



Not long ago I came across the document "The Church and the Internet", published by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications no less than in 2002! It seems to be an indispensable document to understand the position of the Church before the reality of the network and social networks. Then, it is true, Pope Benedict XVI himself, and now Francis, has given an overwhelming continuity to this matter.

I'm not going to stand on many of the points in the document. There's so much worth it! But I do want to devote a few lines to its final part today, to the recommendations made to ecclesial leaders, pastoral agents, catechists and educators, parents and, finally, children and young people. And in the latter, I want to focus my attention.

The Church is very clear to young people and with their trainers about the **internet** and **social media**: "The Internet makes available to young people at an unusually early age an immense capacity to do good or evil, themselves and others".

The Church calls young people to use the Internet properly, to enrich themselves with it and to enrich the lives of others, to prepare responsibly for their future, to use it as a privileged means to do good. Not only that: The Church calls young people to go against the tide, exercise the counterculture and prepare to be persecuted for defending the true and the good also in this environment. Very strong.

What the Church asks for is not automatic. It requires discernment, education, formation and, also, the strength of the Spirit. The latter can only be asked incessantly in prayer and leading a full Christian life, in community and participating in the sacraments. The first thing only requires determination and getting to work.

Discernment: Our boys and girls must know how to discern. Discern what is good and what is bad, what is right for them, and what is not. Discern which photos to share, which messages to post. Discern ingesting and whom to follow. Discern which websites to visit. Discerning when to speak and when to shut up. Discern

your concrete task as a Christian on the network, your call, your mission. Discern what Jesus Christ would do in every situation that arises. This task requires learning, listening, and silence. Discerning requires learning to do so. That's why they need our help. Their educators, parents, and catechists must accompany them, live close to them in their "being" on the internet and social networks. We must get used to them and help them do the same off the internet and make discernment a constant in their lives.

Education: Before, our parents taught us how to handle and act in the street, at school, at home... Do not go with strangers, who not to talk to, what situations to avoid, how to act with our elders, respect for authority... Now all this is still done (when it is done) but no one has faced the network part. Who educates to be on the net? Who teaches children and young people how to be, who to relate to? Who talks about friendship in networks and meets our kids' friends on the networks? Who teaches how to act on an attack, how to defend the weak, how to raise hands when needed? There is a lagoon that must be covered urgently. For this, parents, educators, and catechists must move in the net freely and understand their springs.

Training: The Internet is a place with enormous potential. You must know it. It's not enough to be. You need to know how it works, its rules, the laws that regulate it, the implications that a slip has, the details of privacy, the footprints that one leaves when moving in its corners... Our young people will only be good witnesses of the gospel if they are wise as snakes and simple as doves. No goodwill, naivety... When a young man wants to drive, he goes to school. When he wants to work, he will go through college or vocational training plans. It can't be any different here. And since this training, for now, is not addressed in curricula at school we will have to be bold and make creative proposals to train our own. The Internet is a task and mission for everyone. The Church asks us to be and to do so as believers. It doesn't come by sharing a nice phrase on Facebook or tweeting a verse from the psalm of the day. It doesn't come with wanting to be. If you don't know how to discern and you're not educated or trained, you're not a useful Christian. The net will devour you. We cannot abandon young people on this hard road. Abandoning them would be claudicating and not following Church guidelines. As Paul VI said one day, everyone will have to answer to God for his actions also in this medium. Let's take note and be brave. No excuses.* Santiago Casanova Miralles is a member of the iMission staff.