Council of Major Superior of Women Religious

The New Media and Religious Life:

How an Awareness of the Benefits and Risks of Electronic Media Assists and Hinders the Consecrated Religious in Communicating the Love of Jesus Christ

Workbook

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Introduction

The Catholic Church embraces all that is good in new Internet technologies and seeks to engage with persons using this electronic media as a means of inviting them into deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. Pope Benedict XVI in his World Communications Day Message, 2010 stated "Consecrated men and women working in the media have a special responsibility for opening the door to new forms of encounter, maintaining the quality of human interaction and showing concern for individuals and their genuine spiritual needs. They can help the men and women of our digital age to sense the Lord's presence, to grow in expectation and hope, and to draw near to the word of God, which offers salvation and fosters an integral human development."

The Church wishes to utilize electronic media opportunities as a means of communicating the love of Jesus Christ to people. In religious communities, these opportunities include the potential to underpin and enhance their common life. Electronic media, however, can also present the risk of becoming a virtual substitute for a religious sister's actual participation in community life. This DVD is designed to offer religious communities engaging in the new technologies a broad set of principles outlining some of the influences electronic media can have on the individual religious sister and on community life.

The springboard for these principles on the influence of electronic media is the book, *The Foundations of Religious Life: Revisiting the Vision,* which offers the framework for religious life in its contemporary expression. The presenters will consider how electronic media affects communion and community and the proper place of electronic media in apostolic mission.

This DVD program is divided into eight sessions. Each of the sessions is approximately one hour and includes two presentations; one by a sister-psychiatrist and one by a sister-philosopher, followed by a period of discussion and questions. For flexibility, these sessions could be arranged in groups of four hours over two days with breaks for lunch, for example; or eight separate meetings on eight separate days. Please adapt each session to meet the needs of your particular community. A workbook is provided outlining the basic principles, resources, examples, and questions for reflection presented in the DVD. You may choose to reword or add questions that are more appropriate to your situation as well as eliminate some that are not pertinent to your situation.

The presenters for this program are: Sr. Marysia Weber, R.S.M., D.O. and Sr. Mary Prudence Allen, R.S.M., Ph.D.

Session I: The Church and Electronic Media

Sister Mary Prudence: Part A: What does the Church say about Electronic Media?

- ➢ **First Phase of Church teaching (1936-1957): Be Vigilant About the New Media**

  - ❖ In 1950, Pope Pius XII, requested a serious study of the media.

  "It is not an exaggeration to say that the future of modern society and the stability of its inner life depend in large part on the maintenance of an equilibrium between the strength of the techniques of communication and the capacity of the individual's own reaction." (*February 19, 1950 address to Catholic Journalists in Rome)*

- ➢ **Second Phase of Church Teaching (1963-1971): Understand Objective Moral Norms for the Media**

  - ❖ In 1963, Pope Paul VI, in a decree of the Second Vatican Council stated:

  "Moral norms for the media: information or news should always be true and complete, within the bounds of justice and charity, and proper and decent; art should always be subservient to the primacy of the objective moral order; and the portrayal of moral evil should always reveal and glorify 'grand dimensions of truth and goodness'" (*Inter Mirifica*: On the Media of Social Communications).

- ➢ **Third Phase of Church Teaching (1979-2010): Take Action on Particular Media Areas**

  - ❖ The following Chart identifies Church Teaching on the media with particular relevance for religious life:

Year	Author	Title
Phase I 1930	Pope Pius XI	Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri* On Christian Education #90-91
1936	Pope Pius XI	Encyclical *Vigilanti Cura* On the Motion Picture
1950	Pope Pius XII	Address "L'importance de la press" to Catholic Journalists in Rome for their International Conference
1957	Pope Pius XII	Encyclical *Miranda Prorsus* On the Communications Field: Motion Pictures, Radio, Television
Phase II 1963	Pope Paul VI	Decree *Inter Mirifica* On the Media of Social Communications
1971	Pastoral Council on Social Communications (PCSC)	*Communio et Progressio* On the Means of Social Communication written by order of the Second Vatican Council 5th World Communications Day
Phase III 1979	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 13th World Communications Day: Social Communications for the Development of the Child
1980	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 14th World Communications Day: Social Communications and the Family

1981	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 15th World Communications Day: Social Communications in the Service of Responsible Human Freedom
1989	PCSC	Pornography and Violence in Communications Media: A Pastoral Response
1990	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 24th World Communications Day: The Christian Message in a Computer Culture
1991	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 25th World Communications Day: The Communications Media and the Unity and Progress of the Human Family
1992	PCSC	*Aetatis Novae* On Social Communications on the Twentieth Anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*
1992	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 26th World Communications Day: The Proclamation of Christ's Message in the Communications Media
1993	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 27th World Communications Day: Videocassettes and Audiocassettes in the Formation of Culture and of Conscience
1994	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 28th World Communications Day: Television and Family: Guidelines for Good Viewing
1997	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 31st World Communications Day Communicating Jesus: The Way, the Truth and the Life
1999	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 33rd World Communications Day: Mass Media: a Friendly Companion for Those in Search of the Father
2000	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 34th World Communications Day: Proclaiming Christ in the Media at the Dawn of the New Millennium
2000	PCSC	Ethics in Communication
2001	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 35th World Communications Day: Preach from the Housetops: The Gospel in the Age of Global Communication
2002	PCSC	The Church and the Internet
2002	PCSC	Ethics in Internet
2002	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 36th World Communications Day: Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel
2004	Pope John Paul II	Message for the 38th World Communications Day: The Media and the Family: A Risk and a Richness
2005	Pope John Paul II	Apostolic Letter: The Rapid Development To Those Responsible for Social Communications
2007	Pope Benedict XVI	Message for the 41st World Communications Day: Children and the Media: A Challenge for Education
2009	Pope Benedict XVI	Message for the 43rd World Communications Day: "New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship."
2010	Pope Benedict XVI	Message for the 44th World Day of Communications: "The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word"

