of digital media.

Digital media has distorted what jurisdictional authority and boundaries look like as it has given room to those without traditional accolades to take on aspects of authority. In the past religious authority was given by a title, power, divine intervention and territorial relation. In modern day, authority can be established globally from the tap of a button. “What constitutes authority in new media or digital age can be varied and context specific” (Campbell 22). This notion is something that the Church must adapt to in their continuation of media expansion. The question of who controls what within the Churches established authority is almost extraneous when taking the influence held by social media creators into consideration. It can be argued that media is so far developed that the Church's grasp at upholding its own sense of jurisdiction is out of reach. Rather than focusing on authority as a power or role based, the Church should further embrace the philosophy of relation based authority. Here authority is formed on the basis of connection and mutual benefit, “Authority is established or earned based through an individual's ability to express certain values and qualities in communicative relationships.” (Campbell 26). Many social media influencers have adopted this style of authority by creating a space for relationships that functions in both directions and have seen success in doing so.

In the consideration of the requirements of adaptations to a new digital world, it is recommended that the Catholic church adopt the culture of globalized freedom available to all members within media. “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.” (Nabozny 4). Social capital is indicative of success in spreading messaging. Combining the expertise held by church leaders alongside the mantra of creating relationships digitally would lead to increased evangelization globally. This calls for a refinement of jurisdiction and what it means to the Church, it can no longer be directly linked to a geographic territory but instead conjoined with online territories. “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.”(Nabozny 6). Instead of concerning church leadership with the attempt to draw members back into a traditional standpoint, the Church should meet people where they are while building a more relational authoritative concept. They must foster an environment where collective individuals are encouraged to share their personal experiences with their faith freely, “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.”(Nabozny 6).

As the digital age continues to shape society, it will shape the Church, with or without cooperation. While the Church has made strides in its adaptation to increasing media usage, it continues to cling to its historical safeguard of basing authority on geographical territories. This has been challenged deeply by decentralized and relational forms of influence. Rather than resisting this digital revolution, the Church has the vast opportunity to redefine its digital presence by cultivating meaningful connections via media and welcoming a model of authority based on relationship rather than geographical control. While growing accustomed to society's evolving digital landscape, the Church can preserve its core value of evangelism while producing accessibility to the Catholic church.

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## Question 2, Response #2

Andreina Mireles Garcia

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The issue of territory within the context of the digital world elicits conversations about the authority and influence people have on the Catholic narrative. Because the internet is a place where anyone can share their beliefs, the door to open communication can be positively seen as a place where people can learn and grow in their faith; however, misinformation can just as easily spread and cause disturbances. The Catholic Church must adapt to these rapid changes and establish new boundaries by adjusting their former methods with modern media and technology. When radio and, later, television became major sources of news, the Catholic Church integrated its centralized model of communication with that of the mass media at the time and established new modes of communication, such as having a singular Catholic spokesperson (Bosch et al., 2017, p.35). By revising its methods of communication, the Church was able to broaden its voice while maintaining authority over the message being spread. Keeping a centralized hierarchy would ensure each parish community the ability to have complete authority over any form of digital media of the Catholic Church, ensuring that the message they want to spread is true to what they believe.

With more access to the internet worldwide, it becomes much more difficult to maintain that centralized authority due to a plethora of voices and the blending of jurisdiction. The geographical limitation posed by a parish community and the influence of pastoral leadership used to be clear, but due to the internet, "it is common now to turn to 'influencers,' individuals who gain and maintain a large following, who acquire greater visibility and are able to inspire and motivate others with their ideas or experiences" (PRSM, 72). The words of those outside of the parish can help strengthen one's faith, demonstrating that even those outside of one's direct geographical area can significantly influence and disrupt the common idea of what spreading the word of God looks like. For instance, Vanessa Fosblad, @thatonecatholicgirl on Instagram, is a Catholic influencer with over twelve thousand followers. She posts content catered to Catholics, posting about theology books, sharing scripture, and speaking about her journey with Catholicism. Vanessa, along with many other influencers, can share their beliefs and ideas to a broad audience, disseminating the viewpoints of the Catholic Church.

