

Mediating Relationships: Social Media, Lay Catholics, and Church Hierarchy

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This dissertation titled
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ABSTRACT

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Mediating Relationships: Social Media, Lay Catholics, and Church Hierarchy.

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This study represents one of the first forays into how the Catholic Church is using social media for organizational purposes. Through the lens of Jenkins's (2006) theory of convergence culture, Fisher's (1985; 1999) narrative paradigm, the public relations strategies surrounding relationship maintenance (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998), and Turner's (1969) liminality, this study examined how lay Catholics and members of Church hierarchy within the Diocese of Browntown use social media space for religious dialogue and for connecting with one another. The findings suggest that there is desire for connectivity among lay Catholics and parish priests and that social media space does provide a great avenue to foster these connections, but the connections are very slow to be made at this time.

In light of the Social Age (Azua, 2010), religious institutions, and most notably the Catholic Church, have been making efforts to use social media to harness the faith of their flock. This study found that lay Catholics and priests surveyed in the Diocese of Browntown do report that social media spaces can provide a platform for religious expression and growth. However, few participants reported actually engaging with one another and having relationships in these spaces: While some lay Catholics and some priests report that they engage with one another in social media space, they are the minority. This results in the Church, at least in the Diocese of Browntown, finding

Herself in a liminal space. However, this may not be as bad as it seems: : As Turner (1969) suggests, structural and social bonds are tightened within liminal spaces, which means that on the whole, those who engage in these spaces are likely experiencing several dimensions of relationship maintenance that Ledingham and Bruning (1998) outline as positive public relations practices, including increased investment, trust, interdependence/power imbalance, shared technology, structural bonds, and social bonds. For the Church to be on board with this kind connectivity between Her own priests and parishioners is the first step that can be taken toward interreligious and ecumenical discussions which are a necessary component to the rapidly changing religiocultural landscape of the world today.

DEDICATION

In memory of Mom

October 8, 1946 – November 29, 2012

My biggest cheerleader – You said I had to finish it, so here it is. Miss you every day!

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Writing a dissertation and getting your PhD is no easy feat. I can remember being a Masters student in what was then the School of Telecommunications (I feel so old being here for the ‘big change’ to School of Media Arts & Studies...we even got shirts!), where the cohort ahead of me shared the scary proclamation that Dr. Drew McDaniel made in what we affectionately referred to as “the boot camp class” (Research Methods): “Look around, at most, only 3 of you will actually finish this program.” There were four of them. With odds like that, it’s a wonder I even applied to stick around for that elusive PhD. But here I am. And here, at last, ends the final leg of that journey I began as a bright-eyed 22-year old, southern belle.

I’m 28 now, only a year off track toward what I had projected for my professional life (‘Finish my PhD by the age of 27’ – ask Dr. Merissa Ferrara at the College of Charleston – I made that bold claim in her Advanced Interpersonal class in Fall 2007, my senior year of college). Not too bad! Getting to this point in my professional life would not have been possible without the help and support of so many people, and that’s what this section is all about: Thanking the people who believed in me, talked me out of my deepest ruts, pulled me up when I was drowning in fear and worry, and drank with me on the Jackie O’s patio, no matter the occasion.

I am forever indebted to Dr. Greg Newton for even agreeing to take me on as an advisee in 2010. I had a plan, and I thought I knew what I wanted to do for research, but I needed someone at the helm who would help pull me back and ground me: Greg answered that call and helped guide me through the dissertation process, even though he

himself said “I don’t know much about what you’re going to do – but no one else does either, so here goes!” (Quote may not be exact, but you get the picture.) I certainly became a trailblazer with this project, and the rest of my committee, Dr. Roger Aden, Dr. Scott Carson, and Dr. Roger Cooper (who thankfully stepped in for Dr. Joe Rota upon Dr. Rota’s retirement in 2011) willingly gave their support and asked great questions that only made me strive to dig deeper in order to truly understand the communicative aspects of this awesome project. Thank you all for your guidance along the way: From emails at 10:30PM frantically seeking APA assistance from Dr. Aden to checking in with Dr. Carson in the most random of places and situations (the most notable was when he found me literally cutting up Chapter 5 with scissors to paste back together later) to checking in with Coop at Jackie O’s to the endless, rambling texts and emails to Greg... I really appreciate the support each committee member gave me in getting to this point.

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It was my hope to finish this degree in the 2012-2013 academic year – which would have made me 27 years old at the time of completion (see previous proclamations of obtaining the PhD by the age of 27). However, 2012 proved to be quite a rough year for me. In April, the youth minister at our parish, a close friend, had a brain aneurysm that resulted in a stroke which almost claimed her life. She remarkably recovered, but was unable to continue her role as youth minister. That summer, I became the youth

director of the Athens Catholic Teens (ACT): A group of teenagers who bring a smile to my face and make me laugh at all of their randomness. They bring me life, and I thank them for their unknowing support in this whole process as well.

The end of 2012 was also supposed to be happiest time of my life: My first nephew, Liam, was due at Thanksgiving; my 27th birthday fell on 12/12/12 (so cool); and I was well on my way toward finishing my dissertation and becoming Dr. MCK. However, on November 16, my mother (to whom this dissertation is dedicated) was diagnosed with an aggressive osteosarcoma and given a grim diagnosis of about 2 weeks. Liam was born on November 19, a mere 10 days before his Nana passed away. This also happened to be right as I began data collection for the survey portion of this research. Needless to say, efforts to continue writing and to actually finish this degree became nearly nonexistent in spite of my mother's dying wish for me to finish.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At its most basic form, communication is about making sense of the world in which we live. From the beginning of time, people were created to live in community, as is seen in the Creation Story in Genesis, when God creates Eve from Adam's rib so that man would always have a companion. Since we were created to live not in isolation but in community, being able to communicate with those around us is a priority in order to progress through our daily lives.

The art of storytelling has always had a major role in man's progression through time: Before the written word and the print age, let alone the digital world we find ourselves in today, communication was about passing stories from generation to generation. Oftentimes, these stories included lessons to live by, replete with morals that were to serve the purpose of providing a history from which future generations could learn. We still go through this storytelling process today – we just have more channels of communication to use in order to accomplish the goal. Specifically, today we find ourselves living in a world marked by convergence – old media and old forms of communication merge with new media and newer modes of communication and offer additional ways to build our history, to tell our story.

This research inherently is about how Catholics are telling their story in social media circles through forming and maintaining relationships. The assumption that follows this line of thought is that religious dialogue is appropriate, expected, and encouraged in this space even though other dialogue that is not religious in nature often occurs here. This research rests specifically on how members of the Church hierarchy and members of the laity alike use social media to engage with, build relationships with, and

maintain established relationships with one another. Storytelling within the constructs of a specific paradigm and the ways that communication supports relationships in organizations are fundamental aspects of this research, in addition to how organizational structures shift and change with the passage of time and the development of new, emerging technologies.

This study focuses primarily on the use of Facebook and Twitter by lay Catholics and by members of the Catholic hierarchy (e.g., priests). With nearly 829 million daily users worldwide as of June 2014 and 1.32 billion monthly users as of June 2014 (Facebook, 2014), Facebook's mission is "to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (Facebook, 2014). Facebook's team suggests that "people use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them" (Facebook, 2014). Likewise, Twitter is growing at a rapid rate as a microblogging service that claims to be "the fastest, simplest way to stay close to everything you care about" (Twitter, 2012). Started in 2006, it serves a social networking function as well, surpassing 500 million total users with more than 200 million active users in June 2013 (Smith, 2013). There are certainly other channels of new media being utilized by the target population for this research; however, since the Church's use of new media has not yet been studied widely in the academy, Facebook and Twitter serve as a logical starting point to delve into new media practices occurring within and between two of the central groups that comprise the Catholic institution. For this research, lay Catholic and Church hierarchy use of these

new media platforms will be examined in order to analyze how relationships develop between and within the two groups.

The Internet has developed into a forum where individuals feel comfortable expressing their identity through electronic means. Since social media have become engrained into our social make-up, our online identity and how we are portrayed in this quasi-public forum is of utmost importance. The information that we include on our social networking profiles is often very telling about who we are as a person. Talking about religion in public settings is sometimes looked down upon, but oftentimes questions of faith and moral belief are thrust into the fore as political and scientific debates either implicitly or explicitly involve religion or theological principles to some extent. Organized religion is generally practiced in a public setting; however, many people believe that their personal religious or spiritual nature is meant to be kept private. Historically, there has been an apprehension toward including religious sense-making and reasoning within the public sphere (Habermas, 1984). Despite this, however, “individuals using the Internet for popular or non-official religion have embraced this medium as a new environment where freedom of religious expression rules supreme” (Helland, 2004, p. 23). Helland asserts that “the Internet has become the ideal medium for communicating religious beliefs and practices in a social context in which syncretism, popular tradition, and religion a la carte are among the most common forms of religious participation” (p. 23).

Computer networks quickly developed into social networks with the rise of email and other interpersonal connections being made online in the 1970s and 1980s (Hanson,

2011; Helland, 2004). Some of the earliest research on religious discourse in online spaces dates back as early as the mid-1980s (Rheingold, 1993; Helland, 2004), revealing the presence of religious dialogue in the early days of the Internet's existence. Helland (2004) suggests that "using text to communicate in forums..., individuals began using the Internet to express their religious beliefs and concerns, as well as simply to talk about religion" (p. 24). In fact, some of the first studies completed concerning online community development cite religious discourse as a prominent conversation piece (Helland, 2004; Schwartz, 1995). And in Catholic circles, "as early as 1989, Pope John Paul II saw the 'potential opportunities offered by computer telecommunications to fulfill the Church's mission'" (as cited in Helland, 2004, p. 25).

As the Internet and World Wide Web matured, people began to see its usefulness for personal communication. In 1996, the Barna Research Group "recommended that Church organizations quickly establish their presence in cyberspace or they would lose touch with many of their parishioners and risk losing the ability to advise them in an era of rapid technological growth" (Helland, 2004, p. 26; Roman, 2007). This claim is only further substantiated in the more than fifteen years of development the World Wide Web has seen since Barna Research completed its study. According to Dawson (2004), "the Internet allows individuals to reach out globally to form bonds with people of like mind, overcoming the physical barriers and social distinctions that have held them apart..." (p. 77). Dawson suggests that as a "highly social medium" (p. 79), the Internet offers an environment where people can come together to share ideas that they might not be exposed to otherwise because of the physical and social barriers that are present in the

real world. Social media in our present Social Age (Azua, 2010) offer a space where communities, or at least social networks, can be built and maintained.

As an amateur blogger, new media scholar, and devout Catholic, issues pertaining to the Catholic institution are especially interesting to me. I have always been at home in the Catholic Church, no matter what part of the world I am visiting or what part of the country I live. To “reclaim” my personal identity after moving for graduate school, I became deeply involved in the life of the Church locally. As an elementary-ages religious education teacher, high school youth group leader, college and young adult programming coordinator, and parish-wide faith formation committee member, I began to see where what I study about new media and organizations could be applied to the parishes I served and the Church at-large. Further exploration of the Church’s use of new media platforms led me to find that a grassroots new media movement was rustling in the cyberspaces of the American Church. Two years after my research agenda took flight, the Holy See in Rome recognized the grassroots movement not just in the United States but in countries around the world with the first-of-its kind meeting of bloggers at the Vatican in May 2011 (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2011a; 2011b).

In light of the Social Age (Azua, 2010), religious institutions, and most notably the Catholic Church, are attempting to use social media to harness the faith of their flock. By embracing mainstream strategies such as joining popular social networking sites to reach out to the laity and establishing a presence within the digital sphere, religious institutions like the Catholic Church enter dialogue with their flocks under the scrutiny of the broader public sphere which consists of mainstream media and other religious groups.

Theoretical Foundations

The traditional concept of institutional or corporate communication is top-down: The powers that be hold all the answers and feed knowledge and understanding to those in the system beneath them. What the institution shares is what the public knows and that is the extent of their knowledge base. However, as the landscape of the media environment has evolved during the Information Age, people are becoming savvier about receiving their information from various sources, upsetting the top-down notion of disseminating information. Conversely, the grassroots effort to gather and disseminate information is considered to be bottom-up: People with little to no expertise in any given area still have access to information that they can pass on to others. By taking media and information into their own hands, the common person can do extraordinary things: The creative options in the current media landscape are endless with the right computer with the right software and an Internet connection. Henry Jenkins (2006) suggests that within a convergence culture, top-down and bottom-up concepts of information flow coexist: In fact, their coexistence is what makes a convergence culture work in the first place.

In his book *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins (2006) suggests that as content is distributed more frequently via the Internet, what it means to be a creator of content and a receiver of content is understood in new ways, through the lens of what he refers to as convergence culture. Jenkins defines convergence culture as a period of constant flux – there is no stability as old and new media collide, but there is a sense of unity or community. Old media are not replaced; their use and function in society just shifts as new media garner the attention of consumers. New media do not just swoop in and wipe

out old media forms: Otherwise, everything would be digitized today, there would be no print industry, and the landscape of the television and film industry as we know it would be drastically different. Instead, new media comes in as a complement and even competitor to the old media that already exists. It augments reality for consumers, allowing them various modes and channels for communication: Media consumers can have their pick of a variety of mediated sources.

Within a convergence culture, institutional thinking is confronted by a grassroots effort to spread the wealth of information to more than just a “brain trust” or a hierarchy that holds all of the answers. Jenkins (2006) suggests that no one knows everything, but everyone knows something; and by pooling our knowledge sources together through various types of communication strategies, more can be accomplished. We live in an information age: Through the power of the Internet built on an open-source model (Mason, 2008), we have access to more information than ever before. Moreover, we are afforded the ability to connect with various people around the world with relative ease. This collision of new and old media and the intersection of institutional and grassroots strategies allocates power in unpredictable ways.

The discussions that take place in online spaces fit within the framework Walter Fisher (1999) establishes for the narrative paradigm. The narrative paradigm suggests that “symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – ...have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, and interpret them” (Fisher, 1999, p. 266). Essentially, the narrative paradigm suggests that human communication occurs through storytelling: Signs and symbols take on meaning for people within various contexts and offer a narration of sorts

for what is happening in their lives. The narrative paradigm also “seeks to account for how people come to adopt stories that guide behavior” (Fisher, 1985, p. 348) by providing “‘a logic’ for assessing stories, for determining whether or not one should adhere to the stories one is encouraged to endorse or to accept as the basis for decisions and actions” (p. 348).

Therefore, Fisher (1999) defines narration as “a type of human interaction-activity, an art, a genre, or mode of expression” (p. 270). Telling stories, recounting and accounting for events that have taken place in our lives, helps “to establish a meaningful life-world... [E]ach mode of recounting and accounting for is but a way of relating a ‘truth’ about the human condition” (p. 270). Whether in person or in online spaces, people are constantly sharing parts of themselves through storytelling in order to make sense of their lives and to find truth. By storytelling, people are able “to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one’s life” (Fisher, 1999, p. 271). By communicating via social media outlets, I argue that Catholics create this sense of story and share their common faith in community with one another.

Through faith-sharing in social media spaces, relationships between lay Catholics and Church hierarchy have the capacity to be cultivated and maintained. On one level, this is an interpersonal relationship maintenance of sorts. However, several public relations practices are applicable to this research since the Catholic Church, though a religious institution, also takes on characteristics of a large business or organization.

According to Ledingham and Bruning (1998), one way that organizations build relationships with their constituents is through various public relations practices. The authors rely on a two-way model that sees “public relations as a process of continual and reciprocal exchange between an organization and its key publics” (p. 56). Ledingham and Bruning suggest that there is a need to develop “long-term behavioral relationships between organizations and their key publics, rather than relying solely upon symbolic activities designed to enhance organizational image” (p. 56-57).

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) offer a theoretical framework for relationship maintenance by borrowing from the disciplines of interpersonal communication, marketing, and social psychology. They list dimensions of relationships, including investment, commitment, trust, comfort with relational dialectics, cooperation, mutual goals, interdependence/power imbalance, performance satisfaction, comparison levels of alternatives, adaptation, non-retrievable investment, shared technology, summate constructs, structural bonds, social bonds, intimacy, and passion (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 58-59). Ledingham and Bruning explain that the dimensions that emerged as “critical in the process of creating, developing, and maintaining an organization-public relationship [are] trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment” (p. 59). The nature of this particular research between and within lay Catholics and Church hierarchy seem to lean toward investment, trust, interdependence/power imbalance, shared technology, structural bonds, and social bonds.

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) suggest that organizations that focus upon “building trust, demonstrating involvement, investment, and commitment, and

maintaining open, frank communication between the organization and its key public does have value in that it impacts the stay-leave decision...” (p. 61). Organizations should structure themselves around building relationship goals that utilize different strategies to communicate with their publics. Furthermore, they should use communication as “a strategic tool in helping to achieve [the relationship] goals” (p. 63) that they have established for optimum relationship maintenance.

The interactive quality that social media spaces provide aids in relationship maintenance. According to Dawson (2004), “interactivity...draws people into the social life of the Net and binds them to any ongoing social activity” (p. 83). With the capacity to “draw near to the interactivity of offline relationships” (p. 83), Dawson believes that the exchanges that take place online “emulate face-to-face conversation” (p. 83). Suggesting that community is an integral component of experiencing religion, Dawson suggests that “people use the Internet to augment and extend their pre-existing social lives, not as a substitute or alternative” (p. 85).

While questions of the appropriateness of religious dialogue within broader public spheres limit the scope of the Church’s voice and control in our world today, using new media affords Catholics a liminal space where religious discussion is not only appropriate, it is encouraged and expected. According to Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra (2008), the concept of liminality, as developed by van Gennep (1960) and later Turner (1969), “refers to in-between situations and conditions that are characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes” (para. 1). According to Turner

(1969), liminality is considered to be “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions” (p. 359). In this phase, Turner argues that a sense of comradeship emerges: In this “‘moment in and out of time,’ and in and out of secular social structure, ...some recognition...of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties” (p. 360) is revealed.

Turner (1969) describes liminality as a model “of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (p. 360). This fits well with Fisher’s (1985) notions of hierarchy and Jenkins’s (2006) and Anderson’s (2009) ideas behind reputation economics with new media which will be explored further in Chapter 2.

Purpose of this Study

New media, specifically social media tools such as blogs, Twitter, and Facebook, have afforded members of the Catholic institution – both those within the hierarchy and those among the laity – the ability to communicate with one another in liminal social media spaces within the public forum that is provided by the Internet. The adoption of social media technologies suggests a certain sense of connectivity and interaction. This instantaneous connectivity and interactivity is beginning to change the face of communication between groups within the Catholic Church. Olmstead (2008) suggests

that “lay men and women are in a unique position to bring their faith into all areas of society” (p. 3). As such, this research aims to determine how members of both the hierarchy and laity engage with one another while exploring how their relationships develop and are ultimately maintained within social media spaces.

The timeliness of this research with respect to the Catholic Church as a focal point is both exciting and pioneering: The state of Catholicism worldwide is in flux and has been for nearly fifty years since the end of the Second Vatican Council. Arguably, this state of flux is a liminal space itself. The emergence of social media provides Church hierarchy and the laity with helpful tools to negotiate the tensions resulting from a changing culture and efforts to maintain tradition. Social media provides a forum for discussion where discussion might not otherwise take place. In 2001, the Pew Internet and American Life Project explained that the Internet offers religious seekers “wide access to resources and links, and it offers the doubtful or curious a safe place to explore” (Larsen, 2001, para. 2). The report suggested that, at the time, “spiritual browsing [was] a more popular online activity than online gambling” (para. 4). Larsen went on to explain that “the variety of sites available...appears boundless. They range from denominations and branches with large constituencies to sites posted by individuals in veneration... They run the gamut from multi-faith, multi-service sites...to sites set up for specific faiths and purposes” (para. 5). Numerous developments in technology and online behaviors have occurred in the near decade and a half since the Pew Internet and American Life Project first examined faith in the cyber age. Blogging and social networking were not even fully developed when Larsen completed the 2001 study. Now,

social media have taken the scene: They are constantly changing, and new social media platforms are being developed seemingly every day. Without question, social media have had an impact on how individuals tell the story of themselves in the public forum provided by the Internet. This research seeks to understand how social media are being used by members of the Catholic community.

In 2011, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) determined that adult Catholics surveyed in the United States are generally not likely to read content from spiritual or religious blogs nor are they likely to read religious or spiritual newspapers online or to follow posts of a religious or spiritual nature on Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube (Gray & Gautier, 2011). While CARA surveyed adult Catholics in the United States about their media use, there is no indication that a survey of a similar nature was administered to members of the Church hierarchy to determine their media use. Since this survey was administered, Pope Benedict XVI strongly urged members of the Catholic hierarchy to use new media and make their presence known online, and Pope Francis has continued that legacy in the first year of his papacy (since March 2013). Poignant questions about convergence culture and setting up a narrative paradigm emerge from these papal actions. Are priests in the United States just beginning to adopt the use of social media themselves? How are members of the Church hierarchy using the media asked about in the CARA survey? Does being ordained make a difference in whether media is consumed for religious or spiritual purposes? Are priests vocal in encouraging their parishes and parishioners to use social media to attract attention to events that are occurring within their Catholic community? If this part of the equation is not happening,

there is a chance that this social movement within the Church is either still in its infancy or in a state of dormancy. This research is just the beginning of the investigation into the Church's use of social media on both the lay Catholic and hierarchical levels.

Rainie (2012) establishes a "new normal" for information technology users with one of the latest studies completed by the Pew Internet and American Life Project. The report suggests that in the social age, our world is full of "networked individuals using networked information" (p. 15); and that with the multiple platforms available for consumption, people begin to use multiple platforms and furthermore blend those platforms to maximize their experiences and interactions (p. 17-19). Additionally, the power of influence is leaving the hands of the organizations that were once in charge (top-down) and is shifting to the social networks and the new "experts" who are emerging (grassroots; bottom-up) (p. 24). These new realities appear to be a direct result of the shifting landscape of new, social media.

Within the Catholic institution itself, many lay Catholics were among the first social media users, engaging there long before the Church recognized it as a viable space for communication (Vogt, 2011). One of the first examples of the Church fully embracing social media was the "Vatican Blognic" held at the Vatican in May 2011 (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2011a). Another indicator of the Church's embracing social media was the launch of the official Papal Twitter handle, @Pontifex which is Latin for "Pope" and "bridge builder", with its first tweet on December 12, 2012 (Siemaszko, 2012). And finally, as Catholic Christians, lay persons and clergy alike are "directed toward evangelization in all aspects of life" (Olmstead,

2008, p. 7), which certainly includes a social media presence. This is especially important during the Social Age where much of our interaction is in the digital sphere. Given this, now is an opportune time for scholars to identify the key issues that the Catholic Church and arguably other organizations with hierarchical structures might face with the widespread adoption of social media platforms. Therefore, the goal of this research is to analyze the development and maintenance of relationships, if any exist in this space at all, that are a result of sharing information in social media spaces between and within two specific groups of people within a well-established organization: Lay Catholics and members of the Catholic hierarchy.

Statement of the Problem

Communication via social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter affects the relationships people build with one another, but in what ways? This research, exploratory in nature, seeks to analyze the development and maintenance of relationships that are a result of information shared in social media spaces between and within groups of lay Catholics and members of the Catholic hierarchy.

Research Questions

In order to analyze the relationships that emerge in social media spaces between lay Catholics and members of the Church hierarchy, the following research questions are advanced:

RQ 1: In what ways do social media spaces provide a place for religious expression and growth?

RQ 2: In what ways do social media spaces provide an environment for members of Church hierarchy and the laity to engage with one another?

RQ 3: In what ways do social media spaces provide areas for relationships between members of Church hierarchy and the laity to grow and flourish?

The first research question establishes whether social media spaces act as a place for religious expression and dialogue in the first place before even looking at whether priests and lay Catholics engage in this space. The second research question concerns engagement between the two groups in this space, which can encompass various levels of interaction within social media spaces and the frequency of making contact within that space. This question really focuses on a continuum of activity versus a mere presence in social media spaces: In other words, do priests and lay Catholics carry on a dialogue in social media spaces or do priests (or, conversely, lay Catholics) have a profile for the sake of being present in this space? The third research question explores relationship development and maintenance which is based on the engagement that takes place within the social media space. Once engagement and relationship development have taken place (referring back to the second research question), do social media spaces provide areas for relationship maintenance? In other words, once a determination of the level of engagement is made from the second research question, the third question refers to a feeling about the relationship that has developed: Does having this relationship in a social media space establish a foundation for closer relationships offline? And, is the feeling mutual for both members of Church hierarchy and lay Catholics?

Organization of Study

This research is broken up into several sections. Chapter One has presented an introduction to the topic to provide the reader with a framework in order to make sense of the literature review and proposed original research. Chapter Two will examine the theoretical framework and related studies on which this research hinges. Chapter Three will discuss the methodological and analytical choices that were made to conduct the research. Chapter Four will present and analyze the survey results, while Chapter Five will present and analyze the interview results. Chapter Six will offer conclusions about the development and maintenance of relationships in social media space, make suggestions for future research, and discuss the limitations that were confronted during the research process.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is best understood through the lens of both communication and mass communication theory. Since we live in the Social Age (Azua, 2010) marked by media convergence (Jenkins, 2006), we understand that the Internet, as a set of public forums, offers anyone with a connection the opportunity to have a voice: Anyone with an idea, good or bad, can broadcast it to the masses through social media spaces such as blogs and social networking sites. The stories people share in these spaces becomes a part of a narrative of their human experience of relating to each other and with members of other social strata. The primary subjects for this research are lay Catholics and members of Church hierarchy.

Lay Catholics and Church Hierarchy: What is the Difference?

Lay Catholics have a special place within the Church, though their relationship with regard to Church hierarchy has always seemed to be one of submission to the powers that be within the hierarchy. Lay Catholics are those who are not ordained or professed to a religious order. According to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), “the faithful, who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ and integrated into the People of God, are made sharers in their particular way in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ, and have their own part to play in the mission of [Christ]” (p. 258). They are the people who sit in the pews, week after week. This group also includes those who profess that they are Catholic but do not necessarily attend Mass regularly.

People of all levels of faith exist within the laity. Each person is called to be the light of Christ to everyone with whom they have contact, but the way that they choose to

do this manifests itself in various ways, depending on the individual. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) suggests that “by reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will...” (p. 258). The development and use of new media platforms by lay Catholics has taken this evangelization effort to new levels of significance as the voice of the Church now rings through each individual Catholic who posts their faith experience in a public forum online for anyone to see. Indeed, the Catechism explains that “the initiative of lay Christians is necessary especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life” (p. 258-259). In this research, lay Catholics may also be referred to as the laity, the faithful, lay people, or the congregation.