Sister Marysia: Part B: The History of the Internet

➢ **The Internet: Historical Stepping Stones**

➢ **Important Distinctions: World Wide Web and Internet**

❖ "The Internet has a number of striking features. It is instantaneous, immediate, worldwide, decentralized, interactive, endlessly expandable in contents and outreach, flexible, and adaptable to a remarkable degree. It is egalitarian, in the sense that anyone with the necessary equipment and modest technical skill can be an active presence in cyberspace, declare his or her message to the world, and demand a hearing. It allows individuals to indulge in anonymity, role-playing, and fantasizing as well as to enter into community with others and engage in sharing. According to users' tastes, the Internet lends itself equally well to active participation and to passive absorption into 'a narcissistic, self-referential world of stimuli with near-narcotic effect'. It can be used to break down the isolation of individuals and groups or to deepen it." (John P. Foley, Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Internet* #8, 2002)

➢ **Pope John Paul II on the Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel.**

❖ Pope John Paul II, in his World Communications Day Message of 2002 wrote: "[I]n these troubled times, let me ask: how can we ensure that this wondrous instrument first conceived in the context of military operations can now serve the cause of peace? Can it favor that culture of dialogue, participation, solidarity and reconciliation without which peace cannot flourish? The Church believes it can; and to ensure that this is what will happen she is determined to enter this new forum, armed with the Gospel of Christ, the Prince of Peace." (Pope John Paul II, *Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel, #* 4 World Communications Day, 2002).

Discussion Questions for Session I:

1. How can you become more vigilant about the effects of media you use?

    a. What are some examples of where you see media working for the good in your religious community and apostolate?

    b. What are some examples of where you see media causing what you would consider as bad effects in your religious community or apostolate?

2. Are you aware of how actively the Church was engaged with electronic media from its very beginning?

3. What does the Second Vatican Council ask of you personally in relation to the media?

4. What would you consider to be an appropriate frequency to check email?

5. What would you consider to be a reasonable amount of time to respond to an email?

6. What determines whether you email, text, phone, or write a letter to communicate with someone?

7. How have you used/can you use email to evangelize?

8. What are advantages and disadvantages of reading and broadcasting "touching stories" or bothersome news that people disseminate via the Internet?

**Sister Mary Prudence: Part A: New Media and the Internal
Operations of the Individual Religious Sister**

➢ **The Sister as a Soul/Body Unity in Relation With Other Sisters**

❖ Pope John Paul II emphasized the communal aspects of the positive gift of our external senses: "On this Day, we celebrate the blessings of speech, of hearing and of sight, which enable us to emerge from our isolation and loneliness in order to exchange with those around us the thoughts and sentiments which arise in our hearts." (26th *World Communications Day, 1992)*

➢ **The Lower Operations of the Soul as Form of the Body Organizing Life, Growth, Senses, and Passions**

❖ "The fact is that it is increasingly difficult to protect one's eyes and ears from images and sounds which arrive through the media unexpectedly and uninvited…Public opinion has been shocked at how easily the advanced communication technologies can be exploited by those whose intentions are evil". (*31st World Communications Day, 1997)*

➢ **The Higher Operations of the Soul as Spirit: Intellect, Conscience, and Will**

❖ Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist, Sister M. Timothy Prokes, in her article "The Christian Anthropology of Vatican II and Virtual Reality," stated that, "It is a time of immense contrasts. In St. Peter's Square, a hundred thousand waited for a wisp of smoke over the Sistine Chapel, yet in many hands were cell phones, readied for immediate transmission of the ancient sign."

Sister Marysia: Part B: The History of Mobile Cell Phones

➢ **Distinguishing Cell Phones from Wire Phones**
❖ "The Church considers it to be one of her most urgent tasks to provide the means for training recipients [of electronic media] in Christian principles. This also is a service to social communication. The well-trained recipient will be able to take part in the dialogue promoted by the media and will demand high quality in communications." (*Communio et Progressio,* On the Means of Social Communication, #107, 1971)

➢ **Text Messaging and its Effects on Language, Driving, and Relationships**

❖ Text Messaging:
1. The term "text messaging" or "texting" refers to brief written messages between mobile phones, over cellular networks.
2. Messages are usually 160 characters from mobile phones.
3. These messages are commonly called SMS, texts or text messages and now include messages containing not only written word, but also images, video and sound content.

Discussion Questions for Session II:

1. In what ways do you see general reading and writing skills changing as a consequence of the practices of the new forms of electronic communication?

    a. In community?

    b. In the apostolate?

    c. In communications with family and friends?

2. How does being constantly available and "on alert" for incoming calls erode our sense of recollection? Our comfort with silence?

3. Make a list of the "Ten Commandments" for good Internet or cell phone use.

4. Why do you think the Church insists that a full understanding of the human person is essential for the proper use of the media?

**Sister Marysia: Part A: Overview: Six Interrelated Psychological Effects that the
                       Internet is Having on Human Behavior**

➢ **Introducing the paradigm and identifying six effects:**

1. Online disinhibition effect
2.   Internet regression
3. Withdrawal/isolation from the social group
4. Erosion of professional decorum and convent enclosure
5. Indiscriminate passive reception of images and information
6. Electronic communication substituting for face-to-face relationships

➢ **First Effect: Online Disinhibition**

❖ An unanticipated psychological effect of regular Internet use is called "online" disinhibition effect:
   o "Show thyself" rather than "know thyself".
   o Refers to a loosening (or complete abandonment) of social and personal restrictions and inhibitions.
   o Users may become more affectionate, more willing to open up to others, less guarded about their emotions in an attempt to achieve the release of emotions.

❖ What contributes to emerging online disinhibition?
   o The improbability of any real life repercussions for online social activity.
   o A format of informal, brief exchanges which capture the average person's short attention span.