This positive perspective arises from the idea that "what is most fruitful and operative in the digital age are patterns of life and authoritative experience. The fundamental distinction in this new environment is between living, incarnate creatures and disembodied, non-living computing entities" (Robinson et al., 2021, p.65). Because other humans are the entities sharing their ideas, media regarding the Catholic Church can thrive even though the circumstances in which the word of God is being spread are different. The feeling of genuine connection and relatability is not taken away just because there is a screen instead of a face-to-face interaction. These influencers provide society with a new form of communication and facilitate discourse to form public opinion; consequently, "those who exert influence ... have an important part to play in forming public opinion: they help to do so whenever they express their views. The greater their quality of leadership, the greater is their responsibility to exert it in this way" (CEP, 28).

Because of the globalized nature of the internet, the authority and influence a parish has over its community increasingly diminishes. Geography used to define the spheres of influence

held by the Catholic church and gave order to the community; however, digital media has made way for anyone to access any community or parish all over the globe. For instance, a pastor in Mexico can be giving mass on an Instagram Live that's being watched by a family in Kansas. Influence from members outside of the church also poses an issue. Influencers and other media users can share their ideas and interpretations of the Bible, influencing anyone who consumes their media and giving them a platform to talk about the word of God. The changes brought by modern media logistically change the ways people perceive their church communities, and "by altering the informational characteristics of place, electronic media reshape social situations and social identities" (Meyrowitz, 1985, p.118), giving Catholics a new form of fostering community and changing the authoritative structure of the organization.

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## Question 2, Response #3

Brendan Sculley

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Since the rise of the internet beginning, religious officials have begun to question the role of digital media in traditional faith. As the landscape has continued to grow, throughout the decades, notable figures such as Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have shared an optimistic view on this new technology. To quote the pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio* "There is almost no end to the opportunities for such collaboration" (PCSC 1971, line 99). However, the question that remains to be answered is how one would define a "holy land" in an interconnected world. With the teachings of Christ now able to spread around the world, where would the jurisdiction of the church lie geographically? As digital media has developed, connection to the Catholic faith has grown past the strict boundaries that were once in place, becoming a worldwide network of faith connected to one another via the digital landscape.

Over the past 2 decades, the idea of fully online congregations have become more commonplace across the world. Local churches, the protestant church of St. Mark in Vienna being the primary example of the article from Ralf Peter Reimann titled 'Uncharted Territories':

The Challenges of Digitalization and Social Media for Church and Society ", began to livestream their processions for an exclusively online audience. These streams then became publicly available to those outside of the community that surrounds this church geographically, allowing for outside viewers to take part in the services through the digital landscape. As Reimann (2017) states "Although the video stream does not stop at the parish boundaries, the centre of the life and work of the parish remains the local congregation; but its scope has been expanded by the internet." (p. 79). Though the church itself will always remain rooted in one central location, its influence through the internet now has the potential to expand beyond the physical walls of the congregation.

Moving into the modern era, the focus on utilizing the digital landscape has become more of a focal point in theological studies. To quote the article from Sonny Eli Zaluchu (2024) titled "Digital Religion, Modern Society and the Construction of Digital Theology" "The development of contemporary theology in the digital realm has matched the same level of development in other disciplines. Therefore, theologians and believers have become instrumental in building or creating divine consciousness through digital computing and its accompanying tools." (p.291). In this quote, Zaluchu argues for the development of traditional ideas of faith in the realm of digital media, stating that the discipline requires more attention than before. With the digital landscape becoming more of a focus in the current decade, the idea of a "Digital Religion," a form of worship that is not bound by a single location, has begun to take shape. This in turn has created a new medium of religious practice that continues to be refined to this day.

The opening line of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications' address entitled "The Church and the Internet states, "The Church's interest in the Internet is a particular expression of her longstanding interest in the media of social communication." (Foley 2002, line 1). The continual focus on utilizing the internet as a tool to expand the influence of the church is an extension of this idea, reflected in the enthusiasm shown towards the digital landscape by the leaders of the Vatican. Through this enthusiasm, we have seen new levels of direct engagement

with the digital landscape via social media than we have seen previously. As the church continues to utilize new technology, it in turn attracts new generations all across the world, thus allowing the faith to remain prevalent in the modern day and into the foreseeable future.

