

Parish Ministry in the Digital Age

June 10, 2025



The article by Prof. Martin Carbajo-Núñez, published on the [Blog of the Alfonsiana Academy](#)

With the progressive consolidation of digital culture, the forms of understanding both of the identity of the priest and of the Christian in general have diversified [1]. This change has also had repercussions on the predominant model of the Church, which must adapt to a society characterized by horizontal and interactive communication.

In this social context, people no longer expect just doctrinal instruction, but a “real and cordial closeness” (EG 199), which leads to sharing “the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anguish of the men of our time, especially the poor and all those who suffer” (GS 1). More than an administrator of sacraments or manager of structures, the priest is called to be a living witness “of God’s love for us in Christ” [2] (JCS 2010).

1. An appropriate scope to enhance ecclesial activities

In today’s media society, the priest needs to be trained in the understanding and use of digital media. This will enable him to guide the faithful in the responsible use of these tools and to adopt more effective communication in the pastoral mission.

Unfortunately, a recent study reveals that “the use of social networks is not a relevant part of the planning and action of priests in Spain” (Fandos 2023, 113). Likewise, the rectors of seminaries in six English-speaking countries stated in 2017 that digital natives are not aware that social networks can reduce their ability to form authentic friendships (Gautier 2017, 36). Among twelve important topics for evangelization, these rectors placed knowledge of Internet technologies in sixth place and artificial intelligence in last place (*ibid.* 29). However, the mentality is changing. A recent study conducted in Italy concludes that 99% of seminarians are present on the Internet and 88% believe that this area can be useful for pastoral care.

Parish groups can combine in-person meetings, which are essential, with other online moments to pray or reflect together. This will help strengthen the life of the group and prevent someone from leaving because of the difficulties they encounter in attending all the meetings. Each young person

must feel involved not only in the concrete realization of some activities, but also in discerning the needs that may arise in that social context and the steps to take to achieve them. In taking stock of the results, first-hand testimony of the experience must also be encouraged.

2. Integrate digital space with the desire for physical community

It is important to remember that "relationships established through electronic means cannot completely replace direct human contacts, which are necessary for authentic evangelization" (JCS 2002, 5). Therefore, the use of these tools must be integrated as a complement that enhances, but never replaces, the richness of personal encounters in Christian community life.

"The Gospel always invites us to run the risk of an encounter with the face of the other, with his physical presence that challenges us, with his pain and his requests, with his contagious joy in constant body to body contact. True faith in the Son of God made flesh is inseparable from the gift of self, from belonging to the community" (EG 88).

The desire for community that is manifested in social networks must also find a welcoming response in the parish. The faithful seek in it a human space, more than a geographical one, where they can find creative answers to personal and community challenges.

"If an ecclesial community coordinates its activities through the network, to then celebrate the Eucharist together, then it is a resource. If the network offers me the opportunity to approach stories and experiences of beauty or suffering that are physically distant from me, to pray together and seek together the good in the rediscovery of what unites us, then it is a resource" (JCS 2019).

The parish is not only a place to receive teachings, but an environment where life itself is shared. The parish priest has the task of ensuring that "everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live according to the good life of the Gospel" (EG 114).

Conclusion

"The good news of the Gospel has spread throughout the world through person-to-person, heart-to-heart encounters" (JCS 2021). This did not prevent Saint Paul from reconciling his presence in his communities with the letters he sent them when he was away.

Even today, the Church, described as "a network woven by Eucharistic communion" (JCS 2019), can find in digital platforms a precious resource to coordinate ecclesial activities, promote evangelization and strengthen the participation of the faithful in parish life. This online contact must be oriented to strengthen mutual acceptance and personal encounter in the physical world, promoting a passage "from the virtual world of cyberspace to the real world of the Christian community" (JCS 2002, 3).

Like St. Paul, we must nourish "a burning desire to see your face" (1 Thess 2:7; 3:10), because only in this way will the joy be complete (2 John 1:12; Mt 24:31).

[1] These paragraphs are part of the monographic issue that the author wrote for the magazine «Vida Religiosa»: Carbajo-Núñez Martín, «Mundo digital y vida consagrada», in *Vida Religiosa* 2 (2025) (entire monographic issue).

[2] JCS = Message of the Pope for the World Day of Social Communications.

Original text: Spanish