➢ **Consider this scenario:**

Sister Eileen is a 41 year old perpetually professed sister whose mother was diagnosed with terminal throat cancer. She emailed families she was in communication with for an upcoming youth conference asking them to pray for her mother. These families emailed her that they would pray a 30 day novena to Saint Faustina for a cure of the cancer. Sister Eileen was most grateful. She was touched by the messages from these lay persons. She set up a blog so that others could read what was being shared. This blog expanded to persons sharing their own stories and concerns, and became a site for sharing prayer requests and intentions amongst these bloggers.

Sister Eileen began to share personal details on her blog that she was hesitant to share with the sisters: her fears and concerns about her mother, her doubts about her faith or the value of suffering, and her affection and gratitude which she was not offering to her sisters who were also supporting her. Sister Eileen took great pride in her blog and spent much time improving it with holy pictures and quotes from various saints. The time spent on the computer contributed to her absence from the common life. She became preoccupied with the touching stories emailed to the blog from various persons. This preoccupation also became a distraction to her prayer life. Not

only did she not bring her sufferings and concerns to her own community, she was not bringing them to Our Lord, either.

Sister Eileen was exhibiting an imbalance in her emotional responses within and outside of community. The document, *Fraternal Life in Community* speaks to the need for psychological balance for true emotional freedom and maturity: "Fraternal life in common requires from all members good psychological balance within which each individual can achieve emotional maturity…one essential element of such growth is emotional freedom, which enables consecrated persons to love their vocation and to love in accordance with their vocation. It is precisely this freedom and this maturity which allows us to live out our affectivity correctly, both inside and outside the community." (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community,* #37, 1994).

Sister Mary Prudence: Part B: Principles for Self-Knowledge

➢ **Distinguishing sense stimuli from spiritual realities.**
➢ **Distinguishing emotionalization of consciousness from spiritual elation.**

❖ First in 1971, just after the Second Vatican Council: "If students for the priesthood and religious in training wish to be part of modern life and also to be effective in their apostolate, they should know how the media work upon the fabric of society and the technique of their use. This knowledge should be an integral part of their ordinary education. Indeed without this knowledge an effective apostolate is impossible in a society which is increasingly conditioned by the media." (*Communio et progression,* #111, 1971)

➢ **Mediation and lack of mediation in religious life.**

❖ And again in the year 2000, "Today everybody needs some form of continuing media education, whether by personal study or participation in an organized program or both. More than just teaching about techniques, media education helps people form standards of good taste and truthful moral judgment, an aspect of conscience formation.

Through her schools and formation programs the Church should provide media education of this kind. Directed originally to institutes of consecrated life, the following words have a broader application: 'A Community aware of the influence of the media, should learn to use them for personal and community growth, with the evangelical clarity and inner freedom of those who have learned to know Christ (cf. Gal 4:17-23). The media propose, and often impose, a mentality and model of life in constant contrast with the Gospel. In this connection, in many areas one hears of the desire of deeper formation in receiving and using the media, both critically and fruitfully.'"(*Fraternal Life in Community,* #34, quoted in PCSC, Ethics in Communications, #25, 2000)

Discussion Questions for Session III:

1. What parameters would you suggest to help sisters guard against the disinhibition effect in use of the Internet?

2. What are appropriate reasons for a consecrated religious to share personal information, thoughts or emotions online?

3. Do you have any fears or concerns about communicating personal information online? If so, what are they?

4. Can you remember examples from your own life of Edith Stein's distinctions between experiences of:

    a. Feverishness?

    b. Vigor?

    c. How were they connected to experiences of the media?

5. Can you remember examples from your own life of Karol Wojtyla's distinctions between experiences of:

    a. Excitement?

    b. Elation?

    c. How were they connected to experiences of the media?

6. Can you remember examples from your own life of the emotionalization of consciousness?

    a. Give one example with no media connection.

    b. Give another example with a media connection.

    c. What steps did you take to regain your center of integration and your objective attitude towards your emotions?

    d. How did your religious life help you in this process?

7. What experiences have you had from unmediated exposure to or temptations to use forms of the new media? What suggestions do you have for your own religious community for this new reality?

Session IV: A Common Effect of Internet Use on Religious Community

Sister Marysia: Part A: Internet Regression

- ❖ Studies have shown that REGRESSION is a common effect upon the behavior of the regular Internet user.
    - o Persons feel free to express themselves in a less restrained manner.
    - o The three signs of Internet regression are called "flaming, flirting and giving".
        - ▪ Persons have angry outbursts on the Internet unlike what they might have face-to-face.
        - ▪ Persons exchange sexual innuendos or overt sexual talk on the Internet not as likely face-to-face.
        - ▪ Persons offer time and energy to respond to questions and requests not likely responded to with such generosity if requested face-to-face.

- ❖ What are Some Factors which Contribute to this Regressive Phenomenon?
    - o Anonymity
    - o Accessibility
    - o Affordability

- ❖ In *Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication,* 1986, Cardinal Baum wrote: "Situations will arise where it is found necessary to find remedies for past excessive use or misuses of the mass media. In such cases, the basic media training course should be conducted in a context of balanced individual and community discipline, designed to compensate for the cultural and spiritual imbalance connected with a prolonged and unbalanced use of mass media." (#19, 1986)

Sister Mary Prudence: Part B: Examinations of Consciousness and Conscience

- ➢ **Effective formation in relation to electronic media.**

    - ❖ "I am conscious of those who constitute the so-called *digital generation* and I would like to share with them, in particular, some ideas concerning the extraordinary potential of the new technologies, if they are used to promote human understanding and solidarity. These technologies are truly a gift to humanity and we must endeavor to ensure that the benefits they offer are put at the service of all human individuals and communities, especially those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable." *(Message for the 43rd World Communications Day, 2009)*