This research will also refer to members of Church hierarchy. Church hierarchy is an umbrella term meant to refer to any ordained member of the Catholic institution. This includes the pope, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, and deacons. Through their vocation, these are people who have many years of theological training and, for all intents and purposes, have an inside view of what is happening within the Church as an institution. They also have a vested interest in maintaining the Catholic institution as the universal Church of Christ on earth. The Pope is the figurehead of the Church, the Vicar of Christ on earth. He is in the seat of Peter, referring to the apostle or rock on whom Christ built his Church (Matthew 16:18). According to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994),

the Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, 'is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful.' For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church... (p. 254)

The pope oversees everything that happens within the Catholic Institution, but one man cannot do all of this alone. The rest of the hierarchy serves as the Pope's eyes and ears around the world: The hierarchy is in place to mediate between the flock of Christ (i.e., lay Catholics), their surrounding environment, and God, for the goal for every Catholic on earth is to attain Heaven when this life is over.

Under the Pope is the College of Cardinals. When the pope dies, or resigns his position as Pope Benedict XVI did in 2013, a new pope is elected from this body. The title of Cardinal is an honorary title; most Cardinals are senior bishops who have been appointed Princes of the Catholic Church by the Holy Father himself. In addition to serving the Pope by attending synods and meetings that he calls, most Cardinals are the heads of Archdioceses and Dioceses around the world. Very few lay members of the flock of Christ have personal relationships with the Pope or Cardinals.

The delineation in the hierarchy between Cardinal and the next two levels, Archbishop and Bishop, is somewhat murky. Many Cardinals are also Archbishops, but not all Archbishops are Cardinals. Likewise, not all Bishops are Archbishops. An Archbishop is the head of a group of Dioceses. He oversees a metropolitan province. For example, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's ecclesiastical provinces spread over the entire

state of Ohio while the Archdiocese of Atlanta, on the other hand, comprises the states of Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The Archbishop is the head of his diocese but has limited practical power over the other dioceses within his provincial supervision. For example the Diocese of Toledo, the Diocese of Columbus, the Diocese of Cleveland, the Diocese of Youngstown, and the Diocese of Steubenville are all under the ecclesiastical province of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, and the Diocese of Charleston (SC), the Diocese of Charlotte, the Diocese of Raleigh, and the Diocese of Savannah are all under the ecclesiastical province of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. These dioceses are considered to be suffragan dioceses of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and the Archdiocese of Atlanta, respectively. Each is headed by a bishop who answers to the Archbishop of Cincinnati or Atlanta, although priests and lay Catholics within the suffragan diocese adhere to their local ordinary, the bishop of their specific diocese.

All archbishops and almost all Cardinals are bishops of the Church. The Pope himself is the Bishop of Rome. According to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), "...bishops [have] no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff... [they have] 'supreme and full authority over the universal Church'" (p. 254). Furthermore, "the individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches... they exercise their pastoral office over the portion of the People of God assigned to them, assisted by priests and deacons" (p. 255). Bishops are more visible to the laity as they usually make pastoral visits to the parishes within their dioceses on a semi-regular basis.

Priests, then, are ordained men who, by the power of their ordination, act in the person of Christ. They typically serve in parishes and are on the front lines when it comes to interacting with the flock of Christ. These are the men the laity see week in and week out, each time they attend Mass. For some lay Catholics, though, developing relationships or interacting with priests outside the context of Mass is a foreign concept. However, the use of new media platforms potentially takes communication with the congregation outside of the four walls of the Church on Sundays, making interaction with lay Catholics on a more personal level more commonplace. Online spaces have a tendency to flatten the hierarchical structure, or at least make the structure less prominent since people perceive more similarity between communicative partners in online interactions than they do disparity. With this comes the possibility of a sense of accessibility and transparency that might change the previous notions of one-way transmission within the Church as an institution, which could potentially make communication between the two groups more dynamic and robust. There also comes a sense of questioning who actually has authority and expertise in an area as social media offer anyone the opportunity to say anything. In this environment, conflict without formal structures for resolution could introduce more trouble than benefit.

As such, this research begins with an understanding of the Internet as a public forum. As members of the Social Age (Azua, 2010), we understand that our interactions within these spaces, identified as social media spaces for this research, are marked by the idea of convergence culture: The roots of communication as we know it date back to oral tradition thousands of years removed. Therefore, this research is also grounded within

Fisher's (1985) narrative paradigm because our interactions within social media space are arguably extensions of conversations that would normally take place in more traditional, face-to-face settings. Organizational communication theories of relationship maintenance enhance the notions tied to Fisher's narrative paradigm as the conversations taking shape within social media spaces cross over from merely discussions between individuals of the same social strata: These discussions exist across the unchanging hierarchical structure of the Catholic institution. This leads to a discussion of Turner's (1969) conceptualizations of liminality and *communitas* as these conversations break the mold of what we understand to be communication within hierarchical structures, as if taking place in a space characterized by its "in-between-ness." This brings us full circle to Jenkins' (2006) notion of convergence culture where culture is in constant flux.

Historical Context: The Catholic Church in the Social Age

The art of story-telling has always had a major role in man's history: Long before we were writing, let alone digitally reproducing news items and stories, communication was an oral tradition where stories were passed from generation to generation. But we now live in the Social Age, which Azua (2010) defines as a revolution characterized by sensory overload stemming from the Information Age. The Information Age is largely classified as a period of time encompassing the latter quarter of the 20th century when information became available to people through computer networks. The Social Age is an extension of this Information Age via the rise of social networking: With this new way of connecting people across time and space, individuals can be heard in meaningful ways with smarter content and the possibility for two-way communication (Azua, 2010). Each

person's opinion has the possibility to carry the same weight as everyone else's, credibility can be enhanced by the number of people who agree with each other or follow each other, and opinions are deemed to be important. With all of this, new communities and new ties emerge (Azua, 2010). Technology as we know it is converging, but we are not necessarily seeing the demise of old technology and old forms of media (Jenkins, 2006). On the contrary, we are seeing rapid improvement of these technologies and older forms of media in every new form that emerges. By adopting new technologies, we have the ability to enhance our use of the older, traditional modes of communication, thereby building off of the blueprints of the old (Azua, 2010). This is why Jenkins (2006) suggests that we live in a world marked by convergence: Older technology and media forms never really die; they are improved upon and become something new.

By embracing the digital world and encouraging Catholics to do the same thereby entering a dialogue where the Church can become the center of discussion, the new, digital evangelization's vision pushes today's Catholics to take ownership of their faith while reverting back to the traditional (folk) roots of Catholicism. The Church recognizes the multidimensionality of expression of not only members of the clergy but also the lay faithful, and takes their views into consideration for open dialogue. According to Roberge (1983),

at first the Church looked at the media in order to control and use them – from the outside. Later on, she began to look at them from the inside. She discovered that the ideal of service to the world ... finds an area of application in the mass media,

for the communication media constitute one of the main forms of contemporary social life. They are the world to evangelize. (as cited in Eilers, 1994, p. 198)

Indeed, there is a need for the Church to enter the social spaces found online because that is where much of her flock is. Pope John Paul II (1988) writes in his apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, which addresses the vocation and mission of lay Catholics, that

the privileged way at present for the creation and transmission of culture is the means of social communications. The world of the mass media represents a new frontier for the mission of the Church, because it is undergoing a rapid and innovative development and has an extensive worldwide influence on the formation of mentality and customs. In particular, the lay faithful's responsibility as professionals in this field...demands recognition of all its values, and demands that it be sustained by more adequate resource materials, both intellectual and pastoral. (From *Christifideles Laici*, Chapter 3, para. 44)

The foundation of the offices of communication within the Church as an institution date back as early as 1936 when Pope Pius XI proposed the establishment of national film offices overseen by church officials to help with rating films. From there, communications offices within the Church have become more prevalent especially with the passing of *Inter Mirifica* (1963), the Church's decree on the media of social communications.

The idea of "social" communication is first attributed to the Catholic institution, having surfaced during the Second Vatican Council in the document, *Inter Mirifica*,

according to Eilers (2005). With the new expression, a “broader understanding of communication as a happening and expression of human society in general” (p. 3) emerged: Indeed, “social communication includes all forms and way of communicating in human society from traditional forms like storytelling, rumor, drama, dance and music to the Internet and cyberspace” (p. 3) and now “the expression is accepted even by non-Church related institutions” (p. 3). With this definition of social communication, the Council and the Catholic institution laid the foundation “for a broader understanding of communication as a happening and expression of human society in general” (p. 3). However, pastoral application of the suggestions outlined in the 1963 document has proven to be impractical. According to Fr. Enrico Baragli, at twenty years after the Council, “the need and call for proper formation is still not responded to [which] results in the inability to bring the communication dimension into all the different pastoral activities of the Church” (as cited in Eilers, 2005, p. 4). Eilers suggests that even at 40 years post-Council, the same things could be said. He does believe that *Inter Mirifica* “moved the importance and need for social communication in and of the Church from a ‘marginal’ position into a greater consciousness in general” (p. 4). According to Alain Woodrow (1992),

Churches must adapt to the powerful means offered by the mass media, with their laws and constraints, and not the other way around. Instead of the churches complaining about their loss in influence...one should see it as the religious broadcasters task to attune the institutional churches to the...media, which speak

the common language of an ever-growing number of the world's population. (as cited in Eilers, 1998, p. 239-240)

It is clear that the Church must embrace the Social Age and make the proper adjustments to meet the people where they are.

The Social Age is marked by the standardization and commoditization of technology, specifically cell phones and computers, that produces two-way communication for the purposes of social networking and collaboration at lower costs to consumers (Azua, 2010). In the case of web browsing pertaining to religion, "the web allows the faithful wide access to resources and link, and it offers the doubtful or curious a safe place to explore" (Larsen, 2001, para. 2). As mentioned in the discussion of the Information Age giving way to the Social Age, more information is made available to more people because of the Internet. In fact, Larsen goes on to suggest that "the variety of sites available...appears boundless. They range from denominations and branches with large constituencies to sites posted by individuals in veneration of their deities. They run the gamut from multi-faith, multi-service sites...to sites set up for specific faiths and purposes" (para. 5). This Social Age that Azua refers to is arguably a manifestation convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006), which sees the intersection of old and new media, the shifting of power from institutional levels to grassroots, the emergence active participation on that grass roots level. Larsen (2001) notes this with his suggestion that "the Internet could be seen as an electronic prayer book, an aid to personal devotion, or a reference guide to spiritual issues... [or it] could be a 'place' where people come together either to chat or to pray...with people around the globe" (para. 6). One might question

whether the Social Age is indeed a social age, however. Several researchers in the academy and from the popular press would argue that social media have ruined the way we communicate in face-to-face settings altogether, with people constantly tied to devices that are supposedly keeping them connected with the world around them (Bennett, 2011; Bennett, 2012; James, 2012; Turkle, 2011).

Convergence Culture

Jenkins (2006) defines convergence culture as a period of constant flux – there is little stability as old and new media collide, but there is a sense of community that emerges. Jenkins suggests that old media are not replaced by the new – older modes of communication are used and function differently in the social age. There is a shift as new media garner the attention of modern consumers. New media, rather, complement the older modes of media already in existence: They serve to augment reality for consumers, offering them various channels of communication to accomplish similar tasks.

With convergence culture, institutional thinking is confronted by a grassroots effort to spread knowledge to more than just a “brain trust” or a hierarchy that has all the answers. With the Catholic faith in general, regardless of ranking in the hierarchical structure, it is important to share knowledge, or to evangelize: This is another tenet of convergence culture, having the responsibility to generate knowledge among all members of a community. Jenkins (2006) suggests that no one knows everything, but everyone knows something. By pooling a collective knowledge sources together through many channels of communication, more can be accomplished. Through the power of the Internet, we have access to more information than ever before. On top of that, we are

afforded the opportunity to easily connect with almost anyone in the world with relative ease. This shifting media environment, according to Jenkins (2006), heightens awareness of ownership, demystifies, grows recognition of expression, and takes on more traditional aspects of folk practice. Much like the state of Catholicism after Vatican II, convergence culture reshapes a prevailing identity. The lines are blurred: It “does not mean ultimate stability or unity. It operates as a constant force for unification, but always in a dynamic tension with change” (p. 11). The notions of a convergence culture are put into play within this specific research because they help to make sense of the story of (at least American) Catholicism over the past fifty years. Through the means of new media, Catholics are able to harness their own story and spread it across multiple media platforms to multiple receivers.

Jenkins’ (2006) notion of convergence culture takes the idea of active participation and explains the evolution of media as we know it. His idea of active participation revolved around consumers of media being encouraged to seek new information and to make connections. The consumption of information is a collective process: In social media spaces, experiences are shared and a collective intelligence emerges that is open-ended and profoundly interdisciplinary. Old and new media interfaces collide, grassroots intersects with corporate interests, and the world is open for interpretation based on who is creating the content and what they think that content is saying about a particular issue. In this model, “every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms”

(Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). To Jenkins, convergence is “making sense in a moment of disorienting change” (p. 6).

New media technology encourages participatory culture, where users are encouraged to actively participate in creating their own content and circulating it to other users (Jenkins, 2006). According to Mugridge and Gannon (2008), “the Church realizes that these media...can enhance the life of and be a benefit to all of humanity” (p. 143). Furthermore, “as the world continues to grow...closer due to the phenomenon of globalization and social communications, the choice to participate in the forum of public dialogue will not be optional” (p. 143). The authors suggest that

as mankind communicates, the societal level is advanced; more people are involved in the public debate ... As such, shared information is personally helpful and socially essential... Access to true information according to the dignity of the person allows people to be active participants... [and] social communication serves the culture of dialogue, encourages personal and social development, assists in the development of a healthy society and builds solidarity... (p. 143-144).

A major platform for this active participation is the weblog, or blog, which has a grassroots origin that features bloggers responding to information that has been circulated by other bloggers or by the mainstream media. Blogs were some of the first new, participatory media used by lay Catholics to enter religious discourse. These debates enter the public sphere where the mass media becomes a key player: “Around the media evolve alternative notions and possibilities of the public and of what it means to be a

person or part of an audience” (Meyer & Moors, 2006, p. 4). Meyer and Moors suggest that “religions have come to play an increasingly public role in offering alternative imaginations of communities” (p. 19). In going public as it were, the modern conceptualization of religion and being religious has changed. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter materialized later and are the focus of this research.

According to Helland (2004), “although the Internet is in many ways a blessing to religious institutions that use it to their advantage, it can also be an official religion’s worst nightmare” (p. 30) because users are encouraged to participate and engage in these online spaces, but the religious institution loses a sense of the power of control, much like traditional media and other institutions in this era, as the focus shifts from the institutional level to that of the lay faithful. Religious institutions must take risks in these spaces, allowing anyone to comment on anything at any time, for there to be true transparency and for the lay person to be truly empowered to embrace their faith in this forum: “Doctrines and teachings that were once centralized and controlled can now be openly challenged, contradicted or ignored through a medium that is accessed by hundreds of millions of people every day” (p. 30). With this, there has been a drastic shift in who has control (Dawson, 2001; Helland, 2004; Shapiro, 1999).

With the widespread use of social media to transmit self-produced content online to a mass audience, the Catholic Church can tap into technology that is being consumed rapidly across age groups and social statuses through social media platforms such as blogs, wikis, YouTube, and social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter. Helland (2004) suggests that

as the technology continues to develop and becomes more transparent in the lives of those using the Internet, organized religious websites that are using the Internet as a tool to communicate...information about [themselves] will not have the ability to meet the religious needs of those who want more from the medium. (p. 30-31)

The use of social media has markedly changed how members of institutions engage with one another. Being transparent and offering a two-way, hyperpersonal (Walther, 1996) forum for communication where people can engage in conversation “about their religious beliefs and practices, ask challenging questions concerning their faith, and participate in a safe environment where they can open up and share religious feelings and concerns” (Helland, 2004, p. 31) is preferred over the hierarchical, top-down flow of information that official religious sites tend to provide (Hadden & Cowan, 2000; Helland, 2004). For the purposes of this research, social media are defined as “a specific subset of new media that promotes dialogue, sharing, and online community” (Vogt, 2011, p. 212). New media, then, are defined as “new forms of on-demand, Internet-based communication that promote connectivity and interactivity” (p. 212). As a result of the feelings of connectedness that emerge from interacting in social media spaces, lay Catholics and priests alike can build narratives about their experience as Catholics in the modern, secular world.

Some users of online communication describe it “as a communication medium, a conduit that transmits information from one place to another, a means of keeping in touch with friends in faraway places – or of avoiding face-to-face contact with the people just

upstairs” (Markham, 1998, p. 86). Cyberspace becomes a tool for communication and even a place where people can go to communicate with others. Markham suggests that while cyberspace “may not have physical substance, [it is] thought of as a meaningful place where things happen that have genuine consequences” (p. 86). Some users of social media spaces describe their use and experience as more like a way of being: Their experience with computer-mediated communication is like “a state in which mind and body merge with the computer, or the mind separates from the body to be inside the machine, creating and expressing the soul in abstraction through language” (p. 86). In these settings, the user has control over what information they present to others, and Markham suggests that this “capacity for control...is undeniably tantalizing... Control is perceived as a benefit of the technology or a power the self possesses, not a threat from outside the self or some power possessed by the Other” (p. 124).

This sense of power harkens back to Jenkins’ (2006) discussion of what convergence culture is: The collision of old and new media suggests that the intersection between institutional and grassroots communication strategies disperses power in unpredictable ways. With online communication and narrative building, Markham (1998) notices that, at least in her study, participants’ “perceptions and knowledge of their experiences are centered in the self. It doesn’t seem to occur to the participants...that the other might play an important role in the construction of their own subjectivity” (p. 124). As such, most people in Markham’s study “perceive self to be a performance controlled by the sender of the message” (p. 125). This notion of self-control may be true to an extent, but the community at large fits within a specific paradigm: Like-minded people

have come together in community in social media spaces because of some common link. For instance, Markham's study reveals that in online spaces it is possible to weave "dialogic understandings of" (p. 210) another "sometimes connecting, sometimes deciding it best to move on" (p. 210). Markham concludes that communicating in online spaces "offers unique ways of expressing the self and constructing social reality" (p. 210). The study reveals that "the process of building relationships and social structures...is thoroughly dialogic; online cultures exist because people interact with each other through writing, over time" (p. 210). By collecting information and formulating stories with what is collected, people share their experiences in online spaces.

Narrative Paradigm

Fisher's narrative paradigm offers an "alternative paradigm for human communication" (Fisher, 1999, p. 265). Theories of narrativity like Fisher's offer a general glimpse of communication in practice. According to Lane (2001), Fisher's theory "falls in the middle of the scientific/humanistic continuum" (para. 7), and there is "a degree of determinism...because...this is how we are made up as communicating humans" (para. 7). Narrative paradigm presupposes that humans are "storytelling animals" (Lane, 2001, para. 14).

Building narratives in spaces online gives users a certain sense of control (Markham, 1998). The discussions that take place in online spaces fit within the framework Fisher (1999) establishes for the narrative paradigm. The narrative paradigm suggests that "symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – ...have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, and interpret them" (Fisher, 1999, p. 266). Essentially, the

narrative paradigm proposes that human communication occurs through storytelling: Signs and symbols take on meaning for people within various contexts and offer a narration of sorts for what is happening in their lives. The narrative paradigm also “seeks to account for how people come to adopt stories that guide behavior” (Fisher, 1985, p. 348) by providing “‘a logic’ for assessing stories, for determining whether or not one should adhere to the stories one is encouraged to endorse or to accept as the basis for decisions and actions” (p. 348). In essence, people tell stories about what is happening in their lives that are based in “good reasons” (Fisher, 1985; Fisher, 1999) which comes from our lived experience.

Fisher (1999) defines narration as “a type of human interaction-activity, an art, a genre, or mode of expression” (p. 270). Telling stories, recounting and accounting for events that have taken place in our lives, helps “to establish a meaningful life-world... [E]ach mode of recounting and accounting for is but a way of relating a ‘truth’ about the human condition” (p. 270). Whether in person or in online spaces, people are constantly sharing parts of themselves through storytelling in order to make sense of their lives and to find truth. In order to determine what values are important, various issues surrounding fact, consistency, and transcendence must be examined. This

involve[s] determination of what the values are; discernment of their pertinence to the story or the case at hand; appraisal of their impact if adopted on one’s concept of self, one’s relationship with others, and the process of rhetorical transaction; ascertainment of their confirmation or disconfirmation in one’s life, the lives of

those whom one admires, and the best life that one can conceive; and evaluation of their effects on the quality of life generally. (Fisher, 1985, p. 350)

By storytelling, people are able “to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one’s life” (Fisher, 1999, p. 271). Fisher’s narrative paradigm is based upon the following presuppositions:

1. Humans are essentially storytellers;
2. The paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is ‘good reasons’ which vary in form among communication situations, genres, and media;
3. The production and practice of good reasons is ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character...
4. Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings – their inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity, whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives (narrative probability and narrative fidelity...are analogous to the concepts of dramatic probability and verisimilitude...) [and]
5. The world is a set of stories which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation. (Fisher, 1999, p. 272)

Essentially for Fisher “good reasons are the stuff of stories, the means by which humans realize their nature as reasoning-valuing animals...[, and] the materials of the narrative

paradigm are symbols, signs of consubstantiation, and good reasons, the communicative expressions of social reality” (p. 272). Communication via social media tools fits within the constructs of the narrative paradigm because social media encourages community building and relationship maintenance: What is shared via social media become bits and pieces of the larger story that makes up one’s lived experience. Tweets and posts via social media take on two narrative functions: First, they offer glimpses, short though they may be, into the personal narrative of the author him/herself; and secondly, they become segments of the larger community’s collective story.

According to Campbell (2004), “the Internet has become a canvas of personal expression, a place to learn and test new ways of being” (p. 107). People use the Internet in a way that mixes cultural codes to create new narratives; and according to Campbell, “how people shape these media environments and create these narratives greatly depends on their motivations and interpretations of life” (p. 107). Fisher (1985) explains that the narrative paradigm “insists...that any instance of discourse is always more than the individuated forms that may compose it” (p. 347). Furthermore, Fisher believes that there is nothing that is not a part of “an episode in the story of life” (p. 347). Therefore, the theoretical concepts surrounding the narrative paradigm “seek to account for how people come to adopt stories that guide behavior” (p. 348). The paradigm provides “‘a logic’ for assessing stories, for determining whether or not one should adhere to the stories one is encouraged to endorse or to accept as the basis for decisions and actions” (p. 348). Essentially, the narrative paradigm offers a useful way to interpret and understand human relations. By applying Fisher’s theory’s constructs to the Internet and, more specifically,

social media spaces, a new understanding of how humans shape their identity online to reflect their offline personality might emerge.

While the Internet has been described as many things from a communications medium to a system of networks with specific discourse taking place there, it “not only presents new possibilities for work and communicative tasks, it can also be conceptualized as reconnecting people with the spiritual side of life” (Campbell, 2004, p. 113). Each community that is formed in social spaces creates its own narrative based on its unique traditions and practices. Campbell stresses that “these narratives...bring cohesion and identity to these communities” (p. 113). According to Helland (2000), “on the Web, particular manifestations of community are developing around...religious interaction” (p. 214). Suggesting that computers serves as a portal into different realms of existence, Markham (1998) believes that “the social dimensions of online contexts are constructed primarily through the texts of participants” (p. 61). By creating narratives or texts concerning their lived experiences, people have the ability to maintain relationships through ongoing interaction in social media spaces.

Relationship Maintenance

Dawson (2004) suggests that “part of the experience of religion, and... a foundational part of the experience of the sacred, is the sense of community” (p. 85). Using new media platforms as a way to build and maintain relationships, Dawson explains that “people use the Internet to augment and extend their pre-existing social lives...” (p. 85) and that “people tend to have a far greater range of social relations than in the past” (p. 82) because of the “boundarylessness” these platforms offer. Helland

(2000) asserts that “the Internet has eroded the boundary between traditional public space and, although the World Wide Web is replete with the social manifestations of the secular world, it is also abounding in private expressions of religious belief” (p. 212). The relationships created in these “unique public spaces” (Helland, 2000, p. 212) are different than many of the personal connections made in face-to-face settings: Dawson (2004) explains that “ties are weaker and more flexible, yet they are still an important source of social support, stimulation, and material advantage” (p. 82) for all parties involved. Essentially, people have the ability to meet and interact with others they might not otherwise encounter (Dawson, 2000).

In order to better understand how social media platforms are used to create dialogue between and among lay Catholics and members of Church hierarchy, the dialogue within and between these groups in these spaces should be examined. Lay Catholics, especially, have an integral role to play in painting the picture of Catholicism in their own social media circles which is something that the Church should promote and encourage (Eilers, 1994; Olmstead, 2008). The priest also plays a crucial role in the development of this story, and the relationship forged between priest and parishioner is critical for establishing relationships. The priest as communicator “must be an intelligible and authentic sign of the person and message he proclaims” (Eilers, 1994, p. 247). The priest’s role is so critical because “nowhere else is such a witness as close to the people as in such a small, overseeable unit like the parish where the people live side by side with their priests” (p. 247). This proximity “should also lead [the priest] to be aware of the expectations, the experiences and shortcomings of his people. ...[He] must be aware of

what his [parishioners] read, see, and hear... in the mass media which ...have become a part of their daily life” (p. 247). Social media spaces provide a platform where priests and parishioners can connect. And since this space is online, it is marked by a “unrestricted freedom of expression that is far less hierarchical and formal than real world interaction” (Kitchin, 1998, p. 80 as cited in Helland, 2000, p. 214).

Helland (2000) explains that communicating in online spaces “mirrors the ideal structure of the Internet itself: An unregulated, open-ended, non-hierarchical communications network” (p. 214). With the use of new media platforms, interactions between priests and lay Catholics have the potential to become more commonplace. With this comes the possibility of a sense of accessibility and transparency which challenges the previous notions of one-way transmission seen within the Catholic institution.

According to Ledingham and Bruning (1998), one way that organizations like the Catholic Church build relationships with their constituents is through various public relations practices. The authors rely on a two-way model that sees “public relations as a process of continual and reciprocal exchange between an organization and its key publics” (p. 56). Ledingham and Bruning suggest that there is a need to develop “long-term behavioral relationships between organizations and their key publics, rather than relying solely upon symbolic activities designed to enhance organizational image” (p. 56-57).

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) offer a theoretical framework for relationship maintenance by borrowing from the disciplines of interpersonal communication, marketing, and social psychology. They list dimensions of relationships, including

investment, commitment, trust, comfort with relational dialectics, cooperation, mutual goals, interdependence/power imbalance, performance satisfaction, comparison levels of alternatives, adaptation, non-retrievable investment, shared technology, summate constructs, structural bonds, social bonds, intimacy, and passion (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 58-59). Ledingham and Bruning explain that the dimensions that emerged as “critical in the process of creating, developing, and maintaining an organization-public relationship [are] trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment” (p. 59). These are, arguably, qualities that parishioners look for in the priests they see from week to week at Church.