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## Question 2, Response #4

Abby Taylor

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In the context of ministry, the notion of jurisdiction refers to the influence and governance obtained by religious authorities over their designated congregations. As the environment flourishes digitally, there are a multitude of adaptations required by spiritual leaders in order to maintain fellowship. While preserving their core values, religious leaders may adopt modernized worship methods by maintaining digital accessibility, integrity, and opportunity in order to evolve with the digital environment.

Firstly, it can be noted that spiritual authorities must adapt to the digital environment by ensuring digital media is accessible for communal engagement. Digital media encompasses various means of digital communication, including visual, textual, or audible content for the utilization of the public. Therefore, by ministerial authorities facilitating their respective communities' access to digital content, the notion of jurisdiction can adapt to a digital environment through several methods, including hosting virtual worship services, implementing digitally interactive activities, or creating web-based group discussions to strengthen the digital community within the church.

Spiritual leaders must both promote and maintain integrity within a digital environment in order to foster evolution without straying from the Church's ideals. Namely, *Communio et Progressio* is a document that exemplifies the responsibilities of the Catholic church to both inform and be informed, remain truthful, and uphold public opinion as necessary for adapting the

church to a digital environment. As stated in *Communio et Progressio*, "Every communication must comply with certain essential requirements and these are sincerity, honesty and truthfulness" (Pope Paul VI, 1971, para. 17). Therefore, in the context of the Catholic church, digital media integrity can be upheld by obtaining truthfulness and transparency, safeguarding the validity of the information consumed or distributed by the Church. Thus, the notion of religious jurisdiction may digitally enhance their means of worship while guaranteeing that the integrity of the faith's primary values are respected.

In prioritizing the preservation of their religion's integrity, ministerial jurisdiction can adapt to the digital environment by leveraging opportunities to expand the church's following. When considering *The Church and Internet*, a document issued by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, there are numerous opportunities for the Church to benefit from digital media. As mentioned by Pope Paul II, "the Church 'would feel guilty before the Lord' if it failed to use the media for evangelization" (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2002, para. 4). Therefore, spiritual authorities may embrace a digital environment by utilizing it for evangelization, aiming to both expand the following of the Church and deepen spiritual relationships within the religious community.

The notion of jurisdiction may adapt to a digital environment mainly linked to geographic territories in the context of ministry through a multitude of methods. In order to both expand and sustain their respective congregations, spiritual authorities must maintain their responsibility to enable access to, uphold integrity within, and capitalize on the opportunities that coincide with digital media. Thus, religious leaders obtain the potential to broaden their reach across geographic boundaries by adapting their worship practices to a digitally advanced environment, all while upholding their foundational principles.

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## Question 2, Response #5

Emma Vergara

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Within the church, there are specific borders in which power or jurisdiction align. The Catholic church has levels of grades which make up the hierarchy of the church (Dunin-Borkowski, 1910). Dioceses are the geographical territory in which the Bishop is assigned and responsible for, making them the head of the community in turn. What becomes an issue within this, is the spread of community within this “World Wide Web,” in digital media. With Digital Media, there are no definite borders in which the Bishops, and therefore continuous levels, can be assigned and mandated amongst. The question of how one can adapt to this borderless community arises. This argument can be answered through an evaluation of what “unity” is defined in the Catholic Church tradition, and how this “unity” can be applied within this borderless community. This allows one to investigate the requirements of advancing towards the adaptations that might be necessary in order to utilize this World Wide Web for the benefit of the Catholic Church and the spread of the “Good News.”

In the “pastoral instruction” titled, *Communio et Progressio*, the Catholic Church through the Vatican lays out core values within the church in relation towards the ever-growing age of social communication, or media. While this 1971 document written by the Second Vatican Council does not explicitly talk about the current world’s digital media, it follows the same ideals and concepts that aligns with the Catholic Church’s approach to new media like the world of digital media. One of the most significant themes within the Catholic Church’s approach that is significantly highlighted in the *Communio et Progressio*, is encouraging unity within the use of media, and having that as a high priority. The beginning statement of the instruction is a highly capitalized “THE UNITY AND ADVANCEMENT” of men and is the “chief aim” and use of social communication. They follow with the iteration that all lives are impacted and changed by “the means of communication. (c.p. 1, O’Connor, 1971).” This opening showcases the notion social communication, or media, is a significant social marker in which people come together and form a sense of unity. The Second Vatican Council begins their instruction with this idea and continues the importance of community throughout. This idea of “unity” is also represented in *The Church and the Internet*, spread from the Vatican. Throughout this article, there is a consistent explanation of “community,” and the importance of community within all sense of the Catholic church (c.p. 3, J. Foley, 2002). Ultimately, within *The Church and the Internet*, they come to the conclusion to understand unity as an aspect of internet communication, and can “strengthen the bonds of unity between them (c.p. 10, J. Foley, 2002).” There is a hope to utilize the digital platform of the internet to further “inform the world of [the Church’s] beliefs (c.p. 10, J. Foley, 2002).”