    - ❖ One of the great gifts of religious life is to have our religious superiors dedicated to effective and life-long formation: "Continuing formation, whether in Institutes of apostolic or contemplative life, is an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration. As mentioned above, the formation is not limited to the initial phase…Initial formation, then, should be closely connected with continuing formation, thereby creating a readiness on everyone's part to let themselves be formed every day of their lives." (John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, #69, 1996)

➢ **The <u>Form</u> of the New Media**

➢ **The <u>Content</u> of the New Media**

❖ "Media education should be positive. Children exposed to what is aesthetically and morally excellent are helped to develop appreciation, prudence and the skills of discernment… Beauty, a kind of mirror of the divine, inspires and vivifies young hearts and minds; while ugliness and coarseness have a depressing impact on attitudes and behavior... In the light of truth, authentic freedom is experienced as a definitive response to God's 'yes' to humanity, calling us to choose, not indiscriminately but deliberately, all that is good, true, and beautiful." *(41ˢᵗ World Communications Day, #2-3, 2007)*

➢ **Suggested Approaches to Self-Examination**

Discussion Questions for Session IV:

1. Do your Constitutions, Customs and Guides or written directives from superiors provide guidelines directed toward the necessary balances regarding electronic communications for your Institute?

2. What are other parameters outlined by your community for living the common life that would help prevent or remedy the online regression effect?

3. How can the Evangelical Counsels aid us in avoiding the Internet traps discussed in this session? Give Scripture examples, if applicable.

4. What kind of media education would I like to have?

5. What did I learn so far in these four sessions that I would like to study further?

6. Can I offer any examples of particular responses I have had to the various forms of media, especially the numbing of one's sense by the over-stimulation of another?

7. Can I offer any examples of media experiences I found up-lifting because its form or content were particularly beautiful, good, true, or it had a single purposeful meaning?

Session V: Inauthentic and Authentic Participation in Community Life

Sister Marysia: Part A: Withdrawal/Isolation from Social Group as Inauthentic Participation

Cardinal Baum, in *Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication* wrote: "As an antidote to time-wasting, sometimes even alienating indulgence in superficial media programs, students should be guided to the love and practice of reading, study, silence, and meditation. They should be encouraged, and be provided with the necessary conditions for community dialogue and prayer. This will serve to remedy the isolation and self-absorption caused by the unidirectional communication of the mass media, and will revive the authentic and absolute value proper to the Christian profession and the priestly ministry, particularly those of obedience and evangelical poverty, which the materialist and consumerist vision of human existence offered by the instruments of social communication very often rejects or ignores." (#19, 1986)

❖ The use of electronic media can contribute to withdrawal or isolation from a social group by getting online, which can be motivated by procrastination.

❖ The use of electronic media can become a way of avoiding actual social contact because it is more gratifying or pleasurable.

Sister Prudence: Part B: The Church's Call to Religious to Become Experts in Communion

❖ In 1996 in *Vita Consecrata,* Pope John Paul II actually entrusted this task to us: "The Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of spreading the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries, by opening or continuing a dialogue in charity…" (#51) (*Foundations,* Chapter 4)

❖ It is essential for religious to understand exactly how a spirituality of communion relates to our specific vocation to religious life, because in the 2002 document, *Starting Afresh in Christ*, "we are reminded that one of the tasks of consecrated life today is that of *spreading the spirituality of communion*, first of all in their internal life and then in the Church community…" (#28)

❖ The PCSC in *Ethics in Internet* repeats a definition of the common good from *Gaudium et Spes* #26 (see also *CCC* #1906) that can help us evaluate how each of the examples above contribute: "The common good—'the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily'" (#3). To this principle is added a complementary one from *Ethics in Communications* "the fundamental ethical principle is this: The human person and the human community are the end and measure of the use of the media of social communication; communication should be by persons to persons for the integral development of persons." (#21).

❖ To conclude this introductory session on communal aspects of the new media, Pope Benedict XVI offers a profound reflection on how God can enter into our availability in a radical way that transforms us, and draws us to Him. From *Values in a Time of Upheaval*:

> Yes, we are entitled to rejoice that God exists, that he has shown himself to us and that he never leaves us alone. It is a comfort to know the telephone numbers [and I add, the email addresses] of friends and good people; this means that they are never very far away from us, never completely absent. We can phone them, and they can phone us. God's incarnation in Christ tells us that God has written our names in his address book, so to speak. We can call him, without needing money or technology. He is always within reach of our voices. Thanks to baptism and confirmation, we belong to his family, and he is always on the line: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt 28:20).
>
> … Jesus promises the Spirit of truth (John 16:13), and he gives him the name 'Paraclete' several times in the course of the same discourse. What does this mean? In Latin, this word is translated *consolator*… The word *consolator* tells us that we are never completely alone, never completely abandoned by love. Through the Holy Spirit, God has entered our solitude, and he opens a breach in its wall. This is the true consolation, not only a consolation in words, but a consolation in the power of reality. (pp. 163-165).

❖ Consider this example:

Sister Sarah was a patient advocate at a Catholic hospital. She was not responding to messages or complaints. She was missing meetings. Her paperwork was late or incomplete. All of this was because she was caught up in online relationships that had nothing to do with work. She complained that real life was "paper work and angry, demanding patients and staff…nothing but headaches." The Internet was more interesting, less troublesome and could be accessed when she wanted, without angry reactions from other people.

The document, *Fraternal Life in Community* states: "Ours is a time for edification and constant building. It is always possible to improve and to walk together towards a community that is able to live in forgiveness and love. Communities cannot avoid all conflicts. The unity which they must build is a unity established at the price of reconciliation. Imperfection in communities ought not to discourage us." (#26)

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Discussion Questions for Session V:

1. What have been valuable online recreational activities?

2. Have parameters been outlined indicating appropriate use of electronic media for socialization?

3. If so, what are they? If not, what do you think are appropriate parameters for your community?

4. What do you think about the Church's mandate to religious to become living signs and architects of a spirituality of communion for the Church and the world?