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) suggest that organizations that focus upon “building trust, demonstrating involvement, investment, and commitment, and maintaining open, frank communication between the organization and its key public does have value in that it impacts the stay-leave decision...” (p. 61). Organizations should structure themselves around building relationship goals that utilize different strategies to communicate with their publics. Furthermore, they should use communication as “a strategic tool in helping to achieve [the relationship] goals” (p. 63) that they have established for optimum relationship maintenance. By having a presence among the flock in social media spaces, priests can take a step toward achieving their relationship goals with lay Catholics.

According to Campbell (2004), “since the mid-1990s, the study of online community has been a primary focus of research into computer-mediated communication, exploring issues such as the impact of the Internet on identity

construction...and the creation and maintenance of boundaries in online groups” (p. 113). In religious discussions online people are able to engage various beliefs systems on the Web: “They are contributing personal beliefs and receiving personal feedback” (Helland, 2000, p. 214). In these spaces, “participants may experience a form of anti-structure within their daily structure lives, and they may or may not choose to develop their participation into face-to-face meetings” (p. 219); however, “through this...interaction, they may be obtaining the spiritual and religious input in their lives that they feel is necessary in a modern world” (p. 219). Helland argues that engaging in spaces online concerning religious belief systems “may strengthen [them] by allowing for a unique public space for individual and personal spiritual exploration without the restraints of traditional organization and community” (p. 219). As such, Helland points out that many facets of religion maintain their institutional structures within online spaces.

Helland (2000) believes that the presence of the Catholic Church online is a step in the right direction. Pope John Paul II’s wish that “with the advent of computer telecommunications and... computer participation systems, the Church is offered further means for fulfilling her mission” (as cited in Helland, 2000, p. 220). Religion’s presence online “demonstrates an important development in the accommodation of religion with modernity” (p. 221). This presence “blurs the boundary between the private and public sphere, allowing for a new form of religious participation in the modern world” (p. 221). The active participation of both priest and lay Catholic encourages a sense of what Helland refers to as virtual *communitas*, or “a significant phenomenon...where

restrictions have been removed and the individual can express what they want, when they want, to whomever will listen” (p. 221).

Liminality

Helland (2000) suggests that religious participation on the Internet “forces...liminality upon its users. Status disappears, no social class has dominion over any other, and everyone is forced to accommodation of equality in which a particular form of non-structured interaction can take place” (p. 215). According to Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra (2008), the concept of liminality, as developed by van Gennep (1960) and later Turner (1969), “refers to in-between situations and conditions that are characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes” (para. 1). According to Turner (1969), liminality is considered to be “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions” (p. 359). In this phase, Turner argues that a sense of comradeship emerges: In this “‘moment in and out of time,’ and in and out of secular social structure, ...some recognition...of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties” (p. 360) is revealed. This condition characterizes convergence culture in the Social Age, and the Catholic Church’s standing in secular society today.

Turner (1969) describes liminality as a model “of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even

communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (p. 360). Turner prefers “‘communitas’ to ‘community’ to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an ‘area of common living’” (p. 360), but for the purposes of this research, the terms ‘communitas’ and community may be used interchangeably, with the understanding that they both refer to a communion of equal individuals (lay Catholics) submitting to the general authority of the ritual elders (Catholic hierarchy). Classical sociologist Emile Durkheim (1965) suggested that “if religion has historically been the soul of society, its conscience and guiding force, it is because ‘society is the soul of religion’” (as cited in Dawson, 2004, p. 75). Interested in the function of religion, Durkheim’s (2001) theories seek to explain how society is cohesive through religious ties. Durkheim was working in the early 1900s and studied tribal religions, but his hunch is one that is still applicable today with the development of community online. Community solidarity was the focus of much of Durkheim’s work: His study was concerned with the serious life (Rothenbuhler, 1998) and how people communicated things of social importance. Meaning-making helps people to understand social order and how society hangs together (Rothenbuhler, 1998), which is directly related to the ideas behind Fisher’s narrative paradigm (1985; 1999).

Dawson (2004), echoing Durkheimian theory, reiterates that “part of the experience of religion, and...a foundational part of the experience of the sacred, is the sense of community” (p. 85). Real relationships that take on very personal and sometimes unusual qualities are emerging from online interaction (Dawson, 2004; Markham, 1998; Parks and Roberts, 1998). Rheingold (1993) explains that online communities are “social

aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (p. 5). Dawson (2004) suggests that “life online will likely complement life offline, and there is no reason to expect that religious uses of the Internet will differ” (p. 79). In fact, because of interactions that take place in social spaces, “people tend to have a far greater range of social relations than in the past and over far greater distances. Ties are weaker and more flexible, yet they are still an important source of social support...” (Dawson, 2004, p. 82). Explaining that more and more “people use the Internet to augment and extend their pre-existing social lives... [instead of] as a substitute or alternative” (p. 85), Dawson’s point becomes clear: Religious expressions online help to cement a sense of community among groups of people.

According to Dawson (2000), the “sociology of the Internet has tended to gravitate around two closely intertwined issues: the formation of personal identity and the formation of communities” (p. 31). Under both circumstances Dawson believes that “it is widely recognized that the Internet has ushered in new opportunities for experimentation in how identity and community are experienced” (p. 31). With social media spaces in particular, people can stress the parts of their identity they want and hide parts they would like to keep private. Additionally, social media spaces allow for connections to take place around the world. Dawson suggests that “the Internet seems clearly to not be revolutionizing or displacing conventional conceptions of identity of community, but it is probably facilitating or augmenting changes that are already underway in our societies” (p. 31).

Helland (2000) describes three different types of liminality that can take place in online communities: Existential, normative, and ideological. Existential *communitas* is unrestricted: There is no authority and no constraint on the participants. Normative *communitas* has more structure to it, and the structure “is based around speculative, philosophical, and mythic ideas” (p. 217). In normative *communitas*, members of a community are able to “interact with the belief system, contributing their own experiences and views to the religious group while receiving feedback from other participants” (p. 217). Ideological *communitas*, then, “attempts to maintain the liminal status of its participants in the development of a community outside of the normal structure of...society” (p. 218). Communication in social media spaces contains pieces of each level of *communitas* Helland describes. Communication here becomes like “liminal transition periods on a spiritual path, aiding in the transformation of the individual from one state to the next. In the online world..., it is a liminal space that may be engaged at will and left when desired” (p. 219).

A goal of this study is to illuminate whether the pattern of communication within the Catholic Church is constantly changing, especially with regard to the use of social media platforms for relationship maintenance behaviors. Traditionally, modes of communication within the Catholic institution are thought to be top-down: The hierarchy makes decisions and transmits messages to the people and that is the end of the cycle of communication. The collision of old and new media, indicative of the convergence culture in which we live, suggests that the intersection between institutional and grassroots communication strategies appropriates power in unpredictable ways. Thus, it

may be likely that the introduction of “new” social media platforms within the Catholic institution collides with the established modes of communication the Church has employed in her nearly 2000 years of existence. This has brought about an interesting intersection of communication strategies between the Catholic Church as an institution and her flock of lay Catholics who are operating at the grassroots level.

Power ultimately resides within the relationships that people share with one another. Arguably, social media have changed the game by redefining these relationships. This is true in many relationships – friendships, familial ties, working relationships can all be affected by the power of social media. Social media are hyperpersonal (Walther, 1996), meaning there is some advantage to building and cultivating relationships in an online space that isn’t necessarily experienced in face-to-face interactions. This can especially be noticed in relationships where there is some sort of power differential at play. Users of computer-mediated technologies have the ability to think before they speak, formulate messages, edit, and really offer a packaged image of who they are and what they are about within online spaces (though they do not always utilize this gift). This research makes an effort to better understand how social media platforms are used to create dialogue between lay Catholics and members of Church hierarchy. By extension, the dialogue within these social media spaces should foster relationships between the group and society at large.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

A pilot study was conducted during Summer 2011 among the population of bloggers who attended the Vatican Blognic in Rome in May 2011 (Pontifical Council for Social Communications 2011a; 2011b). The responses from the pilot study were taken and used to create two surveys: One for lay Catholics and one for priests. The survey was distributed to a sample of priests and lay Catholics in November-December 2012. Finally, an interview guide was created from the results of the survey to delve deeper into the thoughts and feelings of some of the survey participants to have a better idea about what the results of the survey mean. The interviews took place during Summer 2013. The following is an in-depth look at the research methods employed by this research.

Part I: Pilot Study

First, an exploratory study consisting of five open-ended, short answer questions was distributed to a sample of Catholic bloggers who attended the Vatican Blognic hosted by the Vatican and the Pontifical Council for Social Communications (2011a; 2011b). Light, Singer, and Willet (1990) suggest that running an exploratory study on a small scale is never a waste of time because it “informs a future effort by systematically examining specific facets of the eventual design” (p. 214). Since a pilot study “permits you to use different kinds of information to strengthen the overall picture” (p. 214), a preliminary questionnaire was distributed to a small sample of bloggers in order to determine salient themes for the construction of a survey instrument using unique scales. The questionnaire operated as a qualitative interview. The open-ended questionnaire consisted of the following questions:

1. How have traditional media platforms (e.g., newsletters, newspapers, radio, television, etc.) helped the faithful to understand their role within the Catholic Church? Has it changed over time?
2. How has the emergence of new media platforms (e.g., blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) changed how you think about media in evangelistic activities?
3. How does your blog allow you to practice your own personal expression of faith?
4. More generally, how can members of the Church (the faithful) and members of the Church hierarchy use interactive media in their respective ministries?
5. What impact do media have on what it means to be Catholic today?

The responses to the questionnaires were collected from the bloggers and analyzed to determine which themes emerged as important attributes demarcating modern Catholicism and its intersection with new media. Overwhelmingly, the bloggers reported a need for Catholics to tell their own story in an effort to harness the faith by those who live it every day. Additionally, the bloggers suggested that the Church has always capitalized on using media as a method of disseminating information. Using new media shifts the focus more onto the individual, making the approach seem more people-centered. Lastly, new media, they explained, offers a connecting point between members of a community; and when one uses media, it becomes an extension of the self which affords Catholics more of an opportunity to actively participate in Church life.

There are consequences to using new media, however, especially with regard to institutional life and structure. The bloggers suggest that with new media platforms,

notions of who holds power shifts from the traditional, hierarchical notion that information is disseminated in a top-down fashion. This shifting power structures leads to uncharted territory. The bloggers were careful to acknowledge that shifting power structure meant crossing into unknown and uncharted territory, especially for the Church as an institution. They pointed out that new media could not replace human, face-to-face interaction between the laity and hierarchy, especially with regard to the sacramental life of the Church.

The bloggers' responses were analyzed using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis is not well understood but is nonetheless widely used as a qualitative method (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Creswell (1994), the qualitative researcher completely immerses him/herself into the study; he/she is the instrument of analysis. As such, completing a thematic analysis "is a way of seeing. Often, what one sees through thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same information, events, or situations" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 1). It helps the researcher to recognize important moments before they encode them: It "is a process to be used with qualitative information. It is... a process that be used with...qualitative methods and...allows for the translation of qualitative information into quantitative data" (p. 4). Essentially, thematic analysis is used as

1. A way of seeing
2. A way of making sense out of seemingly unrelated material
3. A way of analyzing qualitative information

4. A way of systematically observing a person, an interaction, a group, a situation, an organization, or a culture.
5. A way of converting qualitative information into quantitative data. (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4-5)

Therefore, Boyatzis suggests that thematic analysis is useful at all stages of the research process. It helps open the door to many levels of information that help researchers to dig deeper because it is truly multidisciplinary.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis” (p. 78). The authors also suggest that this method “provides a flexible and useful research tool which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (p. 78). Roulston (2001) suggests that the traditional method of analyzing interview data – that is, to let the participants’ voices be heard – runs the risk of “gloss[ing] over underlying discourses and in doing so, romanticiz[ing] those voices” (p. 281). This method is used to identify, analyze, and report patterns that emerge from data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The major threats to using thematic analysis effectively in research are dealing with the researcher’s projection, sampling techniques, mood, and style. By taking care to be consistent, sticking close to the raw data collected, being mindful of distractions, fatigue, frustration, and confusion, the threats to using thematic analysis well are diminished greatly (Boyatzis, 1998).

After analysis of the bloggers’ responses, the themes that emerged essentially match the specifications that Fisher (1985, 1999) establishes in his description of narrative paradigm. Telling one’s own story through means of new media allows

information to be distributed widely, reaching Catholics across the globe. Each individual Catholic can construct their own identity by embracing their story through digital means that allow more active participation on the part of the individual. These individuals come together within media spaces that are connecting points for members of the community, both lay and religious.

A survey instrument was created to poll a larger sample of Catholics, both lay and religious, concerning their use of new media based on these themes from the pilot study and the theoretical constructs of Jenkins' (2006) convergence culture, Fisher's (1985; 1999) narrative paradigm, notions of relationship maintenance, and ideas concerning liminality.

Part II: Survey

In order to analyze the development and maintenance of relationships between lay Catholics and members of the Catholic hierarchy that are a result of interaction between the two groups within social media spaces, two surveys consisting of both open-ended and close-ended items were designed to distribute to lay Catholics and Catholic priests. Surveys are typically "used for descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory purposes" (Babbie, 2010, p. 254). Survey research is "the best method available to the social researcher who is interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly" (p. 254). Babbie also notes that surveys measure "attitudes and orientations in a large population" (p. 254), which makes it an appropriate method for the current research.

The survey instruments (See Appendices A and B) were created based on Fisher's (1999) criteria for determining the importance of values in stories within the narrative paradigm and based on the themes that emerged from the pilot study, which also closely match Fisher's criteria. The items serve to confirm the themes that emerged from the pilot study. Additionally, the survey's purpose was to elicit a response from both Catholic laity and Catholic hierarchy with regard to how they understand their identity in relation to one another, to how they understand and make sense of the relationships formed in social media spaces with one another, and to how these relationships impact their identity as Catholics, which fit parameters of relationship maintenance theories and theories of liminality. In essence, participation in social spaces online goes beyond mere sense-making presupposed with general communication theories. Participation highlights the shifting nature of the relationships formed in social media spaces. Furthermore, the survey responses can then be used to begin to posit how relationships developed in social media spaces between lay Catholics and Church hierarchy impacts the larger Catholic institution, which falls into Jenkins' (2006) ideas behind convergence culture. Here, participatory media convergence suggests a change in, and potentially even a collapse of, the traditional notion of hierarchical structures.

The survey instrument included a variety of response styles in an effort to control for systematic error due to participant response style: It featured several yes/no questions to determine participants' perception of their media use especially with regard to religion (Gray & Gautier, 2011) in addition to close-ended, Likert scale items to measure attitudes toward Church hierarchy, Mass attendance, and the importance of receiving the

Sacraments on a regular basis (Maher, Sever, & Pichler, 2006). Additionally, open-ended questions were advanced in order to gauge participant perceptions of how media can be used by individual Catholics and the Catholic institution and of how media is already being used by both the clergy and the laity. Finally, participants were asked if they were willing to share their contact information for a follow-up interview to expand upon areas that may merit further qualitative explanation.

The survey instrument was distributed electronically to lay Catholic university students at a Midwestern, secular university and to lay Catholics at a few parishes in the same Catholic Diocese in a Midwestern state. Members of Church hierarchy affiliated with the same Diocese received a similar survey geared towards their role as priests. The purpose of the survey was to gauge the attitudes of the three groups of people (Catholic university students, lay Catholic parishioners, and members of Church hierarchy) toward the relationships developed with each other in social media spaces in addition to determining the perceived and actual use of new media by members of Church hierarchy within the Catholic institution.

Subjects

The participants for this study include Catholic students, Catholic parishioners, and members of the lower levels of the Catholic hierarchy. All of the participants attend university, attend and/or are members of parishes, and/or serve parishes in the role of Pastor or Administrator within the boundaries of the same Catholic diocese in the Midwest.

To ensure the confidentiality of both sets of participants, the name of the diocese used for this research is fictional. The following statistics come from the actual diocese's webpage, but the citation is omitted here and in the reference section in order to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. The Diocese of Browntown was selected as the diocese of focus for this research. It has fifty-eight parishes, three missions, and a diocesan chapel across thirteen counties in a state in the Midwest. It was established around the time of World War II and has a Catholic population of approximately 39,000. To serve the population, there are forty-nine active priests, seven priests on-assignment outside of the diocese, three priests on leave, and thirty retired priests at the time data collection began at the end of 2012. The Diocese is relatively well-known outside of the Midwest because it houses a Catholic college that gains much national Catholic attention.

Three groups of people within the diocese were targeted for participation in this research: Catholic university students, lay Catholic parishioners, and parish priests. After receiving approval from Ohio University's Institutional Review Board, a request for contact information (in the form of an email address) for students who self-identified as Catholic on their application to the university was submitted to admissions and orientation officials at a large Midwestern university. Students were asked to participate in the survey via email. The survey was administered electronically via the online survey hosting software, Qualtrics. Additionally, various email contact lists were acquired from local parishes to solicit the participation of lay Catholic parishioners. In all, 274 lay people were contacted for participation. Participants were asked to access the same link for participation in the lay Catholic survey.

Participation from parish priests was garnered in a similar way: The Diocese of Browntown publishes contact information for parish priests on their webpage. After receiving approval from Ohio University's Institutional Review Board, an email was sent to the entire population (50 priests) of priests of the Diocese of Browntown requesting their participation. A link to the survey hosted on Qualtrics' servers was provided in the email.

Information regarding confidentiality and informed consent for participation in the research was featured at the beginning of both versions of the electronic survey so that all participants had the opportunity to read and understand their rights. When possible, this information was also supplied to participants via email.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data was collected using Qualtrics' online surveying software. From Qualtrics' site, the close-ended data was downloaded into SPSS to run simple statistical analyses using frequencies and crosstabs. No other statistical tests were run because of the small *N* for both groups of participants. Additionally, the number of participants answering each question varied, resulting in too many missing responses across individual variables which violated the assumptions of both the chi-square tests and several non-parametric statistical tests. The frequency and cross-tabulated results are discussed more fully in Chapter 4. In the event that a participant provided contact information at the end of the survey, efforts were made to conduct follow-up interviews to expand on information provided.

Part III: Interviews

After the survey data was collected and analyzed, participants who provided contact information were contacted to participate in follow-up interviews to delve deeper into the subject matter. Interviews are intrinsically important because “interview talk is the participants’ rhetorical construction of their experience” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173) which harkens to the idea that Catholics need to tell their own story as suggested in the pilot study with the bloggers. Conducting interviews helps the researcher to uncover the story behind a participant’s personal experience (McNamara, 1999).

Primarily, interviews are particularly helpful in: Understanding experiences and perspectives of participants through their stories and explanations; gathering information about processes that cannot be otherwise observed effectively; and exploring ideas developed in the field and attempting to apply them to everyday life (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). In qualitative research, interviews are important because the participant’s personal experience can be vividly reconstructed for academic purposes using words of the participant’s choosing which makes the information shared not only relevant for academic study but also more personal. According to Chernow (2007), insights from interviewees are invaluable pieces to a puzzle that original research attempts to construct. Sometimes the opinions are gathered from “formal interviews. But other times, and these times are often richer, these insights come out of informal conversations” (p. 118). Usually these conversations occur in face-to-face settings where the researcher can “get a firsthand view with an opportunity to ask follow-up questions and pursue detours that pop up as...questions are answered” (p. 118). Follow-up interviews provide an

opportunity to ask questions about issues that appear as detours during the first two stages of the research process.

For this research, a general interview guide approach was employed in order to make sure that each interviewee is asked about the same topics. This “provides more focus than [a] conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee” (McNamara, 1999, para. 5). Some questions for the interview guide were not apparent until after the survey data was collected and analyzed. The final version of the interview guides are included in Appendices C and D.

Subjects

The participants for the interview portion of this study were recruited via the survey described in Part II. A total of 18 participants (9 lay Catholic, 9 priests) were interviewed. All interviews were conducted in neutral locations for the participant and the researcher – mainly in church facilities or at coffee shops. A more thorough description of the participants can be found in Chapter 5 and in Appendices E and F.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interview data was audio recorded for transcription. All interviews were transcribed using ExpressScribe transcription software. Once again, thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was chosen as the method of analysis to find further clarity about issues concerning social media use and the Catholic Church that were only marginally discussed in the survey results. Since this method is considered to be a way of seeing (Boyatzis, 1998) where patterns that emerge from data can be identified, analyzed, and reported

(Braun & Clarke, 2006), it was selected the best method of analysis for the interview portion of this research. A full description of thematic analysis was described in the pilot study section of this chapter.

For this particular set of data, however, Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis were used to examine the interview data for meaning. The first phase involves becoming familiar with the data through several readings for clarity and understanding. The second phase finds the researcher generating initial codes while rereading the data. The third phase involves searching for themes and can be accomplished via concept mapping. The fourth phase encompasses reviewing the themes that have emerged in Phase 3, while the fifth phase involves defining and naming themes. The final phase, Phase 6, is where the researcher generates a report. Concept maps which essentially depict Phases 3 through 5 (how themes emerged, review of themes, and definition and naming) for each research question are offered in Chapter 5 (Phase 6) for both groups of participants. Boyatzis (1998) suggests conducting some kind of test of reliability to be sure the emergent themes are dependable. In fact, Anastas (2013) explains that with Boyatzis's definition of reliability being "consistency of judgment among different viewers' or coders and/or consistency of judgment over time, events, and setting" (n.p.), what qualitative researchers should complete is a test of dependability to be sure the theme are actually emergent from their data (Boyatzis, 1998; Anastas, 2013). In this research, I compared the themes emerging from the interview data to those that emerged from the pilot study for my test of dependability because the research was conducted among a group of similar people (lay Catholic/priest bloggers attending the

blognic and lay Catholics/priests in the Diocese of Browntown) over a period of time.

Thus, the discussion that follows in Chapter 5 is data-driven and inductive in nature. The next two chapters will outline the results of the survey and interviews conducted for this research.

CHAPTER 4: SURVEY RESULTS

Two surveys were administered in order to gain insight from both lay Catholics and priests regarding how they use social media spaces, how they understand and make sense of the relationships they form in social media spaces, and how these relationships impact their identity as Catholics.

The surveys were distributed electronically via Qualtrics between November 2012 and January 2013. Lay Catholics, comprised of university students from a Midwestern, secular university and random parishioners within the same Catholic Diocese were invited via email to participate in the lay Catholic version of the survey (see Appendix A). Likewise, parish priests from the same Diocese were invited via email to participate in the Catholic hierarchy version of the survey (see Appendix B). The purpose of both surveys was to discover the perceived use of new media by both groups and to gauge the attitudes of individuals in both groups toward the relationships developed within and between the groups in social media spaces.

Section 1. Lay Catholic Survey Results

Lay Catholic participant contact information was gathered from the admissions office at the university where students self-identified their religious affiliation on admissions materials and from the campus ministry organization at the Catholic parish in the town where the university is located. Other lay Catholic participants were recruited using email lists for ministries and organizations within the same local parish community as the university students. As a result of this convenience sampling technique and in order to keep track of the number of surveys distributed to calculate a more accurate

response rate, the lay Catholic version of the survey was distributed to 274 lay Catholics. Of the 274 contacts made, 100 started the survey, but a range of 70-74 participants provided responses to the survey questions reported here for a response rate of 25%-27%. This percentage is slightly below the average response rate of 30% for online surveys (The University of Texas at Austin, 2007; Survey Monkey, 2009). A total of 73 participants filled out the demographic questions concerning age, gender, and occupation, which came at the end of the survey.

Table 1 offers a glimpse of the demographic background of the lay Catholic participants who responded to these questions.

Table 1

Lay Catholic Participant Demographics

Gender	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Male	19.2%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	27.4%
Female	41.1%	5.5%	23.3%	2.7%	72.6%

N = 73; N (male) = 20; N (female) = 53

The age breaks reported are two-fold: First, these are the same age categories that the Pew Research Center utilizes in their “2013 Social Media Update” (Duggan & Smith, 2014). Additionally, these age categories represent generational groups: 18-29 year olds capture members of the Millennial generation, 30-49 captures Generation X, 50-64 captures the younger end of the Baby Boomers, and 65 and older represent members of the older end of the Baby Boomers. These age delineations were made because

technology use differs across generations (A. Smith, 2014). The email recruitment method employed for this research serves as an explanation for nearly 60% of the sample representing the Millennial Generation. Additionally, A. Smith (2014) suggests that while older adults continue to further their use of technology, they have historically been slow to adopt it.

Of the lay Catholics surveyed in this research, nearly 87% reported having a Facebook profile. Table 2 offers a glimpse at the Facebook use of lay Catholics by age who answered ‘yes’ to having a Facebook profile on the survey. It also shows the percentage of lay Catholics within each age range who specify on their Facebook profile that they are Catholic.

Table 2

Lay Catholics and Facebook by Age (at a glance)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Have a profile	93.3%	66.7%	78.9%	75%	86.5%
Specify Catholic	83.3%	50%	60%	0	71.9%

N = 74

The findings reported here differ somewhat from the Pew Research Center’s “2013 Social Media Update” which reported that “some 73% of online adults now use a social networking site of some kind” (Duggan & Smith, 2014, p. 1), and that Facebook remains the most used social networking site across generations (Duggan & Smith, 2014). The individuals represented in this sample report higher social media use than the results

reported by Duggan and Smith because many of them reside in a university community: All of the Millennials who participated in this research are either undergraduate or graduate students at the local university, while many of the members of the other three generations are affiliated or associated with the university in some way as well. The Pew Research Center also reports that while “42% of online adults use multiple social networking platforms[,] for those who use only one social networking site, Facebook is typically...the platform of choice” (Duggan & Smith, 2014, p. 2). They also found that 71% of online adults are using Facebook and that Facebook use “among seniors has increased significantly in the last year” (p. 4) with 45% of Internet users over the age of 65 using Facebook. In this research’s data set, 76.2% of the males surveyed and 89.1% of the females surveyed report having a Facebook profile. Of the males who report having Facebook, 81.3% specify that they are Catholic while only 65.3% of the females specify that they are Catholic on their profiles.

All of the participants for this research report using Facebook for purely personal reasons or for primarily personal but some professional reasons. In fact, 100% of both the 30-49 year old and 65 and older demographics who have a Facebook profile report using it for purely personal reasons, while 93% of the 50-64 year olds surveyed for this research report using Facebook for purely personal reasons. The youngest age demographic, the 18-29 year olds, reported 67% for purely personal reasons and 33% for primarily personal but some professional reasons.

As with Facebook, Twitter use is higher in the sample than has been reported in other capacities. In this research, 36.5% of the participants reported having Twitter

compared to the 18% of online adults who use Twitter reported in the Pew Research Center's *2013 Social Media Update* (Duggan & Smith, 2014, p. 1). Table 3 offers a glimpse at the Twitter use of the lay Catholics who answered yes to having a Twitter profile on the survey.