Within these concepts and ideas, there should be an adjustment and adaptation that aligns with the Catholic values. While there is a struggle with understanding how the Catholic community should align with the lack of physical and geographical boundaries within digital media, by looking into the hope for the advancement of unity, the Catholic church must open their eyes to possible adaptations of the way jurisdiction can be held, especially in the online community. This new age of evangelization through communication within the digital world is titled as “digital Catholicism,” showcasing the spread of Catholic religion and values, i.e. the “Good News” (Lynch, 2015). This calls back to the idea of informing the church’s beliefs

through the digital location mentioned in *The Church and the Internet*. Following that, a journal by Peter Szigeti argues that “territorial jurisdiction” of the church has always been on rocky waters and is not simply struggling because of “technological revolutions (Szigeti, 2017).” He even states that “doctrines of jurisdiction in international law should be reformulated to reflect the illusory nature of the territorial-extraterritorial division (Szigeti, 2017).” This deepens the understanding that jurisdiction should be adjusted accordingly to the revolutions that advance technology.

With this information and understanding, the Catholic church should adjust to the new digital age and approach it with unity that they value and crave within their religious principles. In order to further their community and collectiveness to share the “Good News” in which they are called to “announce” in “all places at all times,” they must advance further and away from the strict geographic jurisdiction needed in physical communities, and approach changes with this idea of creating a community to share their values with the world” (c.p. 126, O’Connor, 1971).

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### **QUESTION 3**

What are practical recommendations or proposals regarding the church's mission in the digital environment?

## Question 3, Response #1

Ava Bell

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In today's rapidly evolving world, many communities must come together to become aware of these changes and explore various ways to adapt. One of the most significant advancements today is the rise of social media, a powerful tool that people use worldwide to communicate, interact, and share information. While many people might argue that simply sharing details about events or information could help grow religious communities, social media is a more effective strategy. As Nabozny (2022) noted, "While some may propose that sharing information about events or conferences may grow the church, there is a way that could help without even incurring much cost." However, it is still underutilized and not fully appreciated as an effective tool: social media". Religious communities must embrace and recognize the potential of social media, seeking its benefits to enhance their spiritual teachings and engage their members. Adapting to the recent rise and innovations in social media, such as podcasts, online sermons, and influencer culture, religious communities will broaden their reach, ultimately connecting with a more diverse audience, regardless of age, location, or background.

As said in the influential document *Communio et Progressio*, through media, religious communities are finding ways to communicate with one another. It states, "The modern media offer new ways of confronting people with the message of the Gospel, allowing Christians, even when they are far away, to share in sacred rites, worship, and ecclesiastical functions." In this way, they can bind the Christian community closer together and invite everyone to participate in the intimate life of the Church." (C et. P 128). Through various media platforms, religious groups can create greater inclusivity than ever before and bridge distances for individuals, fostering a more connected and aware community.

One of the easiest ways for a religious community to accomplish digital evangelism, which is sharing the Christian gospel through online platforms, is through audio and video podcasts. There has been a rise in podcasts within the past couple of years. They have become increasingly popular as they offer a convenient way for individuals to engage with various content genres "on the go." This specific media platform allows religious communities a unique opportunity to share the Gospel intimately. Pastors and church leaders can discuss scripture, offer advice and reflections, and answer religious and theological questions on practicing religion and living out the faith in people's everyday lives. The platform of podcasts also allows many to Listen on their schedules, enabling more people to consume the content on their way to work, while they workout out or in other daily routines, making it easier to integrate their religious and spiritual teachings into their busy lives. By embracing the use of podcasts, religious communities and individuals can evangelize and push for spiritual and religious growth through digital media. With the rise of social media comes a new phenomenon: influencer culture. Influencer culture has taken over the media landscape, as a growing number of young adults turn to other influencers for life content, advice, and inspiration on navigating their own independent lives.