5. What examples can you give of how in my religious institute the new media helps build the spirituality of communion?

6. What examples can you give of how in your religious institute uses of new media has interfered with or harmed a spirituality of communion?

7. What suggestions can you come up with for helping your institute in the area of solidarity and the common good with respect to various forms of new media?

Session VI: Boundaries and Electronic Media

Sister Marysia: Part A: Erosion of Professional Decorum and Convent Enclosure

❖ "[T]he Internet radically redefines a person's psychological relationship to time and space. Attention is riveted on what is tangible, useful, instantly available; the stimulus for deeper thought and reflection may be lacking… Moreover, as a forum in which practically everything is acceptable and almost nothing is lasting, the Internet favors a relativistic way of thinking and sometimes feeds the flight from personal responsibility and commitment… Yet human beings have a vital need for time and inner quiet to ponder and examine life and its mysteries… Understanding and wisdom are the fruit of a contemplative eye upon the world, and do not come from a mere accumulation of facts, no matter how interesting. They are the result of an insight which penetrates the deeper meaning of things in relation to one another and to the whole of reality." (Pope John Paul II, *Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel,* # 4 World Communications Day, 2002)

❖ Consider this example:

A sister was concerned that she prays for the needs of the world. She would be on the computer in the early morning checking for current news. Whenever there was a question of what the current news report was, sister was able to give a detailed update. She would often have her email open during the day to avoid missing new messages; some messages were work related and other messages were not.

The effect? She was late with her "ordinary" work or if she did get it in on time, it would be "under the gun" that she would get it done. When the issue was addressed by her superiors, she could not see how it was affecting her work. Whenever a project was given, she would first want to research it online. This can be helpful, but even when making a simple certificate for a teen retreat, it had to be a special down-loaded photo that took an exorbitant amount of time to create. Sister's decision to ignore her superior's directives on her use of the Internet in the apostolate impeded her ability to function harmoniously and effectively in the apostolate. Her focus was "perfectionism"—staying current gave her a sense of security or a sense of power…not true self-worth or self-governance.

❖ Inappropriate familiarity with strangers or acquaintances can erode the boundaries between work and recreation, i.e., the erosion of professional decorum.

❖ Religious can become over-involved with family while living at their convent through email, i.e., the breakdown of the convent enclosure.

❖ Consider this example:

A sister became anxious if she did not email her family to let her parents know what happened during the day at the convent and apostolate. She felt compelled to email her family every evening for fear that they would worry about her or become angry if they did not hear from her.

She was not saying anything inappropriate, but this communication controlled some of her attention and was detrimental to her vocation. Email and Internet can become distracting at the very least, and can erode a sister's prayer and community participation.

❖ Mother Agnes Donovan, S.V. and Sister Mary Elizabeth Wusinich, S.V. in *The Foundations of Religious Life*, p. 27-28, wrote:

"Touched by God's love, called into a deep, personal relationship with him alone as the source, center, and goal of one's life, the person who hands [his or] her life completely over to the Lord to be set apart for him alone gives up worldly riches, the possibility of exclusive affection with another human being, and makes the supreme sacrifice of his or her own will. What is left is the person—stripped of any status gained from family background, education, worldly achievements, or possessions acquired. Admittedly, the renunciation of many natural human goods can be the source of personal suffering, but a suffering offered for the world in union with Christ, and a sacrifice that does not overwhelm hope. This very renunciation of temporal goods, made in freedom for the sake of the eternal, gives moral authority to the witness of hope offered by religious to the world.

If religious life is engaged fully and authentically, the joy and freedom found in the midst of obvious renunciations is itself a powerful witness to the world. How is such joy and freedom possible? It is precisely through this letting go, and in the purification of heart that follows, that the deepest yearnings of the human heart are awakened: infinite love enduring beyond death, mercy that heals all wounds, and certain hope in eternal life."

Sister Prudence: The Church's Call to Religious to Become Experts in Communion

❖ In laws governing living structures in the real world, each level of reality respects the laws of the lower levels, while at the same time revealing new laws about the structures of the higher level. Bernard Lonergan describes it this way: "Organic, psychic, and intellectual development are not three independent processes. They are interlocked with the intellectual providing a higher integration of the psychic and the psychic providing a higher integration of the organic. Each level involves its own laws…" *(Insight,* 538-542 and 494)

❖ Religious authority includes responsibility for providing the structures such as horarium, convent and enclosures, retreats, to enable a sister to grow in her vocation. It also involves the principle of subsidarity, through which each level of the community fulfils its own responsibility for the common good. Thus, it is the proper work of the authority to make the integration possible, but it is the work of the individual sister to integrate herself. It is through formation dialogue that religious become greatly helped in this process.

❖ PCSC's *Ethics in Communications*: "In all three areas—message, process, structural and systemic issues—the fundamental ethical principle is this: The human person and the human community are the end and measure of the use of the media of social communication; communication should be by persons to persons for the integral development of persons."(#21)

Discussion Questions for Session VI:

1. What is the relevance here of Socrates' quote: "The unexamined life is not worth living"?

2. In addition to directives in your congregation's Rule, what criteria does your Institute employ to guide sisters in their "going outside" of the convent enclosure, either physically or in her communications?

3. Religious Superiors may need to ask themselves questions about how best to address some of the problems which are becoming more evident with respect to structures to protect sacred times and sacred spaces:

   a. Would there be a value to have something like storage bins (like napkin boxes or mail boxes) located outside of sacred spaces like a chapel or sleeping area where a sister could 'park' her cell phone for a period of time?

   b. Would there be a value to setting some sacred times during which email, text messaging, Internet, etc., are not used, such as after Compline until morning prayers are completed, or on Sundays?

   c. Would there be a value in having several different email addresses, one for finances, one for apostolic work, one for personal correspondence, so that each sister receives a smaller number of emails than the flood of emails that sometimes come when there is only one email address for a person to use for different purposes?

   d. When a sister is given a cell phone, IPod, Blackberry, etc. for a specific apostolate within the community, would there be a value in her having a 'back up sister' who could take the instrument regularly for certain periods of time, (much like a physician who is on call sometimes but who has a 'back up' so that she is not always on call)? In other words, how can a religious superior protect a sister to whom she has given an apostolic charge from being always attached to the media necessary for it?

   e. How can a religious superior provide regular sacred times and spaces for a sister who must use electronic media throughout their day (as a school teacher, health care administrator, etc.) to rest in the quiet she needs for integration?