Table 3

Lay Catholics and Twitter by Age (at a glance)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Have a profile	48.9%	33.3%	15.8%	0	36.5%
Specify Catholic	13.6%	50%	66.7%	X	22.2%
N = 74					

Duggan and Smith (2014) suggest that Twitter “adoption levels are particularly high among young adults...” (p. 5), which is evident in Table 2 as well. The Pew Research Center also suggests that Twitter users frequently visit the site with 46% using it daily and 29% checking it multiple times a day (Duggan & Smith, 2014). More than three-fourths of the Millennial participants report using Twitter for purely personal reasons while half of the Generation X participants and two-thirds of the younger Baby Boomers report using Twitter for purely personal reasons. Less than 10% of the Millennials report using it for primarily personal and some professional reasons while the remaining half of the Generation X participants and the remaining third of the younger Baby Boomers report using Twitter for primarily personal and some professional reasons. Only 9.1% of the Millennials surveyed who have Twitter report using it for equally personal and

professional reasons. Additionally, 33.3% of the males surveyed and 36.4% of the females surveyed report having Twitter. Of the males who report having Twitter, 42.9% specify that they are Catholic while only 15% of the females specify that they are Catholic on their profiles. While males made up a smaller sample of the lay Catholics surveyed across the board, the lay Catholic males seem to be more open about their Catholic identity on both Facebook and Twitter than lay Catholic females. However, the number of male respondents was substantially smaller than the number of females, so the male respondents' personalities may be more open than the personalities of the female respondents because they opted to participate in this research in the first place.

Lay Catholics were also asked about their parish's web presence via website and social media. Concerning parish websites, 87% of lay Catholics surveyed correctly said their parish has a website and 12% didn't know if their parish has a website. Of those lay Catholics who reported that their parish had a website, 51% had personally accessed their parish's website within 3 months of participating in the survey, and 33% had accessed it within a month of participating in the survey. However, only 18% had accessed it the week they participated in the survey. Additionally, 26% of lay Catholics surveyed reported that their parish uses social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter, 19% reported that their parish does not, and 55% reported that they don't know if their parish uses social networking tools. The lack of certainty that lay Catholics exhibit across the board concerning their parishes' use of social media suggests that parishes could do a better job with advertising their social media presence.

A five point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) was also used in the survey to measure perceptions and attitudes toward religious expression via social media, lay Catholic engagement with Church hierarchy via social media spaces, and relationship growth because of that engagement. However, for reporting purposes here, the degrees of difference were collapsed into the categories of simply “agree,” “disagree,” and “neutral” for the next three sections of results for two reasons: First, because of the small *N* for each group of participants; and second, because very few responses fell into the extreme categories of strongly agree or strongly disagree.

Lay Catholics: Social Media Spaces for Religious Expression

The results in this section will refer to the first research question posited for this research: In what ways do social media spaces provide a place for religious expression and growth? Religious expression was conceptualized as social media platforms offering a space for lay Catholics to comment on topics they would not comment on otherwise in a public space. Religious growth was thought of as the level of comfort lay Catholics feel in discussing religious topics in social media spaces. It was also based on lay Catholics having a deepened sense of faith because of engagement in religious discussion with other lay Catholics and with priests via social media platforms. First, however, it is important to understand the comfort level of lay Catholics when it comes to being religious in face-to-face situations and in social media spaces before delving into comfort with religious expression in these places.

In face-to-face situations, 83.6% of the lay Catholics surveyed reported feeling comfortable being openly religious (see Table 4). The age breakdown is also quite

interesting: The only participants who reported discomfort with being openly religious in face-to-face situations are those who fall into the 18-29 year old demographic.

Table 4

Being Religious in Face-to-Face Situations (Laity)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Not comfortable being openly religious in face-to-face situations	8.9%	0	0	0	5.5%
Neutral	11.1%	16.7%	5.6%	25%	11%
Comfortable being openly religious in face-to-face situations	80%	83.3%	94.4%	75%	83.6%
N = 73					

Additionally, 90% of the lay Catholic males and 81.8% of the lay Catholic females report comfort in being religious in face-to-face situations. Since the lay participants were pulled from students involved in campus ministry and those on ministry lists at the same Catholic parish, this might explain why only those in the 18-29 year old demographic reported a discomfort in being openly religious in face-to-face situation: Those who volunteer for ministry roles and are in groups that meet regularly enough to have email lists are probably comfortable expressing their faith regardless of the situation, while younger college-aged students are still exploring this part of their lives. Interestingly, the

percentages drop when it comes to being openly religious on social media such as Facebook and Twitter (see Table 5).

Table 5

Being Religious in Social Media Space (Laity)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Not comfortable being openly religious on social media	25%	0	16.7%	50%	22.2%
Neutral	18.2%	50%	27.8%	50%	25%
Comfortable being openly religious on social media	56.8%	50%	55.6%	0	52.8%
N = 72					

Table 5 suggests that only 52.8% of lay Catholics surveyed reported feeling comfortable being religious in social media spaces such as Facebook and Twitter, with 45% of the lay Catholic males and 55.6% lay Catholic females expressing this. The percentages of those feeling comfortable being openly religious on social media drop across the board but, quite considerably, in the 65 and older demographic. This could be explained because of the older generation's hesitance to adopt social media and the younger generation's hesitance to be openly religious even in face-to-face situations (refer back to Table 4). Additionally, later in the survey when asked about the necessity of being openly religious around peers – only 45% of the lay Catholic participants believed it was necessary to be

openly religious around peers while 25% did not believe it was necessary to be openly religious around peers.

When it comes to actually commenting on or expressing views about religious topics in social media spaces, 45.2% of lay Catholics reported not feeling comfortable discussing religious topics in social media spaces like Facebook and Twitter while 37% reported that they are comfortable discussing religious topics there (see Table 6).

Table 6

Comfort with Religious Topics in Social Media Spaces (Laity)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Not comfortable discussing religious topics on social media	50%	33.3%	31.6%	75%	45.2%
Neutral	6.8%	33.3%	36.8%	25%	17.8%
Comfortable discussing religious topics on social media	43.2%	33.3%	31.6%	0	37%

N = 73

Additionally, only one-third of the lay Catholic males surveyed and just over one-third (35.2%) of the lay Catholic females surveyed expressed feeling comfortable discussing religious topics in social media spaces such as Facebook and Twitter. However, 67.6% of lay Catholics surveyed believed that they could defend their position as a Catholic if confronted with debate on Catholic doctrine or teaching within social media spaces, and

55% believed that they have a relationship with a member of Church hierarchy within a social media community who would be able to help them if confronted with an issue of faith. Only 23% felt that they do not have this kind of relationship with a member of Church hierarchy in a social media space. It is interesting to note that according to the lay Catholics surveyed for this research, 63% reported not being friends with members of Church hierarchy on their social media profiles. Additionally, more than two-thirds (69.9%) of lay Catholics surveyed believed that they have Catholic friends in social media spaces who would help them defend Catholic teaching if confronted with a debate. As such, we can conclude that many of the Catholics surveyed for this research feel prepared enough to take on debate concerning Catholic teaching and/or doctrine within a social media space or at least have friends who they feel comfortable contacting for help if the need to defend the faith in a social media space arises. This conclusion gives credence to the idea of social media space being an area for religious expression: While lay Catholics report that they are not always comfortable discussing religious topics in social media space, many do feel as though they have connections in that space that could be of help should debate concerning religious topics arise.

However, total of 45.1% of lay Catholics reported that they do not believe that social media spaces offer a space for commentary on religious topics that they would not normally comment on in face-to-face situations (see Table 7).

Table 7

Commentary on Religious Topics and Social Media (Laity)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Social media do not allow me to comment on topics I wouldn't normally comment on in face-to-face situations	51.2%	50%	33.3%	25%	45.1%
Neutral	30.2%	33.3%	55.6%	75%	39.4%
Social media allow me to comment on topics I wouldn't normally comment on in face-to-face situations	18.6%	16.7%	11.1%	0	15.5%
N = 71					

Gender does not appear to play a role in whether lay Catholics feel as though social media allow them to comment on religious topics that they would not normally comment on in face-to-face situations with 45% of the male sample disagreeing and 45.3% of the female sample disagreeing with the notion. That said, very few lay Catholics believe that social media offer a space for commentary on religious topics: In fact, no one in the 65 and older reported believing this. This is likely explained by the fact that again, the older generation has been more hesitant to adopt social media, and therefore, they would be less likely to believe that it would offer a space for them to make comments on topics that they would not comment on in other face-to-face, social situations. Additionally, younger demographics tend to see social media as an extension of real life, as an extension of the

self: As the numbers here indicate, they are more likely than the older demographics to see social media as an opportunity to try on new and different social roles.

Additionally, only 22.2% of lay Catholics surveyed felt like their involvement in discussions in social media spaces had helped them to deepen their faith, while 30.6% did not feel that way (see Table 8). However, the most frequent answer across demographics, by a wide margin (over 30%) in each generation, was to neither agree nor disagree that discussions social media spaces had helped them to deepen their faith.

Table 8

Deepened Faith because of Social Media Involvement (Laity)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Has not deepened faith	34.1%	16.7%	27.8%	25%	30.6%
Neutral	38.6%	66.7%	55.6%	75%	47.2%
Has deepened faith	27.3%	16.7%	16.7%	0	22.2%
N = 72					

Once again, no one in the 65 and older demographic held the belief that their faith has been deepened because of their involvement in social media spaces. The younger the participants are, the more likely they are to agree with their faith being deepened. Once again, gender does not appear to play a role in whether lay Catholics feel as though their faith has deepened because of social media use, with 45% of the male sample disagreeing and 29.6% of the female sample disagreeing with the notion. However, still nearly half of

the lay Catholics neither agree nor disagree that their faith has grown because of social media use. This leads to a conclusion that these areas need further explanation from the participants (which comes from interviews discussed in Chapter 5).

Now that we have an understanding of how lay Catholics see social media space as a place for religious expression and growth, the next section will explore how social media spaces might function as an environment for lay Catholic engagement with members of Catholic hierarchy.

Lay Catholics: Social Media Spaces as an Environment for Engagement with Church Hierarchy

The results in this section will refer to the second research question advanced in this study: In what ways, if at all, do social media spaces provide an environment for members of Church hierarchy and the laity to engage with one another? Engagement in social media spaces was conceptualized as contact with other lay Catholics and with members of Church hierarchy within social media spaces. It was measured by the level of superficiality lay Catholics report feeling in their online relationships and by lay Catholics' belief in whether close friendships can emerge from their engagement with others online.

As such, lay Catholics reported not having frequent contact with members of Church hierarchy within social media spaces (see Table 9).

Table 9

Lay Contact with Church Hierarchy via Social Media Platforms

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Do not frequently have contact	72.7%	83.3%	61.1%	75%	70.8%
Neutral	13.6%	0	16.7%	0	12.5%
Do frequently have contact	13.6%	16.7%	22.2%	25%	16.7%
N = 72					

Table 9 illustrates that an overwhelming majority of lay Catholics reported not having frequent contact with members of Church hierarchy via social media platforms. In fact, 70% of the lay Catholic males surveyed and 70.4% of the lay Catholic females surveyed report that they do not frequently have contact with their pastor via social media spaces. Surprisingly, however, the percentage of participants who do report more frequent contact with Church hierarchy via social media platforms increases with age. This could potentially be a false trend, however, as the older demographics had fewer respondents than the 18-29 year old demographic.

Of the lay Catholics surveyed, nearly half (47.9%) remained neutral on the issue of the superficiality of relationships formed in social media spaces: 34.2% agreed that these relationships are superficial and 17.8% disagreed that the relationships are superficial (see Table 10).

Table 10

Superficiality of Relationships formed in Social Media Spaces (Laity)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Are not superficial	18.2%	16.7%	21.1%	0	17.8%
Neutral	45.5%	50%	52.6%	50%	47.9%
Are superficial	36.4%	33.3%	26.3%	50%	34.2%

N = 73

What can be extrapolated from this table is a tendency for the lay Catholic participants to neither disagree nor agree with the idea that relationships formed between laity and priests in social media spaces as superficial. Interestingly, in the 65 and older demographic, participants either remained neutral or agreed that relationships are superficial which supports the idea generational mistrust of social media use. Overall, a generational difference can be seen where some of the participants under the age of 65 believe that some of their relationships in social media space are not superficial where only those over the age of 65 reported that there was no such possibility.

However, 58.9% of lay Catholics reported believing that relationships formed in social media spaces could lead to closer friendships while only 27.4% remained neutral and 13.7% disagreed (see Table 11).

Table 11

Social Media and Close Friendships (Laity)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Cannot lead to closer friendships	13.6%	16.7%	15.8%	0	13.7%
Neutral	36.4%	0	15.8%	25%	27.4%
Can lead to close friendships	50%	83.3%	68.4%	75%	58.9%

N = 73

Also, 52.4% of the lay Catholic males surveyed and 61.1% of the lay Catholic females surveyed believe that relationships formed in social media spaces can lead to closer friendships. All of this suggests that while lay Catholics believe that relationships formed in social media spaces can lead to the possibility of depth through closer friendships, they seldom see it in practice (refer to Table 9).

Now that we have an understanding of how lay Catholics believe that social media space works to provide a place for them to engage with their priests and each other, the next section of results will explore how these social media spaces function as a space for their relationship with their parish priest to grow.

Lay Catholics: Social Media Spaces as a Space for Relationship with Hierarchy to Grow

The results in this section will refer to the third research question posited for this research: In what ways do social media spaces provide areas for relationships between members of Church hierarchy and the laity to grow and flourish? Relationship growth was conceptualized as a sense of feeling like one's relationship with their priest has been

aided by interactions in social media space. It was measured by lay Catholics’ feelings about their relationships with their priest being better because of interaction in social media space and by lay Catholics’ perceived knowledge of the priesthood because of their interaction with their priest in social media spaces. “Relationships flourishing” was conceptualized as the ease with which one might approach his/her priest in a face-to-face situation because of their pre-existing interaction in social media spaces. It was also measured by the lay Catholics’ overall feeling of connectedness to the Catholic institution because of their interactions with other Catholics, lay and clergy alike, via social media platforms.

Of the lay Catholic participants surveyed, 58% did not believe that their relationship with their pastor was better because of interactions on Facebook or Twitter (see Table 12).

Table 12

Lay Relationship with Pastor and Social Media

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Relationship with pastor is not better because of social media	55.8%	16.7%	55.6%	25%	50.7%
Neutral	37.2%	83.3%	44.4%	75%	45.1%
Relationship with pastor is better because of social media	7%	0	0	0	4.2%

N = 71

In fact, only 4% believed they have a better relationship because of social media interaction, and all of the participants who answered this way were in the youngest demographic (18-29 years old). More males (10% of lay Catholic males surveyed) expressed a better relationship with their pastor via social media than females (1.9% of lay Catholic females surveyed). Additionally, only 6.9% of lay Catholics felt like they knew more about the priesthood and religious life because they of their connection with a priest on Facebook (see Table 13).

Table 13

Knowledge of Priesthood/Religious Life because of Social Media

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Do not know more about religious life because of social media relationships	54.5%	50%	44.4%	50%	51.4%
Neutral	38.6%	50%	44.4%	50%	41.7%
Do know more about religious life because of social media relationships	6.8%	0	11.1%	0	6.9%

N = 72

Similarly, only 2.9% of lay Catholics felt like they could better approach their pastor in face-to-face situations because of their relationship on Facebook or Twitter (see Table 14). Again, all of these participants were in the youngest demographic (18-29 year olds).

Table 14

Pastor's Approachability Face-to-Face Based on Social Media Interaction

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Cannot approach pastor face-to-face because of our relationship on social media	52.4%	50%	55.6%	50%	52.9%
Neutral	42.9%	50%	44.4%	50%	44.3%
Can approach pastor face-to-face because of our relationship on social media	4.8%	0	0	0	2.9%
N = 70					

With the low percentages of agreement on the previous statements, it was surprising that 16.7% of lay Catholics surveyed reported feeling more connected to the Catholic Church because of their contact with members of Church hierarchy in social media spaces (see Table 15).

Table 15

Lay Connectivity with Church because of Social Media Interactions with Hierarchy

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Do not feel more connected to the Church	47.7%	33.3%	55.6%	25%	47.2%
Neutral	34.1%	50%	27.8%	75%	36.1%
Do feel more connected to the Church	18.2%	16.7%	16.7%	0	16.7%

N = 72

More lay Catholic males (30%) reported feeling a better connection with the Church because of interaction with members of Church hierarchy in social media spaces than lay Catholic females (11.1%). Even more surprising, given the preceding tables, is some representation of agreement in all demographics except for the very oldest. Coupled with conclusions garnered from the first two research questions concerning religious expression and engagement, these results suggest that potential for relationship growth in social media spaces. While the potential for growth appears to be there, however, the majority of lay Catholics still report not seeing these trends reflected in their current relationships with each other or with their priests in social media spaces.

Lay Catholics: Overall Conclusions

Based on the results reported in the preceding three section, it does not appear that the Catholic Church's presence online, especially via social media platforms, is achieving as much as some might hope. When asked about the Church's use of new media, many

lay Catholics remained neutral on the issue (50%) while slightly more agreed (29%) than disagreed (21%) that the Church uses new media effectively (see Table 16).

Table 16

Lay Belief that Church uses New Media Effectively

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Does not use new media effectively	34.1%	16.7%	22.2%	25%	29.2%
Neutral	43.2%	66.7%	55.6%	75%	50%
Does use new media effectively	22.7%	16.7%	22.2%	0	20.8%

N = 72

Lay Catholics see the potential for relationship growth with their priests in social media spaces, but their responses do not reflect that relationships are currently being built via social media platforms. However, because of the level of neutrality exhibited by the lay Catholics who participated in this research, many of the topics discussed in this section were explored further with follow-up interviews, which are discussed in Chapter 5. This research does confirm what other researchers (Duggan and Smith, 2014; Smith, 2014) suggest about social media maintaining a heavy presence in people's lives across generations, however.

Section 2. Church Hierarchy Survey Results

Priests of the same diocese as the lay Catholics were contacted for participation in the church hierarchy survey. The contact information for the priests of the Diocese of Browntown is public information found on the Diocesan webpage. All of the priests of the Diocese were contacted for participation. As such, the Church hierarchy version of the survey was distributed to 50 priests. Of the 50 contacts made, 36 priests started the survey, 21-23 priests responded to the content questions reported here for a response rate of 42%-46%. This range exceeds the average response rate for online surveys, which is 30% (The University of Texas at Austin, 2007; Survey Monkey, 2009). A total of 23 priest participants filled out the demographic questions, which for them mostly concerned age and how long they had been ordained.

Table 17 offers a glimpse of the demographic background of the priest participants for this research.

Table 17

Priest Participant Demographics

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
N	2	5	7	9	23
% of total	8.7%	21.7%	30.4%	39.1%	100%

The rationale for the age breakdown is the same for the priests as it was for the lay Catholics, using the parameters set forth by Duggan and Smith (2014).

Of the priests who responded to the invitation to participate in this research, nearly 55% reported having a Facebook profile and two-thirds of the priests who have a Facebook page indicate that they are a priest on their pages (see Table 18). In contrast to the lay sample, this represents a much lower percentage than the general population. However, because there are so many more priests in the upper age demographics, the population is skewed towards those who are least likely use social media.

Table 18

Church Hierarchy and Facebook by Age (at a glance)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Have a profile	100%	80%	42.9%	37.5%	54.5%
Specify Priest	100%	70%	33.3%	66.7%	66.7%

N = 22

Of the priests falling into the youngest age demographic, 100% of them have a Facebook profile which clearly indicates that they are a priest. The percentages of priests with Facebook profiles drops as age increases. However, there are priests in each age demographic who report having a Facebook profile.

Of the priests who responded ‘yes’ to having a profile on Facebook, 33.3% reported using the profile for purely personal reasons while 58.3% reported using it for primarily personal but some professional reasons. Only 1 priest reported using their Facebook profile purely for professional reasons. Of those priests who reported having a profile on Facebook, 8% said that they are rarely logged in to their profile, while 17% log

in every few days. Fourteen percent reported logging in at least once a day while 1 priest reported that he was always logged in to Facebook. Nearly 67% percent of the priests who reported having a profile on Facebook said that it is clear that they are a priest on their profile (33% reported that it is not clear). Finally, 91.7% of priests who reported having a Facebook profile said that they are friends with parishioners (both past and current).

In line with the broader population, four (or 17.4%) of the priests surveyed report having a Twitter account (see Table 19).

Table 19

Church Hierarchy and Twitter by Age (at a glance)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Have a profile	50%	40%	14.3%	0	17.4%
Specify Priest	100%	50%	0	X	50%

N = 23

As Duggan and Smith (2014) suggest in the “2013 Social Media Update,” Twitter adoption rates are higher among younger adults, which is illustrated here in Table 17. Of the four priests who use Twitter, one reported using it for purely personal reasons; two used it primary for personal but also for some professional reasons; and one used it purely for professional purposes. Three of the Twitter-using priests reported that they rarely log in to their accounts while one reported always being logged in. Two of the four priests on Twitter said it is clear that they are a priest on their profile while two suggested

that it is not clear. Two also reported following their past or current parishioners while two did not. Finally, two reported knowing that their profile's security settings are public while two reported not knowing what security settings they have.

In terms of parishes with websites, 73% of priests surveyed reported that their parish has a website. Of those who reported having a parish website, 90% had accessed the site within the three months prior to participating in this research, 79% had accessed the site within the month prior to their participation, but only 42% had accessed their parish's site the week of their participation. These percentages are higher than the percentages reported by the lay Catholics when it comes to visiting parish websites. Nearly half of the priests surveyed (46%) reported having oversight to what is posted on their parish's website, but only 23% noted that they were responsible for posting the content themselves. Finally, only 19% of priests surveyed reported that their parish uses social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter, 69% reported that their parish is not using social networking tools, and 12% didn't know whether their parish was using these tools. This large percentage of priests who report that their parishes are not using social media can explain why the lay Catholics believe that relationships can be formed in this space but are not reporting that it is happening at this time.

Once again, a five point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) was used in the survey to measure perceptions and attitudes toward religious expression via social media, the priests engagement with lay Catholics via social media spaces, and perceived relationship growth because of that engagement. However, for reporting purposes here, the degrees of difference in the priests' responses were collapsed into the

categories of simply “agree,” “disagree,” and “neutral” for the next three sections of results.

Church Hierarchy: Social Media Spaces for Religious Expression

The results in this section will refer to the first research question posited for this research: In what ways do social media spaces provide a place for religious expression and growth? Again, religious expression was thought of as social media offering a space for priests to comment on topics they might not comment on otherwise in a public space. Religious growth was conceptualized as the level of comfort priests feel in discussing religious topics in social media spaces and having a deepened sense of faith because of engagement in religious discussion with other priests and with lay Catholics in social media spaces. First, however, it is important to understand the comfort level of priests when it comes to being religious in face-to-face situations and in social media spaces.

Almost 96% of priests surveyed agreed that they feel comfortable being religious in face-to-face situations (see Table 20). Surprisingly, one priest did report feeling discomfort in face-to-face situations.

Table 20

Being Religious in Face-to-Face Situations (Priest)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Not comfortable being openly religious in face-to-face situations	0	0	14.3%	0	4.3%
Neutral	0	0	0	0	0
Comfortable being openly religious in face-to-face situations	100%	100%	85.7%	100%	95.7%
N = 23					

Not surprisingly, opinions changed when it comes to feeling comfortable with being religious in social media spaces (see Table 21): 45.5% agreed that they are comfortable being religious within social media spaces such as Facebook and Twitter, 13.6% disagreed, and 40.9% neither agreed nor disagreed that they feel comfortable with being religious in social media spaces.

Table 21

Being Religious in Social Media Space (Priest)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Not comfortable being openly religious on social media	0	0	16.7%	22.2%	13.6%
Neutral	0	20%	66.7%	44.4%	40.9%
Comfortable being openly religious on social media	100%	80%	16.7%	33.3%	45.5%

N = 22

As can be seen in Tables 18 and 19, however, adoption of social media among older priests especially is still rather low, which explains why the older priests express more discomfort on social media as depicted in Table 21. Taken together with Table 20, this result likely reflects discomfort more with social media than with being openly religious in a particular context.

Almost 29% of priests surveyed suggested that they feel comfortable discussing religious topics in social media space (see Table 22) while 23.8% reported that they do not feel comfortable engaging in religious discourse there. However, nearly half of the priests surveyed remained neutral.

Table 22

Comfort with Religious Topics in Social Media Spaces (Priest)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Not comfortable discussing religious topics on social media	50%	40%	0	25%	23.8%
Neutral	0	40%	83.3%	37.5%	47.6%
Comfortable discussing religious topics on social media	50%	20%	16.7%	37.5%	28.6%
N = 21					

There is a high proportion of discomfort across the demographics, even (and especially) among the younger demographics. This can be interpreted in a variety of ways: First and foremost is that, once again, the priests' responses reflect discomfort more with the communication style associated with social media than with being religious in a particular context. More lay Catholic respondents reported higher levels of comfort with religious dialogue in social media which suggests some difference in expectations for what takes place in this space according to vocation. A number of the priests touched on this topic in a broader sense in the interviews (see Chapter 5), suggesting that they are very careful not to bring scandal to anyone or to further spread misunderstanding in an already heated context. However, as one might expect, 93% of priests surveyed suggested that if confronted with debate on Catholic doctrine or teaching in a social media space, they could comfortably defend their position. The other 7% remained

neutral (no one disagreed). Additionally, 62% of priests surveyed said that if confronted with debate on Catholic doctrine or teaching in a social media space, they have Catholic friends they could turn to for help (31% remained neutral and 7% disagreed).

Priests generally disagreed (nearly 62%) that social media spaces allow them to comment on religious topics that they would not normally comment on in face-to-face situations (see Table 23).

Table 23

Commentary on Religious Topics and Social Media (Priest)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Social media do not allow me to comment on topics I wouldn't normally comment on in face-to-face situations	50%	80%	50%	62.5%	61.9%
Neutral	0	20%	33.3%	37.5%	28.6%
Social media allow me to comment on topics I wouldn't normally comment on in face-to-face situations	50%	0	16.7%	0	9.5%

N = 21

Like the lay Catholics, very few priests believe that social media offer a space for commentary on religious topics: None of the older priests reported believing this. This is likely explained by the fact that most of the priests have been more hesitant to adopt

social media as a part of their ministry. Therefore, they would be less likely to believe that it would offer a space for them to make comments. Generally speaking, many of the discussions that do take place in social media, especially at this time, occur at a surface level because of the breadth of the community one enters in a social media space.

Finally, less than 10% of the priests surveyed thought that their involvement in discussions in social media spaces has helped them to deepen their faith (see Table 24).

Table 24

Deepened Faith because of Social Media Involvement

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Has not deepened faith	50%	60%	33.3%	37.5%	42.9%
Neutral	0	40%	66.7%	50%	47.6%
Has deepened faith	50%	0	0	12.5%	9.5%

N = 21

Now that we have an understanding of how priests see social media spaces as a place for religious expression, coupled with the comfort levels they feel when it comes to being religious in face-to-face situations and in those social media spaces, the next section will explore how priests believe that social media spaces function as an environment for them to engage with their parishioners.