As said in influential document *The Church and the Internet*, "...This is necessary in order to communicate effectively with people—especially young people—who are steeped in the experience of this new technology, and also in order to use it well." (CI 5) With that said, religious influencers have also made their mark in the realm of influencing and content creation. Countless religious influencers can be found online discussing various spiritual topics, sharing

insights from church teachings, and offering advice on strengthening your relationship with God. From online sermons to advice sessions on deepening your relationship with the Lord, each religious influencer provides unique insights on faith, attracting hundreds and thousands of subscribers eager to engage with their content. This growing trend of religious influencers specifically highlights how religion has adapted to the modern media world as they find new ways to engage and connect with viewers in meaningful conversations about their religion and faith.

Overall, the evolving world of social media and media in general offers a unique, powerful tool for religious communities. Being able to spread the message of the Gospel so quickly and mainstream through podcasts and online content will only help build and strengthen religious communities. As said in *Communio et Progressio*, "... the media have the potential to unite believers, even across vast distances..." (C et. P 128). The core value at the heart and center of digital evangelism is community. As we learned from Professor Paul Soukup, "Community is the relationships we have with one another". By embracing the media world, religious communities can create stronger bonds and even invite others outside of their community to understand and learn more about the Gospel, regardless of location. Social media is an opportunity to grow a global community based on faith and love for the Lord.

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## Question 3, Response #2

M.E. Harp

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The mission of the Catholic Church in a digital environment can be defined as an extension of its evangelization efforts, through the use of digital media, to spread the Gospel (Pastwa, 2023). Practical recommendations regarding the Church's mission in the digital environment include expanding its online catechesis efforts, establishing online communities, and creating official guidelines for social media engagement. These efforts align with the Church's broader mission of evangelization, ensuring that faith-based teachings remain accessible and relevant in an increasingly digital society.

Catholicism emphasizes that written texts, as vehicles for the Word of God, shape the intellectual and spiritual life of the Church and play an essential role in helping believers understand their faith and apply it to their daily lives (McBrien, 1994). However, in the digital age, access to these texts has transformed. Digital media provides new avenues for communication and faith formation, allowing the Church to reach a global audience more efficiently than ever before. *Communio et Progressio*, a Vatican II pastoral instruction, encourages the Church to engage with emerging forms of communication, including newspapers, radio, and digital media, to further its mission. Recognizing the power of digital communication, the document states that these forms of media are "gifts from God" (CetP 2) that can unite people and promote the Church's evangelization efforts. The internet serves as a powerful medium for fostering faith-based discussions, enhancing catechesis, and building virtual faith communities that transcend geographical barriers. Expanding online catechesis efforts is crucial for ensuring that faith formation remains accessible to believers in a digital era. According to *Communio et Progressio*, the Church has a responsibility to use all available means to spread its teachings, emphasizing that media should serve to educate and inspire faith (CetP 126). Digital platforms allow for interactive catechesis programs, live-streamed Bible studies, and online theological discussions that cater to individuals who may not have access to traditional in-person instruction. *Towards Full Presence* further supports this by highlighting the importance of forming digital spaces that cultivate knowledge and spiritual growth while remaining grounded in the Church's teachings. Establishing online communities is another essential aspect of digital evangelization. As *Towards Full Presence* states, social media creates "an environment where people interact, share experiences, and cultivate relationships unlike ever before" (PASM 1). The Church can take advantage of this by fostering online, faith-based groups where individuals can find support, engage in prayer, and discuss theological matters. *Communio et Progressio* affirms that media should be used to strengthen Christian community and unity, ensuring that believers can maintain a sense of belonging even when physically apart (CetP 22).