Session VII: Governing the Passions as Consecrated Religious

**Sister Marysia: Part A: Indiscriminate Passive Reception of
                          Images and Information/Concupiscence of the Eyes**

❖ While electronic media can provide useful information, media used solely for pleasure for the reception of information can foster a posture of passivity.

❖ Indiscriminant reception of images and data dulls the mind.
  o Bits of information are passively received but are never integrated as knowledge.
  o If passive reception predominates, emotions may overcome the capacity to reason and the imagination becomes uncontrolled.

❖ CONCUPISCENCE OF THE EYES
  o A form of intemperance.
  o Indulging inquisitiveness of the sensual perceptions of the world.

❖ SEXTING
  o A new and disturbing trend among teens is the creation and distribution of their pornography, often using their cell phone, a practice referred to as "sexting".
  o Sexting is slang for sending sexually explicit or suggestive content between mobile devices using SMS.
  o Sexting contains either text, images or video that is intended to be sexually arousing.

❖ "The communications media which can be such effective instruments of unity and understanding can also sometimes be the vehicles of a deformed outlook on life, on the family, on religion and on morality - an outlook that does not respect the true dignity and destiny of the human person. In particular, parents in many areas of the world have expressed understandable concern about the films, videocassettes and television programs their children can see, about the records their children can hear and about the publications their children can read. They rightly do not want to see the moral ideals inculcated in the home undermined by objectionable materials all too easily accessible in all too many places - often through the communications media" (Archbishop J. P. Foley, Pontifical Council for Social communications: *Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media: A Pastoral Response*, #7, 1989)

"The Holy Spirit calls us to make a serious examination of conscience, to enter into what might be called a 'dialogue of conversion'…This dialogue which takes place before God, each individual must recognize his own faults, confess his sins and place himself in the hands of the One who is our Intercessor before the Father, Jesus Christ…The 'dialogue of conversion' with the Father on the part of the community, with the full acceptance of all its demands, is the basis of fraternal relations which will be something more than mere cordial understanding or external sociality." (Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint,* On Commitment to Ecumenism #82, 1995)

Sister Prudence: Part B: Formation of Religious in Christian Virtue

❖ In Pope John Paul II's Message for the 36th World Communications Day he warns: "The essence of the Internet in fact is that it provides an almost unending flood of information, much of which passes in a moment. In a culture which feeds on the ephemeral there can easily be a risk of believing that it is facts that matter, rather than values. The Internet offers extensive knowledge, but it does not teach values; and when values are disregarded, our very humanity is demeaned and man easily loses sight of his transcendent dignity,"(#4).

❖ St. John of the Cross, in *Dark Night of the Soul* observed how gluttony interferes with the relation between a person and his or her spiritual director, formator, or religious superior: "The fragmented self rises up in many beginners, rebelling against wholeness, heightening sensual cravings, stirring gluttony so that they cannot help but try to escape obedience. Submission becomes so distasteful to them they are compelled to modify or rearrange or add to whatever is required of them," (p. 52).

❖ **Use a Humorous Kind of Examination**

A religious sister could ask herself a series of questions about her own habits with respect to various kinds of new media:

1. Am I an Internet 'Voyeur?' Do I live through other people's experiences on reality shows as a substitute for the life I should be leading myself?

2. Am I an Internet 'Curious Addict?' Do I have to follow every step of religious or secular media events employing my intellect towards sensible matters that are not useful for my vocation?

3. Am I an Internet 'Busy-body? Do I eagerly listen to gossip on talk shows or to news casts so that I can pass it on to my sisters?

4. Am I an Internet 'Stalker?' Do I have to see every appearance of a particular person [even someone we think of as a holy one] as a way to possess another's identity for myself?

5. Am I am electronic 'Safe-house?' Do I fill my needs for love and friendship by the safety of cyberspace relations rather than by deepening my relations with my sisters?

6. Am I an electronic 'tether ball?' Do I feel empty and disconnected if I am not attached to a cell phone, IPod, Blackberry, etc.?

7. Am I a jealous Jane? Do I compare the electronic device I have been assigned with another's?

Discussion Questions for Session VII:

1. Are the sisters in your community being sought for counsel by those they serve regarding how to address the access—even accidental or unsolicited exposure—to Internet pornography or inappropriate images (e.g. co-workers or youth they are working with; families who fear their children are involved in Internet pornography; youth whose acquaintances or relatives have exposed them to such material)? What counsel is being given?

2. How can we determine where "being informed" ends and "indulging inquisitiveness" begins?

3. Make a list of some of the "Eight Beatitudes" for appropriate Internet use.

4. How do I understand growth in moral virtue as a help in governing my own passions as a religious woman and my participation in community life?

5. Do I understand how the sin of sloth can be overcome by the virtue of courage, and the sin of gluttony can be overcome by temperance?

6. Can I think of any other humorous examples for an examination that would help me or my sisters become conscious of excessive attachment to a kind of media?

7. What do I think of trying fasting with respect to some times and places of media?

8. Can I see ways in which "a little virtue" could help me govern my passions in relation to new media?

Session VIII: The Interface of Virtual Reality with Actual Reality

**Sister Marysia: Part A: Sixth Common Effect: Electronic Communication
Substituting for Face-to-Face Relationships**

❖ "[W]hile the Internet can never replace that profound experience of God which only the living, liturgical and sacramental life of the Church can offer, it can certainly provide a unique supplement and support in both preparing for the encounter with Christ in community, and sustaining the new believer in the journey of faith." (John Paul II, *Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel,* # 3 World Communications Day 2002).