Church Hierarchy: Social Media Spaces as an Environment for Engagement with Laity

The results in this section will refer to the second research question posited for this research: In what ways, if at all, do social media spaces provide an environment for members of Church hierarchy and the laity to engage with one another? Engagement in social media spaces was conceptualized as priest's contact with other priests and with lay Catholics in social media spaces. It was measured by the level of superficiality priests feel enter those online relationships and their belief in whether close friendships can emerge from their engagement with others online.

The priests were spread when it comes to reporting the frequency of contact they have with the laity in social media spaces (see Table 25): 27.3% agree that they have frequent contact while 40.9% do not frequently have contact with their parishioners.

Table 25

Contact with Lay Catholics via Social Media Platforms

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Do not frequently have contact	50%	20%	50%	44.4%	40.9%
Neutral	0	40%	33.3%	33.3%	31.8%
Do frequently have contact	50%	40%	16.7%	22.2%	27.3%

N = 22

The drastic difference in the percentages reported between younger (priests in the Millennial generation and Generation X) and older priests (younger and older Baby

Boomers) when it comes to the level of contact they have with their parishioners via social media platforms is of note: The younger the priest, the more likely he is to engage with Lay Catholics via social media space.

When asked about the superficiality of relationships in social media spaces (see Table 26), 30.4% of priests disagreed that these relationships are superficial, 34.8% agreed that they are indeed superficial, and 34.8% did not take either side of the issue.

Table 26

Superficiality of Relationships formed in Social Media Spaces (Priest)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Are not superficial	50%	40%	14.3%	33.3%	30.4%
Neutral	0	60%	42.9%	22.2%	34.8%
Are superficial	50%	0	42.9%	44.4%	34.8%
N = 23					

Priests reported very high agreement across demographics when it came to the idea that relationships formed in social media spaces might lead to closer friendships (see Table 27): Only 8.7% of priests surveyed disagreed that relationships formed in social media spaces can lead to closer friendships, 47.8% agreed, and 43.5% remained neutral on the issue.

Table 27

Social Media and Close Friendships (Priest)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Cannot lead to closer friendships	0	20%	14.3%	0	8.7%
Neutral	50%	40%	42.9%	44.4%	43.5%
Can lead to close friendships	50%	40%	42.9%	55.6%	47.8%

N = 23

Also of note is that of the priests surveyed, almost 96% agreed that many of their close friends are also Catholic.

Now that we have an understanding of how priests believe that social media space works to provide a place for them to engage with their parishioners, the next section of results will explore how these social media spaces function as a space for their relationship with their parishioners to grow.

Church Hierarchy: Social Media Spaces as a Space for Relationship with Laity to Grow

The results in this section will refer to the third research question posited for this research: In what ways do social media spaces provide areas for relationships between members of Church hierarchy and the laity to grow and flourish? Relationship growth was conceptualized as a sense of feeling like one's relationship with their parishioners has been aided by interactions in social media space. It was measured by priests' feelings about their relationships with their parishioners being better because of interaction in social media space and by priests' perceived knowledge of the happenings in their

parishioners' lives because of their interaction with them in social media spaces.

“Relationships flourishing” was conceptualized as the ease with which a priest might approach his parishioners in a face-to-face situation because of their pre-existing interaction in social media space. It was also measured by the priests’ overall feelings of connectedness to the Catholic institution because of their interactions with other Catholics, lay and clergy alike, in social media spaces.

Only 22.7% of priests surveyed felt like their relationship with their parishioners was better because of their interactions on Facebook and Twitter (see Table 28): 31.8% disagreed and 45.5% held no opinion either way.

Table 28

Relationship with Parishioners and Social Media

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Relationship with parishioners is not better because of social media	50%	0	33.3%	44.4%	31.8%
Neutral	0	60%	66.7%	33.3%	45.5%
Relationship with parishioners is better because of social media	50%	40%	0	22.2%	22.7%

N = 22

The level of agreement across demographics here is quite striking. Again, the drastic difference in the percentages reported between younger (priests in the Millennial

generation and Generation X) and older priests (younger and older Baby Boomers) when it comes to the idea of better relationships with parishioners because of social media use is quite clear: The younger the priest, the more likely he is to believe his relationships with parishioners are better because of their contact in social media space

The spread was split again by generations in terms of knowing about the lives of parishioners because of contact made in social media spaces (see Table 29): 31.8% of priests agreed that they think they know more about the lives of their parishioners because they are friends with them on Facebook or Twitter, 40.9% disagreed, and 27.3% remained neutral.

Table 29

Knowledge of Parishioners' Lives because of Social Media

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Do not know more about parishioner life because of social media relationships	50%	20%	50%	44.4%	40.9%
Neutral	0	20%	33.3%	33.3%	27.3%
Do know more about parishioner life because of social media relationships	50%	60%	6.7%	22.2%	31.8%

N = 22

Younger priests reported feeling as they knew more about their parishioners' lives because of interactions on social media while older priests do not report this. However,

less than 10% of priests felt like they could better approach their parishioners in face-to-face situations because of their relationship in social media spaces (see Table 30).

Table 30

Parishioners' Approachability Face-to-Face Based on Social Media Interaction

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Cannot approach parishioner face-to-face because of our relationship on social media	50%	40%	50%	37.5%	42.9%
Neutral	0	40%	50%	62.5%	47.6%
Can approach parishioner face-to-face because of our relationship on social media	50%	20%	0	0	9.5%

N = 21

Nearly 14 percent of priests felt more connected to the Catholic Church because of the contact they have with members of the Church within social media space, nearly 41% disagreed about these feelings of connectedness, and 45% held no opinion (see Table 31).

Table 31

Connectivity with Church because of Social Media Interactions with Parishioners

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Do not feel more connected to the Church	50%	60%	33.3%	33.3%	40.9%
Neutral	0	20%	50%	66.7%	45.5%
Do feel more connected to the Church	50%	20%	16.7%	0	13.6%
N = 22					

Church Hierarchy: Overall Conclusions

Based on the results reported in the preceding three sections, it does not appear that the Catholic Church's presence online, especially via social media platforms, is being used to its full potential at this time. When asked about the Church's use of new media, the priests were once again split on the issue of whether the Catholic Church uses new media effectively: 36.4% agreed that it does, almost 41% disagreed, and 22.7% either were not sure or held no opinion on the matter (see Table 32).

Table 32

Hierarchy Belief that Church uses New Media Effectively

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+	Total
Does not use new media effectively	0	40%	33.3%	55.6%	40.9%
Neutral	100%	20%	33.3%	0	22.7%
Does use new media effectively	0	40%	33.3%	44.4%	36.4%
N = 22					

The results concerning the Church's use of new media show that priests across generations believe that there could be improvement in this area. Several of the priests commented on ways the Church could improve their use of social media in interviews (discussed in Chapter 5).

While lay Catholics see the potential for relationship growth with their priests in social media spaces, priests exhibit greater neutrality on the matter. Agreement and action on the priests' part would be preferred for two reasons: First, lay Catholics see potential for relationship growth which could lead to future prosperity for the Church at large. And second, the aim of the last two papacies (Benedict XVI's and Francis's) has had media use by the Church at the fore. In fact, in his World Communications Day proclamation in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI focused his message on the priest, pastoral ministry, and the digital world (Vatican, n.d.). At this time, neutrality at least suggests that the priests could be open to engaging more with their parishioners in social media spaces. Because

of the overwhelming level of neutrality exhibited by the priests who participated in this research and in order to find deeper meaning among both priests and lay Catholics, many of the topics discussed in this chapter were explored further with follow-up interviews, which are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: INTERVIEW RESULTS

The interview portion of this research took place in October and November 2013, with additional interviews conducted in early January 2014. Participants of the survey described in Chapter 4 were asked to provide their contact information if they were willing to sit for a follow-up interview. All interviews were conducted in neutral locations for the participants and the researcher – mainly in church facilities or at coffee shops. Interviews were audio recorded for transcription. All interviews were transcribed using ExpressScribe transcription software.

Of the 100 lay Catholic survey respondents, 25 provided contact information for a follow-up interview. All 25 participants were contacted via email, and 14 responded that they would be interested in following up. One responded that he had moved away from the research area. The other 10 potential candidates did not respond. Because of scheduling issues, 9 interviews were conducted with the lay Catholic participants. The script that guided the lay Catholic interviews can be found in Appendix C. A brief description of each lay Catholic interview participant can be found in Appendix E. Table 33 shows a breakdown of the demographics for the lay Catholic interview participants. The names of the participants have been changed for the sake of confidentiality. Aliases were used to advance the narrative-flow of this chapter.

Table 33

Lay Catholic Interview Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Social Media Use
Sarah Jones	Female	Early 50s	Non-user
Carol Miller	Female	Early 70s	Light
Melanie Crawford	Female	Mid 20s	Moderate
Tom Haselden	Male	Early 20s	Non-(former) user
Maggie Johnson	Female	Early 20s	Moderate
Myra Lopez	Female	Early 50s	Moderate
Jeff Harris	Male	Late 40s	Light
Linda Thomas	Female	Early 60s	Heavy
Jane Hannigan	Female	Early 60s	Light
N = 9			

Of the 36 priest survey respondents, 12 provided contact information for a follow-up interview. Of the 12 attempted contacts, 11 responded favorably to be interviewed and one never responded. Because of scheduling issues, 9 of the 11 potential participants were interviewed. The script that guided the priests' interviews can be found in Appendix D. A brief description of each of the priest interview participants can be found in Appendix F. Table 34 shows a breakdown of the demographics for the priest interview participants. As with the lay Catholic participants, the names of the priests were changed for the sake of confidentiality. Aliases were used to advance the narrative-flow of this chapter.

Table 34

Priest Interview Participants

Name	Age	Years Ordained	Social Media Use
Msgr. Robert Harper	Mid 70s	50	Non-user
Fr. Joseph Finley	Late 20s	2	Heavy
Fr. Michael Coolidge	Mid 50s	29	Moderate
Msgr. John Peterson	Mid 70s	49	Non-user
Fr. Ryan Haggerty	Early 40s	13	Light
Fr. Eric Ball	Mid 60s	9	Non-user
Msgr. Edward Wendt	Early 70s	45	Light
Fr. James Hazel	Late 40s	13	Light
Fr. Andrew Rodriguez	Early 40s	15	Light to moderate
N = 9			

Interview candidates were reminded about the survey they took in the first part of this research at the beginning of the interview during the consent process. Early in all of the conversations, the working definition of new or social media being utilized for this project, that is “new forms of on-demand, Internet-based communication that promote connectivity and interactivity” (Vogt, 2011, p. 212), was reiterated. From there, conversations concerning the interview participants’ opinions about their own social media use, the presence of religious discussion in online spaces, and the priest’s role in communicating online were guided by the interview guides found in Appendices C and D.

Interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001; Braun and Clarke, 2006) for further clarity about issues concerning social media use and the Catholic Church that were only marginally discussed in the survey results. Braun and Clarke suggest that phases 3 through 6 of thematic analysis helps to refocus the analysis from codes to themes via visual representations like concept maps. The following concept maps were developed based on the manifest themes (Boyatzis, 1998) emerging from the interview data.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the manifest themes that emerged in relation to the first research question posited for this research: In what ways do social media spaces provide a place for religious expression and growth? The concept maps outline both positive and negative themes that emerged from in my discussions with both lay Catholics (see Figure 1) and priests (see Figure 2).

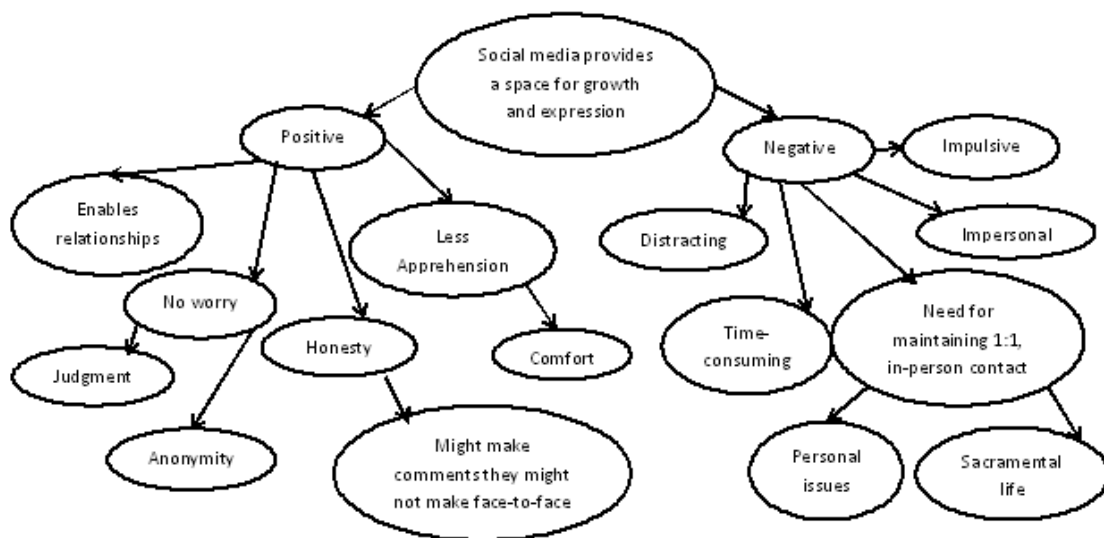


Figure 1. Lay Catholics and Social Media Space as a Place for Growth and Expression

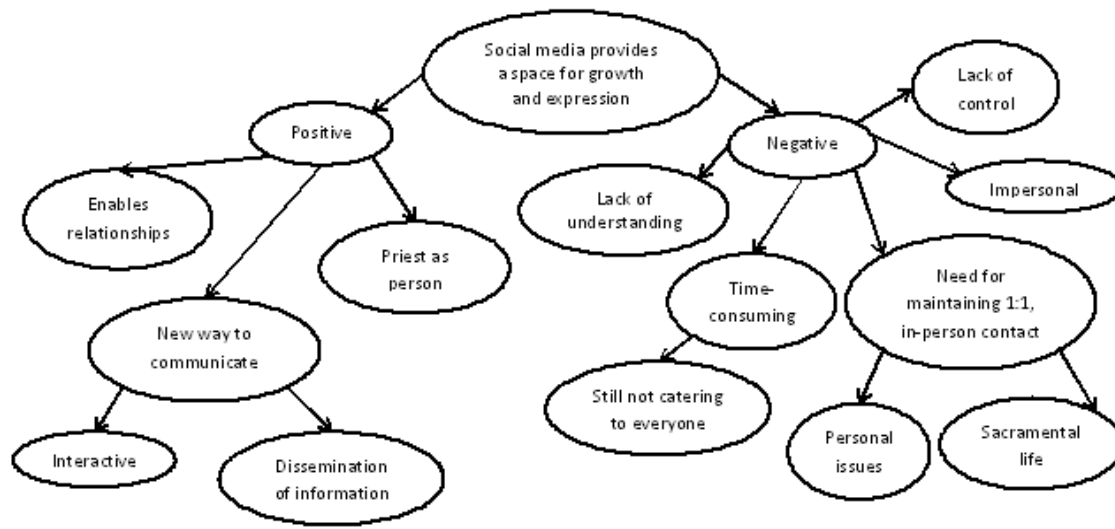


Figure 2. Priests and Social Media Space as a Place for Growth and Expression

Figures 3 and 4 portray the manifest themes that emerged in analysis of the second research question advanced in this dissertation: In what ways do social media spaces provide an environment for members of Church hierarchy and the laity to engage with one another? The concept maps outline both positive and negative themes that emerged in my discussions with both lay Catholics (see Figure 3) and priests (see Figure 4).

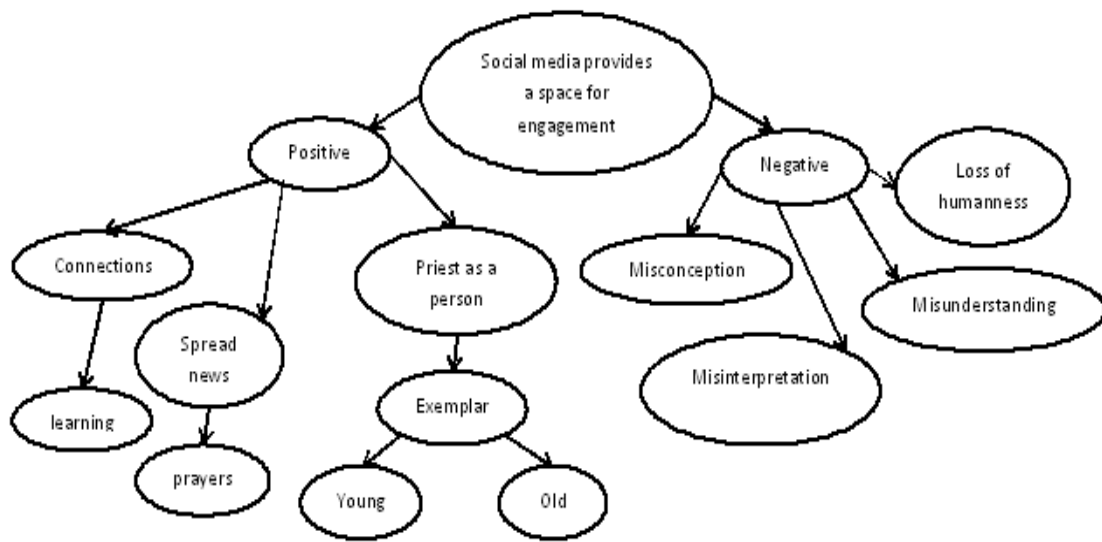


Figure 3. Lay Catholics and Social Media Space as an Environment for Engagement

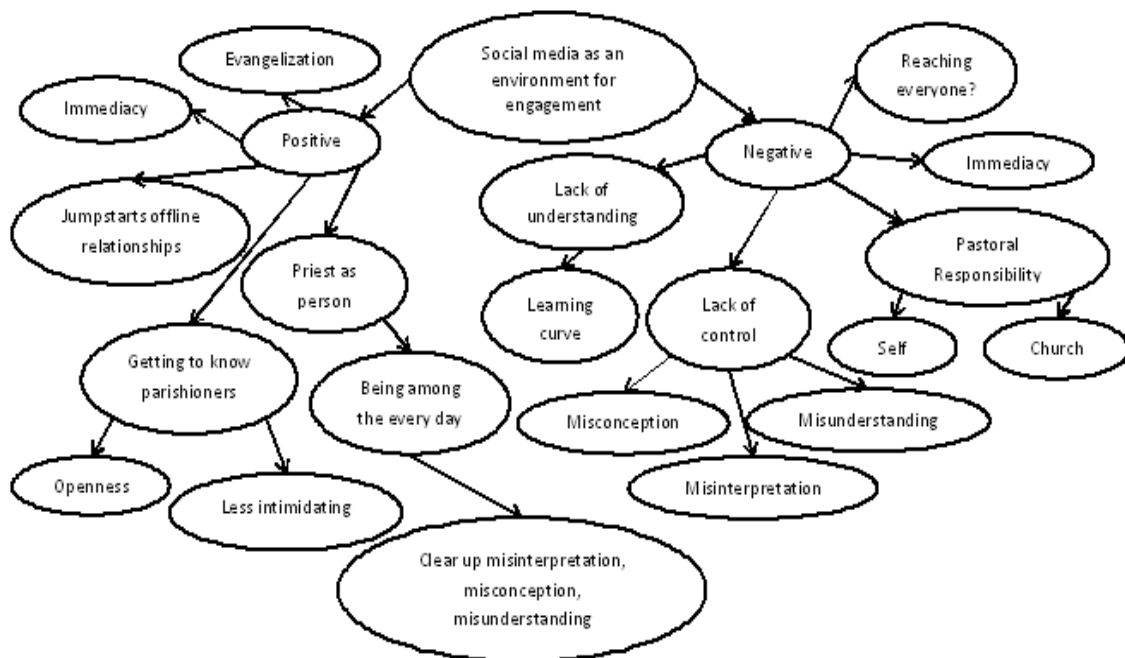


Figure 4. Priests and Social Media Space as an Environment for Engagement

Figures 5 and 6 reveal the manifest themes that emerged from analysis of the interviews according to the third research question advanced for this research: In what ways do social media spaces provide areas for relationships between members of Church hierarchy and the laity to grow and flourish? The concept maps outline both positive and negative themes that emerged from my discussions with both lay Catholics (see Figure 5) and priests (see Figure 6).

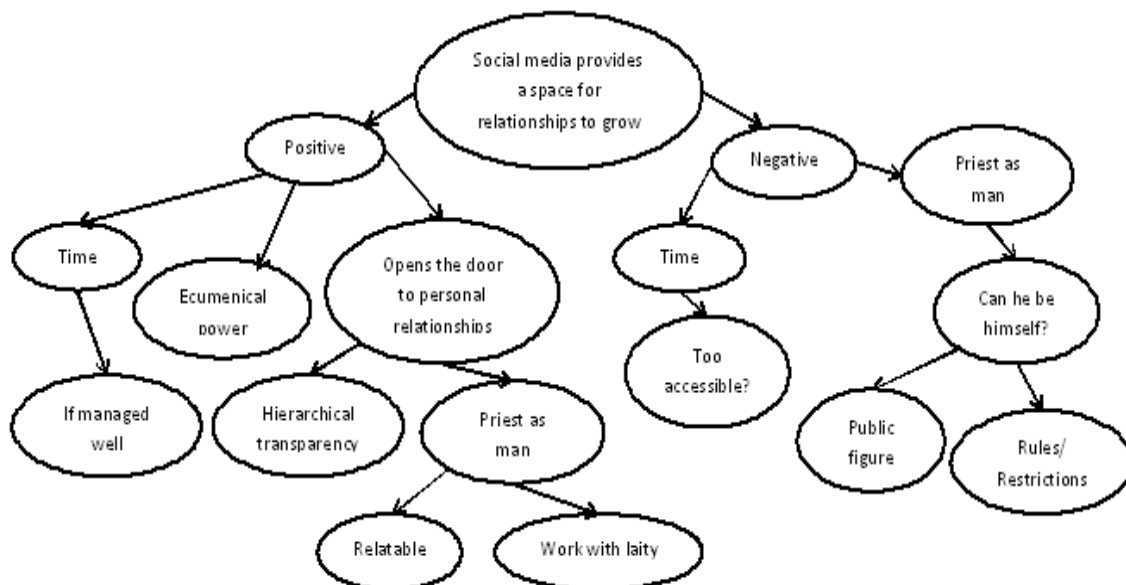


Figure 5. Lay Catholics and Social Media Space as a Place for Relationships to Grow

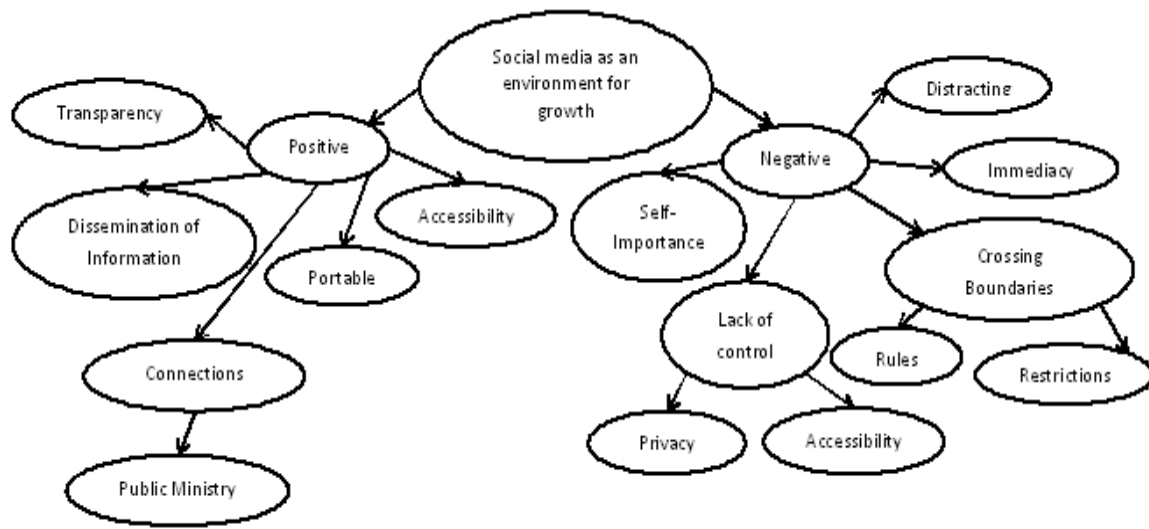


Figure 6. Priests and Social Media Space as a Place for Relationships to Grow

From this stage, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that some codes and themes can form main themes while others may become main themes, subthemes, or even discarded. Some manifest themes emerged for each group in responses that fit different research questions. For example, “priest as man” or “priest as person” emerged in discussions with priests from their responses to interview probes that fell under the first and second research questions (see Figures 2 and 4), while the same theme emerged in discussions with the lay Catholics in response to the second and third research questions (see Figures 3 and 5). For clarity in the reporting process, these themes were collapsed into main themes across participants instead of recurring themes across research questions.

In reporting the themes by participant groups, several latent themes emerged. According to Boyatzis (1998), “an interpretive analysis of latent themes allow for the fullest sense of the context as a referent or basis for understanding the phenomenon” (p. 166). Therefore, the following sections will describe the main themes, both manifest and

latent, that emerged from both groups of participants, those that emerged only from my conversations with lay Catholics, and those that emerged only from my conversations with the priests.

Main Themes across Lay Catholics and Priests

Several ideas about increased social media use emerged across both groups of respondents after analysis of the interview data. Additionally, several issues the Church may face because of the proposed increased in social media use were mentioned as well. In Chapter 4, the survey results highlighted age differences across the board in response to the questions advanced for this study. As one might expect, age again emerged as a common thread in several of my discussions with the participants. The most noticeable correlation occurred between non-use of social media and a priest's age (refer to Table 34); however, there were a few older priests using social media. Likewise, there were several younger and middle-aged lay Catholics not using social media. Lay Catholic participants like Myra Lopez commented about how the "older generation" were "interlopers" or late-comers to social media like Facebook, which was originally started for college students in 2004. Facebook expanded to be available to everyone and has been that way since 2006; and while "Facebook still skews young... [with] 86% of 18 to 29-year-olds who use the Internet...on it" (A. Smith, 2014, para. 4), there has been a dramatic increase in the 45 to 54-year-old demographic, with 46% growth since the end of 2012 (A. Smith, 2014). The largest demographic on Facebook are users aged 35-54 (Brumley, 2014), and anyone over the age of 25 is especially crucial to marketers and

advertisers (Brumley, 2014). As such, lay Catholic participants noted a difference in generational use of social media platforms. Jane Hannigan explained:

I think [the older generation is] still ... more introverted when it comes to expressing our feelings maybe, and our spirituality, because that's just the way that we were brought up. But I think in this day and age, kids are so used to having all of this stimulation and conversation.