By embracing this vision, the Church can enhance its mission and provide a spiritual refuge in the digital realm. Finally, establishing official guidelines for social media engagement ensures that the Church's digital presence aligns with its core teachings and ethical standards. *Towards Full Presence* warns against the potential risks of online discourse, such as misinformation and hostility, urging the Church to promote respectful and meaningful digital interactions. *Communio et Progressio* similarly calls for the ethical use of media, stating that the Church must guide its followers in using digital platforms responsibly (CetP 109). Clear guidelines on digital engagement will help the Church maintain its credibility and foster a positive online environment for faith-driven discussions. A key aspect of Catholicism is the value placed on community. As Hollenbach (2002) notes, Catholicism advocates for a

communal approach to social life, where the dignity of the individual is realized and protected within the context of community. The digital environment offers opportunities to reinforce this communal aspect by creating spaces where believers can support and educate one another. Through structured online catechesis programs, faith-based forums, and official Church social media channels, the Catholic Church can foster a stronger sense of belonging among its followers while maintaining doctrinal integrity.

Ultimately, integrating digital media into the Church's evangelization mission aligns with its historical tradition of using various forms of communication to spread the Gospel. By actively engaging with digital platforms, the Church can continue to be a guiding force in modern society, ensuring that faith remains accessible, relevant, and deeply rooted in the communal values of Catholicism.

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## Question 3, Response #3

Faith Palm

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The Catholic Church, dating back to ancient times, believes in God as its ultimate authority, while holding firm to the Bible as their text that provides truth and guidance. As technology and digital media grow, the Catholic Church sees them as a gift from God to promote unity. Now, the Catholic Church seeks to navigate the digital environment to educate the world religiously and must do so properly and practically. When considering practical recommendations regarding the Catholic Church's mission in the digital environment, a proposal that can be made is the need to curate online resources for the globe alongside proper education in the use of digital media. To better understand Catholic beliefs and values, it is important to analyze their sacred text and how it applies to their values. The Catholic Church believes the Bible is the word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, with teachings from Jesus Christ. One core value is the belief in humanity's oneness under God, where all are brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Church and the Bible emphasize spreading this message globally to promote religious education and unity. In *Communio Et Progressio*, a pastoral instruction to the Roman Catholic Church, the Church sees the "media as "gifts of God" which, by God's providential design, unite men in brotherhood and allow them to cooperate with God's plan for their salvation" (CetP, 2).

According to *Communio Et Progressio*, the Catholic Church believes God has provided media platforms to unite society and support humanity's salvation. In the document, *The Church and Internet*, Pope John Paul II illustrates the "positive capacities of the Internet to carry religious information and teaching beyond all barriers and frontiers" (C&I, 4). The Pope identifies the unique opportunity the Catholic Church has to bring about religious education to the globe, getting around all barriers that could have prevented the Church in the past from carrying out such education. Now that the Catholic Church values digital media platforms as a tool to be harnessed to religiously educate and unite humanity under God, it is vital to analyze practical recommendations regarding the Catholic Church's mission in the digital environment to foster unity and religious education. In an article comparing the Roman Catholic Church and its embrace of communication through digital media, Pope Pius XI expresses his optimism that if digital media is "properly directed and used, it could become a great aid in public instruction and education" religiously (Iheanacho, 6). To effectively use digital media for religious education, users should be properly educated through supervision, guidance, and safety awareness. The Catholic Church could also curate online resources to promote spiritual learning and growth globally.

According to a journal, analyzing catholic religious texts, Pope Francis emphasizes the "significant development in the Church's engagement with media is the rise of online streaming and virtual platforms for religious services and events" (Lam, 167). With the proper education, this development in virtual streaming religious services and events could grow into the Catholic Church building a universal website or social media platform with a multitude of resources for believers and non-believers to grow their faith or evangelize the lost while fostering an online community.



Overall, the Catholic Church's mission is to spread the good news of the Gospel through religious education to then unify humanity under God. With the new age of digital media, the Catholic Church has had to adapt and reevaluate its beliefs and mission to understand how digital media can be of benefit to the church. While digital media provides the Catholic Church with a platform to religiously educate the globe and foster unity through online communities, it is crucial to propose how this can be more beneficial and efficient for the Catholic Church. By educating the Catholic Church in the proper uses of digital media to cultivate an online platform through a website or social media presence, the church could efficiently fulfill its mission.