❖ "Virtual Reality" is described as an event or entity that is real in effect but not in fact (Michael Heim).

❖ Virtual networks greatly expand our opportunities to meet others, but they might also result in our valuing less the capacity for genuine connection.

❖ "The Internet causes billions of images to appear on millions of computer monitors around the planet. From this galaxy of sight and sound will the face of Christ emerge and the voice of Christ be heard? For it is only when his face is seen and his voice heard that the world will know the glad tidings of our redemption. This is the purpose of evangelization. And this is what will make the Internet a genuinely human space, for if there is no room for Christ, there is not room for man. Therefore… I dare to summon the whole Church bravely to cross this new threshold, to put out into the deep of the Net, so that now as in the past the great engagement of the Gospel and culture may show to the world 'the glory of God on the face of Christ' (2 Cor 4:6). May the Lord bless all those who work for this aim." (John Paul II, *Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel,* # 6 World Communications Day, 2002).

Sister Prudence: Part B: Remedies in Real Forms of Community Life

❖ "Virtual reality is a real concern for the Church. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications … warns that: '…the virtual reality of cyberspace has some worrisome implications for religion as well as for other areas of life. Virtual reality is no substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood human community. There are no sacraments on the Internet; and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace of God are insufficient apart from real-world interaction with other persons of faith.'" (Another Response to the Thesis of Sister Mary Timothy Prokes "Encountering the "Really Real" Realism, Sacraments, and Virtual Reality," in Whitehead, ed., *After 40 Years*, 9).

- ❖ Cardinal Ratzinger gave the homily on the Occasion of the Election of the new pope after the death of Pope John Paul II. His words embraced the Christian understanding of friendship and called for:

  > "…a mature adult faith [that] is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ. It is this friendship that opens us up to all that is good and gives us a criterion by which to distinguish the true from the false, and deceit from truth…
  > The Lord calls us friends, he makes us his friends, he gives us his friendship… He reveals his face and his heart to us. He shows us the tenderness he feels for us, his passionate love that goes even as far as the folly of the Cross. He entrusts himself to us… He entrusts his Body, the Church to us.
  > … It is here that appears the dynamism of the life of a Christian… I chose you to go forth. We must be enlivened by a holy restlessness: a restlessness to bring everyone the gift of faith, of friendship with Christ. Truly, the love and friendship of God was given to us so that it might also be shared with others."(Homily Pro Eligendo Romano *Pontifice*, 2007, pp. 2-3)

- ❖ "Consecrated men and women working in the media have a special responsibility for opening the door to new forms of encounter, maintaining the quality of human interaction, and showing concern for individuals and their genuine spiritual needs. They can thus help the men and women of our digital age to sense the Lord's presence, to grow in expectation and hope, and to draw near to the Word of God which offers salvation and fosters an integral human development. In this way the Word can traverse the many crossroads created by the intersection of all the different 'highways' that form 'cyberspace', and show that God has his rightful place in every age, including our own." *(Pope Benedict XVI, 44th World Day of Communications, 2010).*

Discussion Questions for Session VIII:

1. What criteria can be used to distinguish actual reality from virtual reality—truth from fiction—on the Internet?

2. Not all that is presented on the Internet is overtly against the Gospel or morally offensive, yet what are some ways the following ideas are promoted:

   a. New Age religions;

   b. pseudo-religions or watered-down religion;

   c. that which undermine Christian or Catholic truths?

3. How do you judge when one of your boundaries has been transgressed? How do you know when you have transgressed a boundary?

4. What is the relation between a virtual experience of the Mass and a real experience of the Mass?

5. Can you provide an example of how Christian friendship can help a religious sister in integrating the challenges and gifts of the new media?

6. How can new media help or hinder religious sisters in their friendship with Christ?

7. What kinds of recreation does your religious institute have that brings true rest and joy?

Appendix A: An Examen Regarding Internet Use

- ❖ Do I :
    - o Use the Internet as a means of escaping frustrations or avoiding emotional pain?
    - o Remain on the computer longer than planned?
    - o Lose track of time while online?
    - o Experience a sense of well-being or euphoria online?
    - o Engage in indiscriminant passive reception of images for the pleasure it offers me?
    - o Minimize or deny the amount of time I spend online?
    - o Keep the amount of time spent online a secret?
    - o Think about my next Internet use?
    - o Avoid community obligations by escaping into the World Wide Web?
    - o Jeopardize or risk loss of significant relationships, jobs, educational or apostolic opportunities because of my Internet use?

- ❖ Are my rules different in my use of Internet, than they are in everyday religious life?

- ❖ Do I try to augment my importance by the "power" of information?

- ❖ Are my emails too informal or familiar such that they are lacking in religious or professional decorum?

- ❖ Am I engaging in degenerating language skills in my online communications; that is, am I using improper grammar or using so many symbols that the written script is barely English?

- ❖ Do I seek online exchanges primarily for 'human' attention?

- ❖ Do I experience transference reactions toward persons I do not know well?

- ❖ Do I express myself in a less restrained manner online than I would face-to-face?

- ❖ Are there emerging vulnerabilities, sexual innuendos or aggressive tones in some of my email messages that would not be there in face-to-face interactions?

- ❖ Do I present myself other than who I actually am?

- ❖ Do I use flirtatious language online?

- ❖ Am I beginning to prefer my virtual socialization to actual socialization?

- ❖ Are my virtual social contacts more "intimate" to me than my actual social contacts?

- ❖ Is more of my time at work being spent answering personal emails or surfing the Web for non-work related purposes?

- ❖ Am I becoming less mentally and emotionally present to those actually present to me?

- ❖ Is there an evolving erosion of boundaries between my work and leisure time?