Many priests mentioned, however, that in-person contact only afforded them the opportunity to know a handful of the people to whom they minister. While several were skeptical of social media at the outset of our conversations, I found that all were amenable to the possibilities that making connections with parishioners via social media afforded them today. As established from the survey (see Chapter 4), lay Catholics reported that they were not engaging with their priests in social media spaces. However, they did suggest that engagement in these spaces would be helpful in learning more about their faith and engaging in religious discussions online. Similarly, the priests surveyed reported little communication with their parishioners via social media space, but also alluded to the growth that could occur if relationships with parishioners were developed in online spaces.

Making Connections

Both groups shared the desire for connection with one another outside of Mass, and they were open to using social media to make those connections happen. The value of in-person contact between parishioner and priest was a high priority for both groups. Several participants mentioned the fast-paced lifestyle of living in a world with mobile

communication: Mobile technology affords people the ability to do much of life on-the-go; but nearly all of the lay Catholics and priests interviewed suggested that participation in the sacramental life, and most importantly in Mass, should not fall to the wayside in favor of the fast-paced, on-the-go lifestyle so many people have adopted. However, the understanding of what social media can do for public ministry and in regard to one's lived experience varied across groups and by age.

The spread of information to lay Catholics and priests alike can be achieved at greater and more rapid rates because of the instantaneous nature of social media. Even Carol Miller, the eldest lay participant, believed that "if [the priests are] responding to you, then that makes you feel like there's a connectivity there." This sense of connectivity is important, especially in reaching the youth. Tom Haselden spoke about the youth of his parish at home (outside of the Diocese of Browntown) and how they seem to flock to wanting to connect with their priest in social media spaces: "They can more easily engage them and ask them questions and just build a better relationship overall and probably learn more that way. I think it's had some positive effects for [them]..."

Being able to see one's priest as more than just the collar was also positive for both groups of participants. Fr. Ryan Haggerty noted that priests "don't want [parishioners] to be intimidated by us but sometimes they are... They feel like they're bothering you or something if they have a question, and [so] maybe [social media is] a better way to do it, or they feel safer doing it that way." For example, Carol, who admitted to not knowing much about Facebook because she had "enough to keep track of

with just [her] emails” explained that she thinks of priests being on Facebook as “a good way for people...to be in communication...” Sarah Jones echoed this sentiment, suggesting that it is “nice for people who are on Facebook to be able to have that connection and have that link to be able to get updated about what’s going on.”

Connectivity between lay Catholics and priests, in addition to sheer priestly presence in social media space, is considered to be extremely important by both groups: These connections can lead to more learning opportunities and the dissemination of information can be achieved at greater and more rapid rates because of the instantaneous nature of social media. This is the basis needed for these relationships to actually grow and flourish.

Monsignor Edward Wendt suggested that social media use is “...the way to go now. It’s the way most people seem to communicate, especially young people.” He explained that he

signed up because somebody told me I needed to get updated and to get on it...

So I did... But then after I got on, I started to communicate a little bit mostly with family members and keep up with them. And sometimes with other priests. So, like, some of the younger guys use it a lot, and so I look on there and sometimes I’ll see what’s going on with their particular site...

Some priests are starting to see social media use becoming a part of their public ministry.

With regard to his ministry, Fr. Ed, who is now retired, commented

I don’t see [social media use] as a part of mine right now, but I see that that’s what’s being called for. And I think it’s just the way that people communicate.

The way I used to communicate with letters and things like that, they just don't do it. When I get a letter, it's like from somebody who's 60 or older. Anybody younger than that, and it's an email or a phone call sometimes.

Fr. Ed notes that using social media seems to be the way that people communicate today, so taking care of parish business via social media can help priests with their busy schedules. Furthermore, parishioners, according to some priests, are happy when their pastor takes time to send a thought or greeting to them via social media because it makes them feel connected. Jane Hannigan suggested that connections with priests in social media spaces could

open the door to maybe a one-on-one, more personal relationship... I totally understand why priests need to go that route, and there is a need for it. There is a true need for it because if the priest isn't there in the form that a teenager or a young adult needs to be able to make that connection, they're going to lose them. Or it's not going to be a strong bond, so ... I think it's bridging a huge gap and I think it's opening a door for a whole new generation and a whole new way of conversion and keeping kids in the faith.

Melanie Crawford expanded on this idea, explaining that

...there are many different forms of social media that could strengthen faith... when it comes to Facebook and Twitter, I think there is a place and I think it could lead to a better relationship between Catholics and non-Catholics as well as Catholics with maybe priests that serve the parish that they attend regularly or even a parish back home if it's a student away at college... I think that can be

very effective. I think that those kinds of things can be conversation starters for Catholics and non-Catholics as well as Catholics and members of Church Hierarchy. And I think that not only those more faith...based avenues...those can be very effective in bettering those relationships, but I think also just the sheer fact of sharing a picture from an event or parish activity or...like a Facebook page that a priest maintains for the parish that he serves and being able to kind of share reminders and create an open space for discussion about different topics of the day, whether that be something coming out of the Vatican or what's going on with the government, how do you feel like that might affect you as a Catholic.... I think those can be, I think it doesn't always have to be what might seem like official.

Participants all saw the benefits of lay Catholics being connected to priests in social media space but were of the mind that the Church should proceed in using social media with caution.

The Need for Maintaining In-Person Contact

As seen in the pilot for this study conducted with Catholic bloggers (see Chapter 3), both priests and lay Catholics stressed the need for maintaining one-to-one, in-person contact with one another, especially when it came to personal issues and to the sacramental life. Sarah Jones suggested that her non-use of social media is due to the lack of person-to-person interaction that comes with the Internet-based communication:

...I don't like it because it lacks everything that personal communication has...
Even though there's an etiquette..., it still doesn't carry tone. There's not an

ability to have clarification like you can when you're actually talking to someone.

It just is so impersonal that I just feel like we're losing so much of our humanness...

Tom Haselden, a former user of social media, noted that while it might be good for prayer requests because of "how people spread news and how news is efficiently disseminated" through social media, he still thinks it might be "difficult to build a relationship with a priest over social media just because...I feel like it should be a very personal thing." From his standpoint, Tom hoped that the priest "would maybe offer a different form of communication [to answer questions]. Where you know like, 'hey give me a call' or 'here's my email address if you have any other questions,' you know?"

All of the priests conveyed an overwhelming sense of the need to be able to have one-on-one, in-person contact with their parishioners when it came to guiding them through the sacramental life. Monsignor Robert Harper, known as Fr. Rob to his parishioners, suggested "you know, I think for the most part, person-to-person is the better way... from the point-of-view of being able to really ask a question right away if you have...a doubt, whereas with [electronic communication] you have to wait."

Communicating in person with parishioners about important details of their lives is seen as superior to both the priests and the lay Catholics because, while communication via social media is interactive and, in some cases, instantaneous, that is not always the case; and a period of waiting for an answer or response to an inquiry may be endured.

Additionally, seeking clarification could become problematic, especially if details are lost

in translation from verbal to virtual means. Several of the priests agreed that they feared a disconnect with their parishioners due to the impersonal nature of social media.

Disconnects and Distractions Might Inhibit Spiritual Life

Social media's distracting and time-consuming qualities emerged as a reason why participants did not use or lightly used these platforms for communication. Lay participant Tom Haselden described his choice to stop using social media because of its ability to distract and to consume time:

...it was mostly just like a distraction for me. I felt, I found myself being really unproductive when I was using it, so I decided during Lent one time to give up all my social media and just haven't gone back since.

Many users of social media describe logging in to various platforms just to check things to pass time and end up getting distracted by links and posts, spending more time there than they originally intended. Microsoft executive, Linda Stone, coined the term "continuous partial attention" which describes the condition of staying connected continuously; this causes people to also only partially pay attention continuously (Stone, n.d.; Conley, 2011). Conley (2011) goes on to suggest that the stimulations we experience from getting notifications via social media affects how well we focus, thus putting people in a constant state of distraction. If we categorize social media users as living in continuous partial attention, or in a constant state of distraction via social media, it affects how well we are able to absorb and recall information. Thus, the distractions social media offer might prohibit users from experiencing life more fully, which is important to the Catholic Church as all of its sacramental life should be experienced fully and in person.

Disconnects may also occur because of the distractions social media offer. Continuing with the idea that social media users typically live in a state of continuous partial attention (Stone, n.d.), lay participant Jeff Harris described the distractions that social media offer as being a hindrance to one's spiritual life:

...when it comes down to it, ... it's so easy for us to miss out on the really, really important things in life by being distracted by lots of different things. So...there's both good content and just what seems to me to be pure distracting content.

Trivial. There's nothing wrong with fun little videos, but too much of fun little videos keep you away from doing meaningful things.

Overall, though, Jeff, and others, did see the positive outcomes that could potentially arise from using social media platforms as a starting point for engaging in meaningful, offline relationships: "I think in most cases, it has a potential to enable relationships..., as long as you don't get distracted by the trivialities."

Interactivity between Groups

One of the qualities of social media that the Church could exploit, according to both groups, is the possibility for interaction in these spaces. For priests and parishioners to engage in conversation via social media, whether it be for spiritual direction or for something else entirely, more interactivity among priests and their parishioners can occur. Fr. Rob Harper suggests that much of the time parishioners only approach the priest if there is a crisis, but that social media could change that:

Perhaps this would be a kind of middle area where you'd be able to connect with them in a lot less tense or, you know, reasons are that are not as serious. You

know... if something is going on in your parish and you just want to make a comment about what you think of it, you know, so you can do that...and get a response back. Which probably otherwise you would never do. ...I think through...educating folks and letting them know that this is, and that's always going to be important, letting them know that you as the pastor take that seriously, then I think that people would probably be more apt to do that, especially...[in a] larger parish situation that doesn't always have that personal feel like a smaller parish would have. ...

What Fr. Rob gets at here is close to interactivity – where parishioners and priests can connect with one another in what he refers to as sort of a middle ground that might be less formal than in-person contact: Social media could indeed provide a space that is more comfortable for some people. While he does suggest that some interactions could be frivolous in nature, Fr. Rob made sure to note that parishioners should be made aware that the dialogue that takes place online would be taken seriously and treated as important. His suggestion is that social media space could be a potentially less volatile meeting place for engagement between pastor and parishioner to occur. He also suggests that this would be ideal especially in a larger parish setting that sometimes lacks the personal feel that smaller parishes have. Fr. Ryan Haggerty shared similar sentiments, explaining

I think it does break down some barriers which I think maybe that's the main good point that anybody can kind of come into the church in a sense at any time. ...[Social media] gives people maybe a comfortable place where they can make an

initial connection... maybe even a more human connection with us to be able to see a little bit about our lives and share a little bit about theirs.

The idea of social media fostering an environment where “a more human connection” can be made also emerged as a prominent theme. This is explored in the next section.

Priest as Man

Social media, according to several participants, has the potential to help priests be seen as something more than an official of the Church: The use of social media platforms seems to offer priests an avenue to express who they are as a person who is also a priest, according to both groups of participants. Indeed, all of the priests interviewed for this research and most of the lay Catholics spoke to this assumption in some way. Fr. Joseph Finley said that he felt as though “people appreciate... encountering the priest as a person” and explained that using social media

... is personal. I shared a picture of me with a cardboard cutout of Pope Francis the other day at a store and people, lots of parishioners were like commenting back and forth on that, and yesterday there was a Justin Bieber cutout at the high school, so I did the same thing. Sometimes, it’s kind of just like that, friendly sort of communication. Informal, and I guess for me as a priest it’s kind of just like it’s a good thing for people to see, ‘Okay, the priest has a normal life, a sense of humor, interests, hobbies and stuff like that.’ I think that’s a way of just kind of sharing that, of letting them get to know you in a deeper way than if all they see of you is at Mass, in your homily, then they don’t really know you that well.

Melanie Crawford suggested that she has “gotten a better idea of who [her priest] is and how he connects, or represents a disconnect, with the Church at large...he never made comments or did anything...that suggested that he was splitting from Church teaching or anything.” Melanie described this priest as quite liberal in his political leanings, which is information she has only been privy to because of her connection with him via social media space. Connecting with priests in this social space gives the lay Catholic a glimpse of him as a person instead of as the person s/he only sees week after week at Sunday Mass.

Overall, the lay Catholic participants seemed to draw a dichotomy through the fact that a priest is a public figure, but that his presence in online spaces like Facebook and Twitter helped to make him more relatable and more human. Jeff Harris sums the contrasting opinions up with his assessment:

I’m friends with a lot of priests, both in my life and on Facebook. I know some of those priests...use [social media] as a bulletin enhancement, you know, they’re saying ‘hey’ and inviting people to certain things and sometimes they are following up on a homily topic or something. So there are little snippets of...either descriptive or evangelical kind of things to kind of get the word out there. So should they be using it? I think again based on who they are and what their lives are about, then yes ... they should be using it if they choose to in ways that further their ministry.

Jeff goes on to describe his relationships with priests in these spaces as being “a part of the fabric of [his] life” because “what they’re interested in, [he’s] interested in.” His thought is that being friends with priests

...helps you see them as real people... Seeing a priest talk about something very humdrum on Facebook about their pet or about something that happened...it just reinforces their humanity... You know, in all ways except ordination, they’re just like us. And so... it helps me to continue to relate to them on that more personal level.

This ability to relate on a more personal level could be seen as problematic, however (especially in eyes of the priest and the hierarchical structure). There is still a need to define levels of appropriateness because opening up about one’s life in a more personal way leads to a public relations risk, especially if the one opening up holds a public role, like a priest.

Indeed, social media contact could potentially open the door to a more personal relationship with one’s pastor which allows lay Catholics to potentially see a side of their priest as, first and foremost, a man with interests outside of Church and religion in general. This could come as a shock to some lay Catholics, however, who are comfortable with seeing their priest each weekend during Mass but do not know how to react to seeing him wearing jeans or gym shorts with a t-shirt as opposed to the more conventional black clerics and thus makes the theme ‘priest- as-man’ take on both positive and negative overtones. Melanie Crawford admitted that being friends with a priest via social media made her more curious about him as a person:

I have to say it's both refreshing and kind of weird... I would say it's just interesting because he's.... I can see him as who he is in terms of being a man. And just with interests: ...photography, the different things that he...shares...just different things that he finds interesting. And I can see him as an individual and not just a representative of this huge organization that is the Catholic Church. And so that is refreshing in a way to see that he is human, that he's not so perfect or anything that he doesn't have interests outside of saying Mass all day or anything like that. But I think that he's still very representative of the priest mold in terms of typically the kinds of comments he has, just about different things. He usually mentions God in those comments.

Having this connection with her pastor affords Melanie, and likely many other lay Catholics, with the opportunity to see their priest in a new light, as someone who is indeed ordained to minister to them, but also faces some of the same challenges and temptations in life that they do.

Moreover, priests lead lives that are quite similar to their parishioners that lay Catholics often do not understand. While ordination does come with a specific set of rules in terms of chastity and obedience, lay Catholics tend to forget that their pastor is still a person. For example, Myra Lopez provided an anecdote of a family who ran into their priest at the grocery store and were shocked to see that he was purchasing beer:

I'm reminded of a family who had attended church for several years and they ran into a priest in Krogers who had beer in his cart and they quit coming to church

because he bought beer. They actually told me that. And I was amazed, but you know... what if in a social media setting a priest talks about [that stuff]?

Myra's comment highlights the censorship a priest might feel he has to use in posting on social media platforms in an effort to not scandalize his parishioners. Indeed, Fr. Ryan Haggerty noted that

there's still boundaries. Like there is with everybody with every relationship... [like] I wouldn't maybe necessarily put on there all the movies or books or the music, just out of fear that it might turn somebody off. Or think 'well a priest shouldn't listen to that or watch that.' And ... we just have to be aware of the boundaries. Like, there's certain things that maybe we shouldn't share about our personal lives or our ministry ... in that realm. But that being said, I think it is good for them to see us as human beings.

This censorship, in effect, means that the priest cannot fully exercise the freedom to be who he is in fear of putting off parishioners in this social space. The idea of limited expression on the part of the priest is discussed in the next section.

Misconception, Misinterpretation, and Misunderstanding

Both groups of participants exhibited healthy fears about misconception, misinterpretation, and misunderstanding. According to Fr. Eric Ball, communicating electronically is "good for information, but it's not so good for emotion." He went on to say that one of the dangers of social media "would be a miscommunication that the priest is trying to put something across and it's misunderstood because of the gap in electronic media. ...also, that some priests might get too friendly" or too familiar where respect for

them as a priest is lost. Sometimes, people put priests on a pedestal and forget that they are still men. Yet, Fr. Ball agreed that priests communicating with parishioners in this way “brings Christ down to them, which I think our Holy Father Francis is doing a whole lot more. He’s pointing that out. That’s what priests...have to do is not be up on the pedestal, but come down and meet the people.” Fr. Ball warned, however, that the priest “can’t be with the people all the time...He has to have time where he is in prayer with Christ, so he has to go back...and pick up the spirituality of Christ and then bring it to the people.”

A possible explanation for the lack of relationships with priests in social media spaces could be that lay Catholics interviewed seemed to be concerned about social media’s tendency to perpetuate misinterpretation, misunderstanding, and misconceptions, and so they stick with maintaining an in-person relationship with their pastor. Both groups expressed this concern. Lay participant Myra Lopez explained:

Anytime you don’t have a direct one-on-one, face-to-face conversation, there’s always room for misinterpretation. And so in my mind...our priests have to be extremely careful that they don’t just have a conversation and walk away from it. ...You know, if they’ve had a conversation...with a young person or any person really...I think God will help them know that they need to follow up if there was any possibility for misinterpretation, but really they should follow up whether they think there’s a problem or not. Just to be sure that everybody’s okay. So I think that it could be bad if you don’t do that...I think it is necessary to be

thoughtful about that because there is a real, you know, any time you're not face-to-face, there is a chance [for misunderstanding].

The priest is representing more than just himself at all times, and especially within the realm of social media: therefore, as mentioned in the previous section, it is imperative for him to not mislead or scandalize anyone via social media. Fr. Joseph Finley, the youngest priest I interviewed and a heavier social media user than most others – even in comparison to the lay Catholic users – explained

I think you just have to be careful in a way. ... When I was in college, I wouldn't have cared, I'd share whatever I was interested in. But especially... I'm much more conscious now as a priest that like, I don't want to scandalize anybody; I don't want to confuse anybody. So I want to share me, my personal self, that's what Facebook is, but like, ... I want to make sure it's nothing that could confuse people or mislead people. So I try to be careful about that, and like I don't share things without reading all of them or watching all of a video so I make sure I'm okay saying this as a priest and sharing it with people.

Fr. Michael Coolidge hearkened back to his belief that posts should be deliberative and exact, explaining

I think certainly anything today that a clergyman puts on any kind of social media is out there. And so that's why I think one has to be deliberative and make sure what you're posting is something that you're not getting in trouble with. Because there have been occasions where I might make a statement to somebody and that's been misunderstood... that's why when I put things, and I think maybe

that's [why] I don't post a lot. But I do post some things... It's those kinds of things that are generic, but I think it's still very important to... watch the words that you use, and I think today in society where... people are looking for things to point a finger, and 'look at what he said' or that kind of thing. There's a negative cast to clergy and I think in some respects with the whole sexual abuse crisis we've gone through, I think people are more into looking at and finding fault... I think people will take any avenue. Some of them are looking for trouble; they'll find it. And that's why I think it's more on my understanding to be cautious. I don't want to give people the wrong impression; I don't want to send out the wrong message.

Proceeding with caution because of the openness of one's social media profile was definitely of concern to the priests because they know that what other people post might also reflect on their profiles in some way, for better or worse.

The need to be sure that there is no misunderstanding or misinterpretation of things posted online stems from what Jeff Harris referred to as a public relations risk. He insisted that

...anytime that you're revealing something about yourself, you know, sometimes there's a risk that someone will take something the wrong way, or that someone will... you know, someone's going to friend you, and they're going to see he's friends with.... It's Jesus's problem: He's friends with these people, how can he be? You know, these are sinners and tax collectors, you know? How could he allow them to be friends with him? So there's a lot of ways that things can be

misinterpreted and unfortunately with the online, and with no or little control over what others do relative to your postings... you know, that I think that is kind of a PR risk... But you know, do I think it's worth that risk to be out there? Yes, I would say that it is.

However, using social media as a tool to evangelize, to clear up commonly held misconceptions, and to reach parishioners also emerged in several of the discussions I had with both groups of participants. Several lay Catholics suggested that one way to be sure of being exposed to and engaging in religious discourse is to be connected with priests or other members of Church hierarchy in social media spaces. Social media platforms offer a space for people to ask questions in a less intimidating environment. Fr. Finley explained:

...People have messaged me privately on Facebook if they have a question or something. Or...when I intentionally make an effort to catechize or evangelize about something in particular, people might have a dialogue about that. Just so they can see what the CNN says isn't necessarily what the Catholic Church teaches so we can talk about that and clear up misconceptions and things like that. I think it's definitely a public ministry...We can kind of just put stuff out there and then do our best and I think parishes having their own accounts could be a big part of that.

Being able to address questions on a personal basis and at large is only one of the advantages to using social media in public ministry. Several priests reported that the use of social media, if understood and used for ministry, could be a meaningful way to

jumpstart relationships offline. There is a certain sense of immediacy about the nature of interactions in social media space that is beneficial not only for getting things done but also because that has become the expectation in society. The immediacy with which we can send and receive messages virtually is unmatched. For example, statements and messages that the pope crafts in Rome in the morning there can be translated and transmitted to the United States by the time we wake up in the morning, thereby granting Catholics an immediate connection with Rome.

Another similar attribute that comes from the connection with priests via social media, discussed in this and the previous section, is that it brings the priest down to the level of the lay Catholic to where they can relate with him more as a person and less as a part of the hierarchical structure of the Church. Not only does this help the laity to relate more with their priest, which is important to working together toward the common goal of salvation, but it also affords the laity a certain sense of transparency into the hierarchical structure of the Church.

Hierarchical Transparency

Having a sense of transparency into the hierarchical structure of the Church was also important to both groups of participants. Melanie Crawford noted that her connection with a priest on social media platforms made her more comfortable in her own faith:

In a lot of ways, it makes me feel that it's okay to show feelings..., I think it's nice to know that even these figures who have taken vows, who have indicated that they are going to live a chaste life, all of these different things that almost

make them seem like these perfect, not-touchables as the way human beings kind of figure as once the Catholic Church was... I think the Church was like that a long time ago. I think it's nice and refreshing to see them as...somebody who is human and... I think it really, when I can point to people like him... and say 'This guy took vows and is leading a chaste life...but he's still like a cool guy.' He's not the old-school version of a Catholic priest. ...I think it's nice to [be able to point to him] and say 'Look at him, look at how he is living the faith and look at how he is representing the Catholic Church.' If somebody says, 'Oh [priests] are old and crusty and don't want to change ways' and stuff like that, I can be like 'this guy's liberal!' ...They're just interpreting the Church teaching as well as, you know, the ways to live out liberal values in the way that...where the two can come together. I think it's nice to be able to kind of point to them as fun and human representatives of the Church.

Jeff Harris was not sure whether it was a sign of the times with society changing that the relationships between members of Church hierarchy and lay Catholics were becoming more open, but he noted that this idea of transparency, a characteristic of social media, is definitely something that has become apparent to him as time has passed:

It's hard to say how much of this is due to social media or just due to changes in the world, but I do notice...that there seems to be a growing relationship, in various ways, between the hierarchy – priests and religious – and lay people. There seems to be kind of an openness on both sides more to that relationship. And I don't know if in the past it was....closed either by the priests not wanting

that relationship or the parishioners not feeling like they were allowed to have that relationship. But somehow the way we live our lives a little bit more open, just that change in the culture a little bit... people are willing to share various things about their plans, their kids, good things that happen at work, whatever, in a public forum. ...So it seems like there is that more openness, you know, again with priests and religious that is that invitation to relationship. ... And it seems like more of the parishioners feel comfortable. I don't know if friendship is the right word, but you know, at least a familiarity more with the priests, and that's a positive thing.

Transparency within the Catholic hierarchical structure is one of these positive outcomes that social media use affords both groups.

According to Fr. Ball, being connected “gives [the Church] some transparency so that people don't get the wrong idea, or think that the Church is being secretive. And...I think that's what Holy Father Francis is doing, right? Opening up the Vatican more...” Being open and more transparent breaks down the hierarchical structure that has been prevalent in the Church for so long. Fr. Ed Wendt explained that today, there seems to be “a lot of communication... from the top down” that makes the inner workings of the Church more open and transparent. Fr. Ed also noted that along with this trickle of information flow, there is a sense of immediacy that social media offers that the Church just cannot ignore when it comes to informing people and, potentially, giving people the opportunity to respond.

Fr. Andrew Rodriguez praised the hierarchical structure, proclaiming that “the Vatican is doing a good job in terms of disseminating news or... whatever they have to communicate. I’ve found them very useful to me personally.” However, Fr. Andrew did note that “the Vatican [has] many policies about how we should use [social media], but...they are [not] open to interactions...they have [not] invested so much in that.” He explained that while the Church is disseminating this information to the masses,

...then, there’s nothing. ...It can just be an excuse mainly that there will be responses from unnecessary people, but that’s the risk you’re taking. But I think that they should probably have something where people can have interaction, especially young people today. They want to interact. They want to know, they have questions, and they want answers. ...I don’t know at what level we can do that, but it will be great to see Church groups or dioceses or the Vatican having some kind of interactive options for especially the young people, and also for people who are interested in the faith and want to grow in their faith.

As mentioned in the literature review, social media spaces have a tendency to flatten the hierarchical structure or at least make it less prominent since people tend to perceive similarity between themselves in online interactions: Connectivity equals similarity. With increased accessibility to one’s pastor via social media, a sense of transparency into the Catholic hierarchical structure can be achieved which challenges the one-way transmission that the Catholic institution has experienced for so long.

Taking Care with Rules and Restrictions

This ability to relate on a more personal level could be seen as problematic, however (especially in eyes of the priest and the hierarchical structure). There is still a need to define levels of appropriateness because opening up about one's life in a more personal way leads to a public relations risk, especially if the one opening up holds a public role, like a priest. Fr. Eric Ball, a non-user of social media, believed that the clergy needed to be careful because of his experiences seeing some other priests

get into trouble a little...I think there have to be boundaries, that we have to watch out for the clergy, how we use it and share on it. Where the laity are freer, but at the same time, they have a certain responsibility [too].

The Diocese of Browntown does have a code of conduct for and some listed restrictions toward social media use. In his role interacting with school-aged children as a school chaplain, Fr. Joseph Finley explained that because of these boundaries, when it comes to interacting with minors in online spaces, it is clear cut: He cannot. He stated "I've had to tell grade school students who follow me on Instagram 'I'm sorry, I can't be your friend.' But it's nothing personal." Fr. Ed Wendt explained that "the Church has come out with all these guidelines for using social media. And I think it's for, you know, just to make sure nothing inappropriate is going on with regard to those communications." Fr. Ed went on to say that the Diocese he served

just recently...sent a document to all the priests to have us sign, this agreement that we would not have anything, mostly they were talking about pornography

and those kinds of things, but on any computers or, you know, electronic media.