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## Afterward

# Afterward

Meg Boone

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As Professor Campbell's Research Assistant, my role in this project was to oversee the creation of the eBook by collecting and editing information from each of our student contributors. This is my third eBook project with the university, and Dr. Campbell and I have enjoyed each one more and more. It has been an incredible opportunity to work with exceptionally talented students from Texas A&M University, as they are all hardworking and willing to produce outstanding analyses. The collection of essays represents more than just a class assignment or simple academic reflections. It is a conversation between students and the evolution of the Catholic faith.

Each contribution in this book was written by a student in the Religious Communications course (COMM 480) taught by Dr. Heidi Campbell. These students approached the subject with academic depth but also with a curiosity to understand the Catholic Church in a digital age. While reading the essays, I was reminded of the importance and influence of the digital age on not just technology but also religion. The church's presence in spaces must still be rooted in tradition and sanctity but also open to transition as the digital age continues to expand.

Whether you are here reading your own essay in a published book or you're a religious scholar looking for insights from this generation, this book offers new perspectives that inspire new thoughts and perspectives. I hope that this book has inspired new discussion among Church leaders, communicators, and academics alike. My aspiration is that it serves as a reminder that the future of the church's digital presence is shaped not only by theology but also by innovation and a desire to move forward into the contemporary digital world.

## Contributors Biographies

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**Ava Bell** is in her last semester at Texas A&M University, majoring in Telecommunications Media Studies and minoring in Sports Management. Post-graduation, she plans to attend Columbia University in New York City in their Sports Business Graduate program.

**Madelyn Brandt** is a senior Communications major who plans to pursue a career in software sales.

**M.E. Harp** is a senior at Texas A&M, studying Communications, and will be a legal recruiter upon graduation.

**Sheyla Hildaglo** is a senior Bachelor of Arts Communications major with a Spanish minor at Texas A&M University. She currently holds the position of Social Media Officer for PRISM, a Public Relations, Influencing, and Social Media student organization, and a wardrobe and set stylist for The A-Line Magazine, a fashion and lifestyle magazine student organization on campus. She hopes to pursue a career in Creative Directing or Marketing Communications.

**Morgan Hunter** is a junior at Texas A&M University from Sunnyvale, Texas, and is set to graduate in 2026.

**Andreina Mireles** is a 2025 graduate of Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Science in Telecommunication Media Studies and a Minor in Business, planning on working in the Digital Marketing field.

**Faith Palm** is currently a senior at Texas A&M University, graduating in May 2025. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communications. Outside of school, she is a volunteer leader for an outreach ministry called YoungLife, and a full-time photographer. Post-graduation she will be continuing photography and pursuing YoungLife staff.

**Madeline Osborn** is a graduating member of Texas A&M's Class of 2025 with a Communications major, and plans to pursue a career as a collegiate Director of Operations.

**Grayson Philips** is majoring in Communications and will graduate in may of 2025. He has previously been involved in several organizations, notably Young Americans for Freedom and Pro-life Aggies.

**Claire Russo** is a senior communication major at Texas A&M University. Following graduation, she hopes to have a career in corporate communication and marketing.

**Brendan Sculley** is a Senior in his final semester at Texas A&M and is pursuing a degree in Telecommunications. As of right now, he is a full time student and a member of the Texas A&M Tabletop Troupe, also known as T-Cubed.

**Holly Simpsen** is a senior Communication Major and Psychology minor at Texas A&M and plans on graduating this spring.

**Megan Steinberg** is a communications major in the class of 2025 at Texas A&M University and her goal is to go to work for Texas Instruments.

**Abigail Taylor** is a 2025 graduate of Texas A&M University, majoring in Communications with an interest in leadership and planning to pursue a career related to digital media.

**Grant Tomlinson** is a senior Telecommunications Media Studies major and a professional musician. Post-graduation he plans to make a living pursuing music.

**Ashlynn Veach** is a senior majoring in Telecommunications Media Studies with a minor in Business. She is a Chi Omega at Texas A&M and loves to spend time with her friends and family. She plans on graduating in May and moving back to her hometown, Austin, Texas, with hopes of pursuing a career in food and beverage Marketing.

**Emma Vergara** is a Class of 2025 Communications major at Texas A&M University with plans to pursue full-time ministry after graduation.