  - o Is the distinction between stress and relaxation breaking down?

  - o Is this erosion of boundaries to the detriment of healthy relaxation?

- ❖ Do I find my family's demands on me greater because of email communication?

- ❖ Am I prudent regarding what I surf on the Web?

- ❖ Do I linger on sites that are sensually stimulating rather than "click away"?

- ❖ Am I voyeuristic in my use of chat rooms, checking My Space/Facebook, for example?

- ❖ Am I irritable or restless when attempting to cut down or refrain from using the Internet?

- ❖ Is there a lack of initiative to bring right ordering to my desires in surfing the Web?

- ❖ Do I fantasize or reminisce about material I accessed on the Internet while at work? When falling asleep?

- ❖ Has time spent online diminished the time or interest I invest in my friendships?

- ❖ Has the quality of my friendships become shallower as a consequence of the social encounters I have sought online?

- ❖ Is the Internet a useful aid or a distraction to my emotional and spiritual well-being?

- ❖ Am I experiencing more distractions in my prayer from images that I viewed online or information I accessed on the Internet? Is prayer less appetitive to me because of such distractions?

- ❖ Has my Internet use affected the quality of time I spend before the Blessed Sacrament?   Do the Internet images impede my ability to focus on Our Lord?

- ❖ Has my desire for and attention to my spiritual life been decreased as a consequence of time spent on the Internet?

Appendix B: Technology Surveys

Survey of Internet and Email Usage

1. How often do you use the Internet (excluding email)?
    a. Never
    b. Less than 1 time a week
    c. 1-3 times a week
    d. 4-6 times a week
    e. 7-10 times a week
    f. Several times a day

2. Approximately how many hours do you spend on the Internet (excluding email) during a normal week?
    a. Less than 30 minutes
    b. 30 minutes
    c. 1-2 hours
    d. 3-6 hours
    e. 7-10 hours
    f. More than 10 hours

3. When do you usually spend more hours using the Internet (excluding email) during the weekdays?
    a. In the morning
    b. In the afternoon
    c. In the evening

4. When do you usually spend more hours using the Internet (excluding email) during the weekends?
    a. In the morning
    b. In the afternoon
    c. In the evening

5.   Internet online activities (Put a checkmark before the item).
For which of the following activities have you been using the Internet?

✓	Activity	How Much Time
	Work	
	Playing Games	
	Web Browsing	
	Downloading Files	
	Finding Information Online	
	News Information	
	Research	
	Other, please specify	

6. How much time do you spend using email per week?
    a. Less than 30 minutes
    b. 30 minutes
    c. 1-2 hours
    d. 3-4 hours
    e. 5-6 hours
    f. More than 6 hours

7. How much of that time is spent on work-related email per week?
    a. Less than 30 minutes
    b. 30 minutes
    c. 1-2 hours
    d. 3-4 hours
    e. 5-6 hours
    f. More than 6 hours

8. How much time do you spend using email for family per week?
    a. Less than 30 minutes
    b. 30 minutes
    c. 1-2 hours
    d. 3-4 hours
    e. 5-6 hours
    f. More than 6 hours

9. How often do you email family? _____

10. Where do you primarily use email for personal use?   Convent   Apostolate

11. Where do you primarily use email for work related purposes?   Convent   Apostolate

12. Where do you primarily use the Internet?   Convent   Apostolate

13. Are you aware of the directives on email and Internet usage?   Yes   No

14. Do you have any comments or suggestions for Religious Communities regarding the use of email or Internet?

_____

_____

_____

Email and Technology Survey for Schools

Internet

1.   Does your school have Internet access in the regular classroom? Library? For faculty use?

2.   Are there any regulations governing its use during the day?

3. Does the school have a filter on the Internet?

Email

1. Do you have school email? Is your school email account your primary account? Do you have a convent email account?

2.   Do you communicate with your faculty using email?

3. Do you communicate with parents using email?

4. Can parents communicate with faculty members using email?

5. Does the school have a written statement regarding the use of email by faculty and parents? Please attach it to this survey.

6. Does the diocesan office use email? If so, is it the primary means of communication with you?

7. Does the diocese have a policy regarding the use of email in schools? Please attach a copy of the policy with this survey.

8. As we consider the use of email by parent/faculty what do you see as benefits of its use? What do you see as being problematic?

9. Would you be in favor of allowing email communication from the faculty to parents and parents to faculty? Why or why not?

10. Does the school have an Acceptable Use Policy? Please attach a copy to this survey.

Cell Phones/ Palm Pilots/ Blackberries

1. Does your school have a policy related to the use of cell phones? For the faculty? For students? Please attach a copy to this survey.

2. What concern do cell phones present for the school community at this time?

3. Do you have a cell phone, Palm Pilot or Blackberry?

Appendix C: Further Questions for Discussion

1. What are some examples of how Skype can be used in religious community projects as well as recreation? If used in this way, what parameters might be helpful regarding its use?

2. Regarding online grades and parents' desire to track with immediacy the outcome of their child(ren)'s grades: Does this cause a breakdown in responsibility? Communication? Respecting the dignity of the child(ren)?

3. How can legitimate use of media subtly derail a religious into using the media in a way that leads to undermining communion, recollection, and/or detachment?

4. What boundaries can we put in place in relation to teacher/parent or parent/teacher communications? Within the community schedule, discuss appropriate times when the convent email can be checked.

5. Should sisters using business email addresses/school email addresses use these at the convent or only during working hours?

6. In elementary educational environments, how can parents and educators be made aware of the spiritual and psychological effects of Internet use?

7. When is using media in educational fields effective? What criteria can be set down to ensure that educational objectives are being met? How is this new media education related to real life?

8. Today many employers will "Google" or search the Internet to see what is "out there" regarding a candidate who is applying for a job. What are the benefits/drawbacks of doing the same regarding candidates for religious life?

9. How has the Internet and other electronic media affected the attention span of students?

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