So that was new. I mean, they didn't have to do that before. That's just this year!

Melanie Crawford, a younger lay participant, suggested that she holds the same standards for priests on social media platforms that she does for other public figures

because [they hold] a very public position, whether they are practicing in what seems to be a small town or the Pope in Vatican City. I think it doesn't matter where you are and how many people you're serving currently... [but] I think that's a really fine line to be able to say what you feel but also keep with the Church teaching and represent the Catholic Church with a positive light. It's a tough one.

As discussed in the previous sections, many of the lay participants seemed to be concerned with the priest's ability to feel free to be himself on his own social media profile because of his role as minister to a public, but they maintained a level of excitement about potentially being able to connect with him in that space, despite their concerns of authenticity of self.

Convergence Culture

After analysis of the interview data, I realized that all of my conversations were marked by the idea that the Church finds Herself in a state of flux when it comes to social media use. Several of the participants noted the positive outcomes that could be a result of connectivity between priests and lay Catholics in these spaces. For example, Monsignor Edward Wendt suggested that recently, starting all the way up at the Vatican

and moving into the national levels of the Catholic hierarchy, the Church has been experimenting in communicating with lay Catholics via social media. He explained

...the Vatican is trying to contact people in the parishes to get information on how we deal with people who are somehow marginalized. How do you deal with gay couples? How do you deal with people who are married and then divorced? ...How do you deal with couples who are practicing birth control? ...They're going to have a conference about all this stuff... Their thing is that they're going to reach out to the people; they want to get information from the parishes about this stuff that's going on. So how do they do that? ...I think with social media, this type of communications, some people in the Church are starting to say, 'okay, well this is the way we have to go.'

As such, we live in an era marked by in-betweenness, where there are many who are searching for and reading everything online and others who seek out the paper version – the old-fashioned forms of media. This is where the idea of convergence culture is most notably seen in the Church. Fr. Michael Coolidge explained

...I think in our area in particular, a lot of folks are comfortable picking up the paper, sitting down with their cup of coffee and reading it. Whereas others will just go right into the website and pull it up... I think what's going to happen down the line is that certainly paper is going to go by the wayside and people are just going to have to move forward. And I hear a lot of people... 'I don't like the computer; I don't use the computer; I don't...' But when you tell them, 'but what

about a tablet? It's not a computer; you can do this and this...' 'Oh...' and they get involved with things like that... so we're getting there. It's just taking time. What Fr. Coolidge points out here is the changing of the times, the idea of convergence culture, where our old and new media have collided. Moreover, Fr. James Hazel suggested that

there can be a number of ways that [social media] can...become more sophisticated.... [Using] smartphones and tablets, so that people who are for whatever reason isolated or homebound or are in the midst of one place where they can't get to an event or a gather, that is important. They will be able to connect with a priest personally or with the event that is happening with the parish.

Beyond this, simply connecting with people so that they come to Church is a challenge for priests that could be met through social media. For so long, the Church has been the focal point or a gathering within communities. However, the understanding of what it means to be in a community is driven by the changes experienced in communication patterns and lifestyles of Western Culture. For example, Fr. Haggerty noted

For so long, people have come to Church but you just see the way that culture is changing, you really have to go out and seek people a lot more. And if that's where people are, we just can't not go there. We have to get over even our reticence to be there because if it's a way we can reach people, then I think we need to use all our avenues and you just take the good with the bad. ... But, yeah, I think you have to engage in it. ...The way we communicate is changing so

we've got to change with it or then we just, we're not there. ...So we have to learn to do it well and we have...to be willing to do that. And the willingness is just one of the drawbacks. ...We prefer the old way where people just come to Church. But they're not coming. And you see the connection with the faith for a number of reasons is just getting...generationally, is just getting weaker and weaker. ...And the formation maybe has not been as good, and then the culture is moving away from the faith. You just see less educated and well-formed Catholics, and then their children are even less so. ...You really just have to go out and go after people, and [social media] is a good way to do that.

Fr. Haggerty alludes to the idea that the excitement to be Catholic, and the zeal for the faith itself, is being lost from generation to generation. According to Fr. Hazel, Catholics will always have the personal contact because that's just the nature of the Sacraments... so that will always be. But a lot of the other aspects of priestly ministry can be built up by social media and perhaps made more efficient.... However social media can make it more personal, that's what we want to emphasize...

While the interactivity component could be better understood by the Catholic hierarchy at large, one of the most important take-aways from my discussions with the priests and lay Catholics is this idea of connecting and interacting in social media space. Being able to share and witness alongside lay Catholics in these spaces allows for better evangelization efforts and potentially better understanding of Catholic Social Teaching. These interactions could also help the Church with Her image: Through faith-sharing activities

between lay Catholics and priests in social media spaces, the Church engages in what Ledingham and Bruning (1998) called “a process of continual and reciprocal exchange between an organization and its key publics” (p. 56). Continual interaction in these spaces should result in achieving several of the dimensions Ledingham and Bruning developed in their theoretical framework for relationship maintenance, including investment, commitment, trust, cooperation, and social bonds, among others. Developing these dimensions online as Dawson (2004) suggests might result in long term relationship development between priests and parishioners that can then be transferred offline, which might ultimately help the Church in other areas, including vocations and retaining numbers in the pews week after week.

Themes from Lay Catholics Only

Several themes only emerged in my conversations with the lay Catholics. Lay Catholics were more open to the idea of connecting with other lay Catholics and with priests via social media than the priests were. Even lay Catholic participant Sarah Jones, who dislikes social media platforms because of their impersonal qualities, suggested that there might be positive outcomes from using them for religious discourse, especially when it comes to talking about hot button issues like religion:

I think it can have positive effects because it gives people...anonymity. So a lot of things that people aren't going to want to say to someone face-to-face, they can say on social media... I think that it provides an avenue for people who might have had some kind of bad religious experience to...not be worried about being judged or feeling shameful...because it provides that kind of anonymity.

Sarah used the word anonymity, but what she seems to be really getting at is the power distance that social media affords its users: The fact that communication is Internet-based and not in-person, anonymous or not, offers many users an opportunity to make comments that they might not otherwise make. For example, Myra Lopez suggested that “there’s an honesty to people’s reactions to diversity that wouldn’t be present if we were all sitting in the same room and talking about the topic, so I think it’s actually kind of freeing for some...” Tom Haselden explained that social media platforms offer a comfortable place for users to sound-off: “It makes people more confident that they can say whatever they want without... repercussions.”

Social Media: The Great Sounding Board for Impulsivity

However, many of the participants, especially among the older lay Catholics interviewed, voiced their concern with the idea of sounding off. Jane Hannigan attributed her light usage of social media to the fact that people do not seem to put thought into the repercussions of what they post:

I’m very leery anymore about posting a lot of things on Facebook. I’ve seen a lot of damage done to people, socially and personally. ...to me, Facebook is a very impulsive means of communication and unfortunately you write something down and you post it, and it’s there... my sense is that people have a tendency to be very impulsive with their feelings and if someone says something, they do an immediate response back without taking time to think it through....

Going along with the idea of impulsivity, Linda Thomas commented on the multitude of information available and the importance of the ability to be able to discern good information from bad information. She said

...in a way it's good because it helps to broaden your thinking, you know, it gives you different things to think about... If someone makes a spurious comment about your faith, you can think about what that means: Maybe help you think in a different direction, help you be more aware of all the different aspects of your faith. That being the case, you can also be exposed to things that if you're not strongly rooted... I think you could be swayed into a wrong path. ...I've seen so much stuff out there...the hoopla that goes along with some fads could be dangerous, once you peel all the layers back. But they wouldn't know, so here they are touting this thing, and it could be totally anti-faith.

What Linda and other participants who made similar statements get at here is the idea that in social media spaces like Facebook and Twitter, a certain sense of agency is granted to the user, meaning anyone can post anything. Additionally, readers and posters must make judgments about the reliability and validity of what is posted. Since the Catholic Church as an institution is often thrust into the limelight for both positive and nefarious events (i.e., canonizations vs. the sexual abuse scandal), links posted about Church doctrine, news regarding the Church, the pope, or anything of the like are open to interpretation. Essentially, what is posted may be true, may be an exaggeration of the truth, or may even be false.

Discernment

While no one individual uttered the word discernment in any of the interviews, as suggested in the previous sections, the idea of incorporating a better sense of judgment in posting in social media spaces certainly emerged on the latent level. Discernment is widely used in the religious sphere. Generally defined as the ability to judge well, gaining understanding or purpose, or obtaining spiritual direction, discernment is about coming to know more about something. According to Whitney (2012), “the process of human discernment and decision-making exists at the very heart of Catholicism” (p. 1). Being Catholic does not just apply to being inside the four walls of the church on Sunday morning: Being Catholic, as the final words of the Mass suggest, means going forth and spreading the Gospel message. Whitney suggests that “Catholicism relies upon moral agency: Upon real people acting, not just thinking or feeling, in a moral fashion...Catholic theology and spirituality do not stop at the church door, but exist in the give-and-take of the public square, in the conflicts and decisions of everyday human life” (p. 1). According to Whitney, discernment, in the Catholic sense, “is about becoming sensitive to the movements of what is good in us and what is bad in us, what leads us closer to God and what draws us away, and responding to the good, nurturing the good, following the good” (p. 2). With this and the idea that social media space does, in fact, afford its users a place for religious expression, discerning what we post in these spaces and considering how it might affect more than just the poster is of critical importance to anyone engaging in religious discourse on social media platforms. As Whitney suggests, “discernment relies upon conflict... and it does not ensure unity of results... but through

unity of process, through faithfulness and a presumption of good will..., it can draw us closer to one another...” (p. 2). Therefore, in order to achieve the plans for the Church’s use of social media initiated by Pope Benedict and carried on through Pope Francis, this research suggests that proper education in Catholic social teaching be offered and that patience in discernment be exercised by lay Catholics engaging in religious discourse in social media spaces.

Age and life experience were two factors that lay participants mentioned explicitly as having an effect on judgment which helped me to arrive at the idea of exercising better discernment when using social media especially with regard to religious discourse. The two factors are often paired with wisdom which might potentially help lay Catholics to discern good from bad information. Myra Lopez explained that

people who have maybe more worldly, more life experience when they put their stuff out there and then there are folks who are maybe more impressionable, you know the younger people, I think ...it could be maybe a negative thing for younger people to sort of not understand the perspective that’s coming through a person with more age. ...I have to sort of weigh what I see my sons post from the perspective that they’re coming from which is having fun and you know just a little less serious than I think people my age generally are on some topics... you know, sometimes I think I see sacrilegious stuff on there that really drives me crazy, but I’m trying to at the same time assess the age group and just their perspective of things.

Linda Thomas made a similar statement about younger people and their experiences, or lack thereof:

...people who are experienced in the world would have less of a problem and...I could see that they could only learn from [being challenged in a social media space], but younger people just don't have that level of experience to be able to differentiate between what's good and what's bad. ...I can sometimes see a person who would pick up on something...and go blabbing it, sharing it with everybody, and then a negative comment come back and to the point that it could be very hurtful...to the extent that [one] would stop talking about [his/her] faith and maybe even stop practicing.

Clearly to several of the older participants, age, wisdom, and lived experience are all determining factors in being able to discern good from bad and right from wrong.

However, Maggie Johnson, one of the university student participants, explained social media use by the younger generation as being

a way to...keep people updated on your life, but also like, I don't know, ways to make people laugh. ...Everyone has that friend that posts about every last detail of their life. And you just don't care. Nobody does. You don't need to post that often, it's not necessary... [Posts are] always so exaggerated. Like there's this girl the other night that said 'Mom didn't make dinner. I can't make anything. Feel depressed.' I'm like, 'Make a sandwich, you got this. You're a junior in high school. Find some bread!'

Maggie's comments juxtaposed with the commentary from several of the older social media users like Linda and Myra shows the varying uses of social media platforms by age. However, this seems to go beyond the idea that young people post exaggerated notions of what is happening in the world around them: Rather, a deeper reading of what was manifest in all of this commentary takes the notion of age difference and one's social context to another level. Perhaps younger social media users understand the world around them, they just choose not to comment on it, instead focusing on what they have eaten (or have not eaten, as Maggie's example suggests). This is also an indication that these younger social media users (who have grown up using social media) understand it in a completely different context than some of the older users who are learning how to use social media as adults. The coming together of age difference and social contexts from which young and old social media users approach their daily engagement with social media platforms suggests that younger social media consumers use the platforms for leisure rather than more serious topics (Mihailidis, 2014). Younger social media users have increasingly never lived in a world that has not had social media, while the older generations can remember times when things were more simple and seemingly more social. Social media use is often described as a place for hanging out and wasting time, so many users – arguably both young and old – have a hard time “visualiz[ing] their engagement within social networks as much more than personal socializing with friends and family” (Mihailidis, 2014, p. 1067). Mihailidis suggests that there is a hesitance “to embrace social networks as dynamic tools for engagement in daily lives” (p. 1067) which

provides background for the disconnect with civic engagement that the older participants alluded to in this research.

Getting to the more serious topics of conversation that occur in social media spaces, when it comes to sharing things of a religious nature there, university student Maggie Johnson commented that she doesn't

...love when there's tons and tons of religious stuff on my wall. It's not that I'm not proud of my religion and everything, it's just like when everybody has that other friend who like, it's just a constant stream of Bible verses. For some reason, that annoys me. I feel like it shouldn't, but it does. Like, I don't mind seeing the occasional verse or the occasional, upbeat, hopeful quote, but I guess that's just not how I use social media.

A sense of being educated and well-informed about faith matters was definitely a key to making sure information is understood within the context of Catholic Social Teaching. What all of these themes seem to suggest, both positive and negative, is the need for a broad sense of discernment for the social media user.

The Power of Social Media: The Bad

Forming a connection of some kind between priests and lay Catholics via social media was described by Sarah Jones as "kind of a double edged sword or...middle of the road thing." This is where discernment, mentioned in the previous section, is key. Sarah's view was that it "becomes risky... because...social media [is] not necessarily being able to actually get the real view, you're getting what he has time to post... [A priest] can't

open himself to personal, individual cases in a social media network.” Myra Lopez echoed the idea of social media being a double edged sword with priests using it:

I don’t have a different set of rules for them, but I think in general... I saw something that could have been viewed as a little off-color on our priest’s page a little while ago, and you know he was kind of bantering with friends and I loved it. I took it for what it was intended to be, but then I thought, ‘I wonder what someone else might think who has a different perspective of him or a different expectation of him?’ So to me it’s kind of a double-edged sword... there is a responsibility there, I think a higher level of responsibility for a priest, or... a leader in the Church because I don’t think it stops at the priest.... There’s definitely a hierarchical responsibility process that needs to be considered.

Pastoral responsibility, while fleetingly mentioned here in Myra’s comment, emerged as a prominent theme among my conversations with the priests and, thus, will be discussed in further detail in the priest section.

The Power of Social Media: The Good

The powerful, positive connections that social media offer its users are hard to deny. Some participants even believed that being able to relate to priests in this way could help pave the way for people to start coming to Church or to come back if they had fallen away. Myra Lopez commented:

I think one of the special things about our current pastor that he brings to our Catholic community is his youth. Clearly he is drawn to the people who need to be drawn to us. You know our church is an old church, and I don’t mean the

building. It's an aging thing in this society, and he is, I think, a light to attract those younger people. So I see that he's a catalyst for that. I think his use of social media is very important to be able to relate. And with [the youth], the same thing. You need to be able to talk to them on their level and their level of understanding to integrate, to sort of figure out how to be a role model...

Having access to the priest via social media affords the lay Catholic another avenue for connection apart from during or after Mass. The lay Catholics stressed that having priests being present in these spaces was important for the possibility of relationship maintenance and cultivation.

Additionally, some participants noted that using social media might help priests with time management if they were disciplined about their use of the platforms. For example, Carol Miller commented on the shortage of priests and how their responsibilities have changed over the years:

Well you know they've taken on such a huge responsibility that is different from responsibilities they once had just because of the decrease in the number of priests. So you know if you have the choice between taking the time to stop and see how a parishioner is or emailing them... I think you have to save time. ... You know if you're calling somebody, then you could get engaged in such a long conversation. And you don't have that much time. You know, they have to be so much more cognizant of their time. You know, you look at [our pastor now] he's got to figure out how to fix the steeple and sort of be a jack of all trades and whether or not they're training priests to do this or if it's just the theory and

whatever you need to know for the liturgy of the church, I don't know. ...I compare it to the medical profession. ...in my day, we had a doctor. You didn't go to the doctor's office. He came to your house. Well now we have so many specialists. We don't have general practitioners. So I mean in many ways the priests...they have to be general practitioner... [And] I think if social media can save them time, that's good idea.

Carol's commentary only begins to scratch the surface concerning the complexities of a priest's life, especially when it comes to social media use. The priests themselves held several beliefs about using social media personally and as a part of their public ministry, which are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Themes from Priests Only

Several themes only emerged in my conversations with the priests as well. Priests were more reserved about connecting with other priests and with lay Catholics via social media than the lay Catholics were. Like the lay Catholics, the priests interviewed were aware of the appeal for the Catholic Church to use social media effectively, but many had questions and concerns about what the use of social media platforms meant for their ministry in guiding the people of Christ as the shepherd of the flock. What's really holding some priests back is fear of the unknown. Fr. Ryan Haggerty suggested that

...there's an exciting aspect to it, but there's also the scary aspect to it too. And you know, that fear is maybe fear of not being able to do it well, or what might happen. We can get involved in fear of the unknown and it's something that may keep us from doing it, but I guess that's why the Lord said, 'Do not be afraid.'

Like he sent them out in the Gospel, two-by-two, and so [using social media] is a good avenue. ...It's easy to say things on there because you're not in a face-to-face but it's easy for...people that are searching to find a connection that is safe for them, ... but if we're not out there, we're not allowing that to happen.

Fr. Joseph Finley, the youngest priest interviewed who maintains a blog where he posts his homilies, suggested that using social media is

...really important, but also remembering that like, it's not the Gospel. Nothing beats face-to-face conversation, and I think always remembering that and not looking down on people who don't get it or don't buy into it... It's another tool. And so if it changes the priesthood, it gives it an opportunity to share in a new way, and communicate with people in a new way. But always just kind of remembering it's not going to solve problems. ...Facebook's not going to save anybody's soul, but it could be the tool to get them there.

Here Fr. Finley highlights the general idea behind the Church using social media in the first place: As a tool to help people make connections and express themselves. It is interesting to note that from the priest's perspective especially, a latent theme emerges in which social media is typically viewed through a utilitarian lens, as a tool to encourage connectivity.

Utilitarian Use

While the transmission function of social media is a great tool for the Church to utilize, the interactive component, which is least understood by the priests I interviewed, holds much more communicative power. I reached this conclusion after noting the few

instances where the priests mentioned the idea of social media being a tool along with their lack of understanding about how to properly use it. For example, Fr. Michael Coolidge commented:

I do have Twitter. I don't understand, I guess, the difference. I'm still learning. I've probably had an account about a year, give or take. And [my parochial vicar] has kind of helped me because he's into all of that. He understands it. So I'm like 'What's Twitter? What does it do? What purpose does it serve?' And I haven't quite figured out... like I'll post something and think, 'Okay, now what? What do I do with it?' ...I don't have... the time to sit down and fiddle. I just, I want to get in and out and do what I need to do on the computer or on my phone or tablet ...

Fr. Coolidge is like many other priests: He knows that he should use social media, but he is unsure of how it works and what purpose it serves. Nevertheless, he suggested that social media use by priests is "very healthy, but it's also one of those things that one has to be...deliberative in what you put on it," which shows that he knows enough about social media to know that discernment (as discussed in the lay Catholic section) is important. However, many priests alluded to the learning curve and to the fears and anxiety that come along with having to learn something new. All of these comments made it seem clear that there was a lack of understanding about the interactive component that social media offers: Indeed, many of the older priests seem to see social media as a glorified bulletin insert when in reality, it could be so much more.

Lack of Control

One of the major deterrents toward social media use that several priests described in their interviews was the open nature of social media profiles and the lack of control that comes along with ownership of a profile. Fr. Rob Harper suggested that he has not been using Facebook because of its open-endedness. He commented on the lack of repercussions there for social media users for what they post:

There's always negative aspects once you put yourself out there. I mean even in just walking around in a small parish... people can say things or they can be upset or whatever. A negative aspect here is that people...make comments that I don't know personally they would make to somebody...because it's in print, then they feel like they can do that and...just send it off. ...It doesn't seem like they really... have to pay the price for whatever it is that they say.

Other priests were also concerned with their lack of control over what other people post, especially on their wall or timeline as a message or in comments on something that they have shared themselves. There is a real caution to using social media like Facebook because, as Monsignor John Peterson noted, "someone can take...and rearrange what you said or what they think what they thought you said and so I stay totally away from all of that." I pointed out that this could happen during a homily which is given orally on Sundays from the pulpit, but he just maintained that when it comes to using social media, whether "it's priest or parishioner, I think we have to use the guidelines of our faith." Monsignor Peterson's attitude is quite striking, but he is not alone in his thinking: Several of the older priests almost condemn social media use for things that can also occur in

other communicative settings. This is further evidence that at least several of the older priests only have a limited understanding of what social media is.

Indeed, Fr. Andrew Rodriguez, a more experienced user of social media, explained that when it comes to using social media platforms in public ministry

it all depends on how you want to use it. As a priest, I can use it in a very personal way, but I don't see that as an obligation. And I don't think that all priests maybe are capable enough. I don't want to underestimate them, but they may not be as efficient to use [social media] in the right way. Because...it can put you in trouble at times. That's what I feel because it's such a complex thing now. ...I think some people just take for granted that a conversation is happening just among them, but it's not. It's happening in the wide open public, and it's under the scrutiny of everybody. So...what you say makes a lot of difference. And a lot of people do take note of that, and it can have adverse effects which we may not know immediately. It can give a bad impression about you as a priest...

Being honest and having a sense of responsibility in posting on social media ranked high among priests' concerns with public profiles on these platforms.

How do Social Media Work in the First Place?

Several priests spoke to the idea of users just putting information out there (akin to the impulsivity that the lay Catholics were concerned about) and how it could serve a purpose of informing those who encounter it; but they were concerned, still, that it would be less effective than a dialogue with actual, in-person interaction taking place as discussed in the previous section. For example, Fr. Rob Harper explained that

There's a lot of ways that you can communicate with people. ...I guess the criteria I would say is if everyone really were, if they were actively involved and it wasn't just simply [like] getting a newspaper and reading what you want to read and not reading what you don't want to read, and, you know, there's no... it doesn't evoke a response. ...otherwise if it's just a question of putting religious issues out there, then we're back to really what they're doing with the pope and Tweeter [sic] where they're just simply putting something out there and...people who want to take advantage of it [do].

Fr. Rob is a retired priest and a non-user of social media. His simple explanation of communicative acts here shows only a partial understanding of how social media works. Starting with a basic understanding of the Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication (1963) and moving on to more elaborate models that portray communication dialogue, Figure 7 (as cited in Soules, 2007) shows a basic model of communication that includes the classic Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver idea but also encompasses encoding, decoding, and feedback.

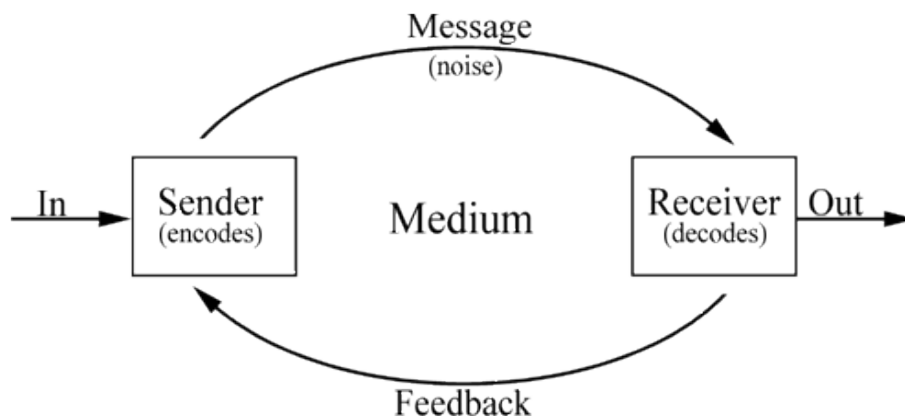


Figure 7. Communication as dialogue (Soules, 2007)

This is a very basic model that Soules (2007) uses to explain that “the performative aspects of any communications medium are conditioned by the way it allows us to send and receive messages. We adjust our performance style...while using the telephone, meeting someone face-to-face, or emailing a friend...” (para. 21). Furthermore, Soules suggests that via “the resonance theory... the message is not something which is sent, but rather something created by the person who receives the stimulus. [Therefore], the identity of the person is instrumental to the outcome...” (para. 21) of what is communicated. The interactive component of social media is not fully understood by the Church at large: There is more to using social media for evangelization than just being able to transmit messages rapidly.

A Window into the Parishioner’s Life

That Facebook and Twitter are a foray into the more personal aspects of one’s life is another feature that would be of great use to priests. Fr. Ryan Haggerty suggested that social media could especially help priests in

...getting to know [their parishioners]. That's probably the biggest key for us as pastors is just getting to know the flock. Getting to know your sheep. If it helps in that way, and them getting to know us, then that would be the biggest benefit of it. And also just having just a forum for them to access information at their discretion, maybe just for formation.

Since people tend to post what is happening in their lives more freely on these sites, if they are connected to priests via social media, the priest has an automatic in that cannot be captured in any other way. Fr. Joseph Finley explains that

For a priest, it's tough because a lot of people, you just never talk to. And if they don't talk to you after Mass or participate at some deeper level than Sunday Mass, then you don't know. You might not even know their name. So...I know a lot more people and I know them better because of, well Facebook mainly, just because they share themselves on there and I can learn about them, see what they're interested in. And if there's some sort of crisis or something, usually somebody will share that. And so you know about that more immediately.

Fr. Michael Coolidge echoed these sentiments explaining that he sees the lives of his parishioners

...unfolding from their comments with family or this or they're going here or they're doing that or... and I see that through the texting, through Facebook, through emails, I see some of those connections so like I may be able to say to somebody 'oh I saw you were here and did this and that' when I see them at Church... so there's that connection. ... I don't know how many parishioner

friends are on Facebook; it's limited. But yeah, it kind of gives you an entrée into conversation with them.

As suggested previously, before priests can delve into the depths of their parishioner's social media profiles, they themselves must become familiar with the platforms and the responsibility that comes along with maintaining a personal profile. Pastoral responsibility ranked high among many of the priests' concerns in using social media.

How to Use Social Media for Public Ministry

In order for engagement to take place, a priest must understand how social media can enhance his own public ministry and the parish life. The youngest priest I interviewed, Fr. Joseph Finley, is the assistant to Fr. Coolidge. Fr. Finley explained that he thought his parish should begin using Facebook strategically soon because of this research and because, he detailed:

I was talking to somebody, [and] ...probably most of the parish is on Facebook.

We should have a Facebook page! I've been thinking that I'm going to bring that up to the pastor. It's like, this is easy to do, we can both have access to it... and just put out announcements there, just as much as the bulletin. Because people read that.

As mentioned previously, Fr. Finley posts his homilies on a blog that he maintains, and his parishioners access that and make comments to him in that space. Fr. Finley explained, as a social media user, that

sometimes people will message me on Facebook or even Twitter, like asking questions if they're in charge of something or something like that. It's kind of just

out into the open, and then if people need to contact me, they know they can through that.

Fr. Finley is quite comfortable with his use of social media, having used Facebook since his senior year of college. He explained that to him,

Facebook's definitely more personal...I got on Facebook my last year of college; that's when it came to our college. So that was right towards the beginning. So I [have] friends from every stage of my [life]...from like high school all the way up to like parishioners now. ...It's definitely more personal, even though there's people on there that I'm not like, personally close with. But on like Facebook, ... I'll share almost anything on there. Whether it's like music stuff or some interesting article. I do consciously try to like share, like for example...if Pope Francis said something that's been taken out of context, I consciously try to share like good articles and good Catholic media... like [Catholic] blogs and the National Catholic Register and things like that. I consciously try to share that. Especially since a lot of friends from previous parts of my life [are] either fallen away Catholics or non-Catholic or totally just don't know what's going on. So I try to evangelize a little through that, but it's still much more personal.

Fr. Finley understands where the Church is headed with Pope Francis' (and Pope Benedict before him) call to use social media as a part of priestly ministry: He is already incorporating it as much as he can into his own ministry.

We can juxtapose Fr. Finley's understanding and use of social media to someone like Fr. Ryan Haggerty, who is more careful with what he posts on his platforms. Fr. Haggerty explained that many priests he knows

...are very active on it. And I kind of see that as sort of... through their experience, through their posts, where they're just posting about... I mean, it's not all religion of course, it's just what's going on in their lives or what they like or what they're doing... sort of what everybody else does. ...I think that can be a humanizing quality, which is good.

What Fr. Haggerty suggests here is that social media as a place for engagement does seem to allow priests to express themselves as a person who is also a priest. He noted, however, "I just kind of understand that up front, that it's public. You know maybe [I have] a reticence about entering debate in that kind of media because it... it is like a public debate..." Fr. Haggerty and several other priests interviewed were familiar with social media spaces being an area where discourse could turn inflammatory very quickly because of users' lack of discernment, the tendency for someone to react immediately and with little thought, the communicative distance that frees people to say things they might not in person, and the misinterpretation of social commentary and ease with which people take offense to it that are often seen in social media spaces today.

With Catholicism being displayed in such prominent ways online and the real possibility of at least one of the negative reactions listed above occurring within social media space, some priests spoke of the necessity for the Church to use new media in Her ministry. Fr. Finley explained that for him

...it started...in college with blogs because Twitter and Facebook didn't exist yet, but just that opened my eyes to this whole world of Catholicism and these people were as excited as I was. That was really affirming. You can learn so much, you can meet people from all over the world... But it was always lay people. ...It wasn't official, whatever that means... I guess in the past few years, and especially as I've become a priest, seeing the official channels and seeing the Vatican really embrace [social media] very quickly compared to anything else. I mean, the Church moves very slowly, but that Vatican has Instagram and Twitter and Facebook and all these things. Seeing the Church embrace that, that's really exciting... And understanding how that works and trying to figure out how to do it, because nobody tells you how to do it. ...So experiencing the Church as a whole first off is just this total like grassroots sort of thing and teaching that Church that you have to do this and own it and not... it can't just be left out there for anybody to do. [A]ll this stuff (social media) should be just as normal as the diocesan Catholic paper or EWTN. Those are ways of reaching people, but if you want to reach people now, they're not watching EWTN... whether it's Twitter or Instagram or Facebook, they'll follow that. So even if they're not engaging, they're getting that in their feed every time you post something.

Fr. Ed Wendt noted that the priests needed to be informed “about how to use [social media] more effectively themselves. ...how can we use it more effectively? ...The younger guys may have that already; but us older guys, not so much.”

Using Social Media to Confront Sociocultural Issues

Operating in social media space in today's fast-paced culture presents great challenges for priests. For example, Monsignor Edward Wendt believed that some priests might struggle with the different ways to represent some social issues via social media. He suggested

...in just talking with some priests...they were saying, 'well, there's kind of like the official teaching of the Church with regard to some...issues like birth control, and then there's the practice.' Well, the official teaching of the Church is that birth control is not permitted; it's immoral. But in practice, these priests know that they are running into people who are on birth control and they still, I mean it's not like they're rejecting those people like they can't do this or they can't do that. So it's almost like, in practice there's a different thing than what's going on. ...in communicating on social media, it's like, okay, how do I respond to questions like this or deal with people in parish, do I kind of keep saying, okay here's what the Church teaching is... which I think is what most of them do. But I think it's like, you know, personally, well yeah, I accept these people as a part of my parish.

On the surface, Fr. Ed talks about the struggle the priests are met with in embracing American Culture (which Pope John Paul II coined as the 'culture of death' in 1993 at World Youth Day in Denver and wrote about in 1995) along with Catholic Social Teaching. In *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), John Paul II succinctly describes the Church's view of American culture, explaining that

...while the climate of widespread moral uncertainty can in some way be explained by the multiplicity and gravity of today's social problems, and these can sometimes mitigate the subjective responsibility of individuals, it is no less true that we are confronted by an even larger reality... This reality is characterized by the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity and in many cases takes the form of a veritable "culture of death." This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic, and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency... (para. 12)

The pontiff furthered his thoughts concerning this culture of death, explaining that "in our present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the 'culture of life' and the 'culture of death', there is need to develop a deep critical sense, capable of discerning true values and authentic needs" (Pope John Paul II, 1995, para. 95). Again, a greater sense of discernment is key. In his interview, Fr. Ed noted that communicating with parishioners amidst the pervasive 'culture of death' mentality puts priests in "a difficult position. ...how do I make people feel welcome, how do I show my acceptance to them, and yet still maintain clearly that this is what the Church is teaching...?"

The hot button issues that priests face in shepherding their flocks are at odds with secular culture: It is more difficult for Catholics to accept social and political beliefs and values than other Christians because what is mainstream is at odds with Catholic social teaching. Maher and colleagues (2006) point out that "Catholics [are] basically left with a confused identity of belonging to a distinct-yet-indistinct culture and little ability to articulate what exactly distinguished them" (p. 38). Social media could be a place for

more Catholic voices to enter public discussion, bringing positive commentary about these social issues. Yet, even priests are hesitant to enter the discussion there. Fr. Finley suggested that

...if it's something like gay marriage or almost anything people get angry about, [social media is] not the place to have a real discussion. You can have some sort of back and forth, but it's not... I have a relative that has put some really anti-Catholic stuff out there and some of my family is like 'well we should say something' and it's just not going to help. I think that especially like with controversial, heated, emotional stuff, it's not the place. I want to say something, but I hold myself back because I don't think that's the place to get into it with somebody because it's really easy to misinterpret and just assume things, because that's how people make statements on social media: They put something ridiculous out there whether it's an article or an image or something that's very strong, and they want people to react. And so I think it's just best to maintain the relationship, and keep that going and you can speak, and you can teach the faith that way, in a deeper way. ...I think that's a lot of what happens sometimes when people get really heated on social media that people want to argue and...you can't evangelize that way.

Fr. Finley brings up two important issues with this statement: First, discernment, and second, evangelization. As mentioned previously, discernment is about coming to know more about something. Having to make decisions is at the heart of everyday life, and it is no different in the Catholic life. However, being Catholic does rely upon a sense of

“moral agency” (Whitney, 2012, p. 1). Since social media space affords its users a place for religious expression, discerning what is posted in that space is of critical importance to both the lay Catholic and even the priest choosing to engage in religious discourse on social media platforms.

Evangelization

The second point that Fr. Finley stressed was evangelization. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) (2002), evangelization is bringing the message of Jesus Christ “into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel itself. At its essence are the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ and the response of a person in faith, which are both works of the Spirit of God” (para. 10). Evangelization happens in the ordinary lives of all Christians: Evangelization occurs every day, every time we come into contact with another person. By loving and supporting our friends and even strangers, Christian values are passed from person to person. The USCCB (2002) explains that for evangelization to occur, two things must happen: A witness, “which is the simple living of the faith,” (para. 36) and sharing, “which is spreading the Good News of Jesus in an explicit way” (para. 36). Both of these components for evangelization can easily be translated into how Catholics use social media.

Representation of the Universal Church

Many of the respondents stressed that the priest not only represents himself but the broader, universal Church via his social media profile. Fr. Rob Harper described the responsibility as

...representing not just yourself... Usually, as soon as a member of the clergy does something... he's also representing not only himself but the parish, and also, you know, the broader church. ...Not just in terms of an institution, although it is that. But he's also seen as being the representative of his community's faith. So, things that get attributed to him also get dispersed in how ...people [who] are in one way or another connected to him. ...You have to be really careful about how [social media] is going to be used. Now, if it can be controlled, and he's just going to use it for a personal thing, fine. But if he starts using it as, let's say a pastor or a priest of his particular parish in this ministry, then that takes on a different...image and model.

Fr. Andrew Rodriguez explained the conundrum succinctly, that “priests are public figures, and as a priest, whether you like it or not, everyone knows you as a priest.”

Whether they refer to it as “putting truth out there” (Fr. Finley) or being shoulder to shoulder with their parishioners in the trenches (Monsignor Peterson and Fr. Ball), the presence of priests in social media spaces is a good thing because priests can clear up misinformation about the faith and potentially take conversations offline and have a real talk, face-to-face as discussed in the previous sections. Fr. Finley explained that with social media platforms, parishioners

...know their priest in a personal way and that's great, but I think... you have an ability to reach people where they are, where they're reading, where they're getting their news and stuff... I saw an article or a study or something where most Catholics don't know about Catholic media. And that's kind of scary; we're

missing the point. The people that are reading some of this really good stuff online or watching YouTube channels or whatever, they're the people that already know about it and usually the people who know their faith, so I think it's an opportunity to like bring more of the lay Catholics into the world of like... where people are thinking about this, people are talking about this, the Catholic Church is so much bigger than just your parish and just like giving them good sources so they can grow. I think that's the biggest thing... Reading and encountering other people online and just seeing, this is Catholicism.

While everyone has different reasons for using social media, what Fr. Finley points out is true: If a priest is making a connection with a parishioner in social media space in some capacity at all, it is still a connection (see Carol Miller's comment in p. 111). The Church is visible, and priests are engaging in the two-fold plan of evangelization: Witnessing and sharing among their flock. Even though the survey participants in Chapter 4 reported not having frequent contact with their parishioners via social media platforms, several priests (and several lay Catholic participants) still alluded to those connectivity points being critical in the development of their relationships.

Fr. Finley explained that being among the everyday, mundane, and sometimes even profane posts is precisely why priests should be present on social media – they can interject and interact amid the posts of the everyday user:

...anybody can post anything. So I think that's always the tricky part of...well, it goes both ways. Anybody can post anything, and they are. And so we should at least be there. ...so I think that's the negative aspect, it's very open to people with

misinformation or bad intentions that can do damage... they can do that anyway whether we're there or not.

Priests then could serve as a voice of reason or a voice of truth in a space marked by profanity and dark deeds.

Future Priests: Training Today's Seminarians

Fr. Finley also explained that not only is this kind of sharing a good way for sharing themselves with their parishioners, it also can serve as a marketing tool for vocations.

...how do we get young men to think about the priesthood? ...Really, the more and more that I see it like, the best way is just for them to know priests who are happy and just enjoy being a priest. And so I think this is an avenue for people to see this is a normal person, ideally well-adjusted and just living out his priesthood, and that includes all this stuff. It doesn't...put him on a pedestal where he doesn't do anything like.... Yeah so, it's easy for a priest to fall into that as well. You're separated from the world in this way, but like, this allows people to know you and so you can kind of build those bonds that make it so they see you like that and you don't separate yourself, and they don't put you away.

With the popularity of social media on the rise and several priests serving as vocations team members or spiritual directors for seminarians, I took the opportunity to ask if they knew if seminarians (men who are studying to be priests) were being instructed on using social media for ministry while in seminary. Fr. Finley said

...that's a really good question... if you hear anything in the seminary about social media, it's about being careful and not like, doing something stupid... there isn't training for this, but... there probably should be because everything we hear, either the Child Protection [Decree] – kind of like your boundaries, which are important, but... there's no sort of 'you can use this.' This is a tool, just as much as homiletics is a tool, learning to preach. ...Some of the new seminarians are on this stuff, but it's probably still very much like a personal thing to them.

So...that's something the Church can improve in.

Fr. James Hazel worked with seminarians and explained that his role “was to talk with [them] about their prayer life as well as about the way they lived out their faith publicly,” which oftentimes included on social media platforms. Fr. Hazel recited a quote from a professor and explained

...one of our professors from about 4 or 5 years ago, he said ‘You know in the past we used to say, one of the goals of communications was to know thyself, but now the goal is to show thyself.’ So we’ve had this change from know thyself to show thyself. So, yes, you get to know people’s thoughts, people’s preferences... what attracts people by what is posted and their comments as well. ...because this person uses social media, ... I’ve gotten to know them better than a person who...I have gotten to know through personal meetings and discussions outside of Mass. Yes, I can and I have gotten to know aspects about them that I haven’t gotten to know about others.

Fr. Ed Wendt, who is retired from active ministry, also works with seminarians as a spiritual director. He explained "...how they communicate ordinarily, is just through Facebook. Now with me, they communicate by email, but generally, they use Facebook. Or I don't know if...they probably use Twitter too, but I'm not familiar with that." Fr. Ed also explained that for the seminarians, using social media and being taught how to do ministry through its channels is

...something that needs to happen. ...if you're really good at it, and you're really conscientious about doing a lot of texting and you could get...all of these people have all of these needs and practically speaking, how many can I respond to? Can I respond to all of them? And the time factor, the time it takes. ... I help out in some of the parishes here, and there are thousands of families. The one I got to the most is 1,800 families and the one next door is 2,400 families and only one priest to take care of all of that. And then you know, so like if 1/10 of those people texted you on a weekly basis... so like that's families. So when you talk about people, there's probably 2 or 3 times that many. So you're talking about a couple thousand people, and if just like 1/10 of the... 10 percent, so that's 240 people. If they texted you once a week, my gosh, how would you respond to that? ...Plus, ...not only do I have these families, but I have these families from the other places that I've been.

Social media, then, could be a way to organize communication and to make connections with the multitudes of people in a priest's flock. As a result of the feelings of connectedness that emerge from interacting in social media spaces, lay Catholics and

priests alike can build narratives about their experience as Catholics in the modern, secular world.

Overall Conclusions: Lay Catholics and Priests

The potential growth that the Church could experience from adopting social media is really undetermined at this time. Fr. Michael Coolidge explained that he was excited about what he thinks the Church could do with social media. He noted that

...as Catholics, we can be more on top of this in a positive way... this is a whole new endeavor in the Church. The Church is still young in all of this too. But... the Church has always tried to communicate. There were the letters that the Apostles wrote in the early days; well, I wonder what they would do today? They would probably send a tweet or a text or something. So I'm excited about that part. It's going to become more natural to all of us.

Fr. Ryan Haggerty suggested that the Church's use of social media as a whole has "been good, it connects us with people that I don't know, and maybe former parishioners and stuff. You see a lot of good Catholic ministries that are using it well..." Fr. Haggerty went on to suggest, however, that

...it just takes more investment on our part. ...Us Catholics, ...we're probably the largest, but we by far don't do anywhere near the best. ...The more resources we can put into it, or just working together to find the people that can do it. ...I know it just seems like everything grows by little steps: Somebody starts something and it's good, and it grows. It attracts attention so you know ...It's not that expensive. [For example,] we just... learned that one of the young adults on our

Confirmation Team likes to do video editing and so, just finding people like that to do that and putting something out there. ...It's almost like when you put the investment into the person, the Church benefits from it, but then at the same time, the person will then put an investment back into the Church. It's a cyclical thing that I don't feel like we've quite capitalized on in our faith.

Fr. Andrew Rodriguez noted that from his experience with social media

you get to know parishioners more than you were before. ...You are more accessible to them. They can just ask you [questions]. ...I think in terms of that, there's certainly a big impact which I think I have been taking for granted. ...It's just that the Church is, as usual, slow to find this out and slow to implement appropriate measures or appropriate strategies to...really capitalize on them. ...the Church should be involved concretely in doing research and finding out about the impact, the influences, advantages, disadvantages of social media so that way they will be able to use it more strategically rather than just going by what other people are saying about the effectiveness of social media. ...We should have our own forms of doing research and finding out so we have our own resources to bank on: I think that's where the Church is lacking in terms of really finding out and using [social media] to our advantage.

Fr. Andrew admitted that, while he has been working in the field of communication for some time, even he was influenced by the Vatican in his use of social media: "The pope was on Facebook, and he also was on Twitter, and he also spoke about it. So of course

that gave me confirmation that, ‘hey, this is something that you can use for proclamation.’”

Consequently, many of the priests related our modern, technologically driven society back to Biblical roots where they see a pattern emerge concerning social behaviors and how some sense of organized religion influences it. Fr. Finley detailed a story from Acts of the Apostles where Paul goes to the marketplace:

He goes there and they have all their pagan temples. And he goes and talks to them there. And that to me is such a lesson for us [priests], we have to be where the people are talking. He wasn’t afraid to go there because they worshipped false gods there, so I think even though there’s loads of bad stuff on the internet and social media, that is THE reason that we shouldn’t stay out of it. Like it’s going to make us dirty or taint the Church or something. That’s where people are, and that’s where the discussion is happening and so we have to put truth there, or else the opposite is going to fill it up.

Fr. Haggerty explained it in another way:

...I was just thinking of what Jesus says of the children of this generation are wiser than the children of light. ...The world is so savvy about how to market, how to sell things... [and] we haven’t been as good at marketing the faith.

Fr. Coolidge echoed those sentiments, explaining

...people are on the Internet all the time, and so if we can give some kind of a good presence of the Church ..., I think that’s helpful. And I think people...who

are interested in it will find it.... So I think the Church needs to be out there in this media...

Fr. Ed Wendt held a similar view. He believed that social media is

...going to be the main source of communications with people and I think if you want to get your message out there, it's the way you almost have to go. ...I remember I was at a meeting [about 3 years ago] with our previous bishop, and the lay people... it was a lay deanery council for our deanery... and so the bishop was talking about the budget for the Diocese. And he was talking about how much money we put into the Diocesan newspaper, which was in the tens of thousands of dollars... and one of our parishioners [said] 'well I can assure you, Bishop, nobody under 30 reads that paper' and the bishop got really upset because they were putting all this money into the paper and we're telling him people don't read it. And he says 'no, not if they're under 30, they're not reading it.' You know, a lot of people over 30 aren't reading it either. So it's like if you want to get your message out there, then you need to start looking into social media and some other ways.

Until education and awareness are achieved on a much wider scale, however, the Church will be slow to adopt and use social media as a part of the new evangelization movement.

Tom Haselden, one of the younger lay participants, referred to the Church's slowness to adopt social media: While he understood that "the pope got a Twitter account," Tom surmised that the Church took the necessary precautions in starting up social media platforms because being in the mix itself make it "easy for people to

misunderstand things when it's not really thoughtfully constructed." He went on to suggest that from his personal observances of hierarchical social media use that

more diocesan priests have used social media rather than you know like higher... cardinals, the pope. Even bishops... I think that probably with the amount of new media uses that the diocesan priests have used has probably been a good thing. I would say that most of the misunderstanding and miscommunication is a part of interpretation from mostly people who are like, outside the Church. So, if anything, I would say that if the different levels of hierarchy could maybe more effectively communicate with or explain Catholic theology via social media, then that might be a more effective way of actually getting everybody to understand things. But I think that overall that would be really difficult to do.

Several of the participants seemed to highlight many of the difficulties that come along with maintaining a social media profile for someone who works in such a public role. The thing that remains, however, is the human quality of the person behind the social media profile. Participants stressed that the person-to-person contact was necessary in the end because of the need for counsel and comfort that can only come from in-person relationships. Sarah Jones probably summed it up best when she remarked

I will always believe, even if you're an electronic-age person, I will always believe that people need personal interaction. ...A machine can't hug you and love you and tell you what you need to hear, you know. And even though you get the same message, maybe, online...you know, or through social media, you're not

getting the humanness. And I think if we lose our humanity, there's no sense in us existing.

Maggie Johnson, one of the university participants, cautioned that overly religious social media sites, to her,

...feels kind of fake. Like, if you feel the need to proclaim it so often, it's like you're trying to prove something to yourself more than anyone else. ...To me, faith is more of a personal thing that you discuss with a person, like, one-on-one or over the phone. It's more personal than Facebook, I guess.

Essentially, according to the lay Catholic participants, social media might be helpful in starting or enhancing relationships, but the relationship between priest and parishioner would be best serviced in an off-line capacity because of the human need for interaction in an in-person context.

In order to use social media effectively for ministry and evangelization, even priests need to exercise discernment in what they think they should post. They should feel a sense of freedom in expressing who they are as people and relish in being able to connect with their parishioners on this level. Much of the fear that priests have in using social media come from social taboos, that everyone is out to attack the Catholic Church, and that there cannot be a sense of true religiosity experienced in these places. In his 1984 *Theories of Communicative Action* concerning reason and rationality in society, Habermas explains that communicative acts are a means to an end for mutual understanding among human beings and that communication offers individuals a sense of "human emancipation." This occurs within the public sphere, an area marked by its

democratic appearance and functioning. Social media platforms are a viable sphere where this kind of freedom can be experienced.

Bohman (2004) suggests that the Internet is the new, emergent public sphere. Within it, people are afforded the opportunity to communicate with others despite cultural, temporal, and political differences. Meyer and Moors (2006) propose that media itself help to engage people in discussions within the public sphere and in doing so, help participants to understand their position as a member of an audience. The public sphere calls for active participation in dialogue that is imperative to social progress. Active participation is made easier with the advent of new media because the physical and temporal boundaries that once prevented some from taking part in the discussion have been removed. Jenkins (2006) explains that new media have placed us within a “convergence culture” which operates because media consumers are taking on the ideals of a culture that encourages participation. Consumers actively participate with the media which leads to engagement, and being actively engaged suggests that the consumer has a real investment in their social environment. All of this speaks to the notion of “human emancipation” that Habermas idealizes: By being encouraged and actually able to actively participate or engage with media, the consumer is able to communicate without hindrance which essentially affords them a sense of freeing power. Many lay Catholics are already at this level of use; these arguments serve as further rationale as to why more priests should adopt social media as a part of their ministry.

By encouraging active participation through mediated means, people of faith have a new platform from which they can speak. Because control is difficult to manage on

social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, the voices of the faithful can emerge unhindered by the politics within the traditional public sphere. While the same rules apply to the new public sphere supported by Internet technology, opinions are much harder to police there. While both groups see the potential for relationship growth in social media spaces, priests exhibited greater neutrality on the matter within the surveys but seemed to have more to say in their interviews.

This chapter sought to find deeper meaning among both priests and lay Catholics about how they used and viewed social media for connectivity among and between each group. Each group spoke positively about using social media for connection and even suggested that social media space potentially can provide a great avenue to foster these connections. However, because neither group has really experienced these connections with each other firsthand, explanations of their use and their expectations of the other group's social media use were very vague. This finding and others will be summarized more fully in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to analyze the relationships that emerge in social media spaces between lay Catholics and members of the Church hierarchy through investigating the following research questions:

RQ 1: In what ways do social media spaces provide a place for religious expression and growth?

RQ 2: In what ways do social media spaces provide an environment for members of Church hierarchy and the laity to engage with one another?

RQ 3: In what ways do social media spaces provide areas for relationships between members of Church hierarchy and the laity to grow and flourish?

However, after analysis of the survey and interview data collected, this research could not really answer the questions that were originally crafted because within the Diocese of Browntown, the Church is not yet at a place where significant social media engagement between priests and lay Catholics occurs. Still, this research did reveal an institution and its people struggling to make sense of a rapidly shifting media landscape that continues to see exponential growth. Moreover, these people must now learn how to cope with the constant changes if they will integrate social media use into daily practice. Thus, this research provides answers to new questions, such as:

New RQ 1: How do Catholics in the Diocese of Browntown use social media to communicate?

New RQ 2: In what ways do social media help Catholics in the Diocese of Browntown to build relationships?

New RQ2a: How might the Church use social media to better fulfill its mission?

New RQ 3: What concerns arise for the Church, priests and laity, from increased social media activity?

As such, Chapter 4 provided information about the state of social media use by both lay Catholics and priests within the Diocese of Browntown while Chapter 5 detailed the limited experience of several of the participants while highlighting many issues that the Catholic Church may face in adopting social media platforms for evangelization purposes and public ministry.

This dissertation represents one of the first forays into how the Catholic Church is using social media for organizational purposes – most notably, in the new evangelization movement. It identifies several of the key issues the Catholic Church faces as the media landscape shifts and changes. Through the lens of Jenkins’s (2006) theory of convergence culture, Fisher’s (1985; 1999) narrative paradigm, the public relations strategies surrounding relationship maintenance (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998; Helland, 2000; Dawson, 2004), and Turner’s (1969) liminality, this study examined how lay Catholics and members of Church hierarchy within the Diocese of Browntown use social media space for religious dialogue and for connecting with one another. The findings suggest that there is desire for connectivity among lay Catholics and parish priests and that social media space potentially can provide a great avenue to foster these connections, but the connections are slow to be made at this time.

In light of the Social Age (Azua, 2010), religious institutions like the Catholic Church have been making efforts to use social media to harness the faith of their flock.

Indeed, in all of his World Communications Day proclamations, Pope Benedict XVI focused his message on the use of digital communication in proclaiming the Gospel message; and as time and technologies progressed, he began including social media platforms as a part of those messages. Specifically, Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 World Communications Day address, "New Technologies, New Relationships: Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue, and Friendship" suggested that "new technologies have...opened the way for dialogue between people from different countries, cultures, and religions. The new digital arena, the so-called cyberspace, allows them to encounter and to know each other's traditions and values" (Pope Benedict, 2009, para. 7), which helps bring understanding and peace to the world. The messages for World Social Communication Day in 2010 and 2011 centered around the priest, pastoral ministry, and the digital world and truth and the authenticity of life in the digital age, respectively (Vatican, n.d.). Therefore, by embracing mainstream strategies such as joining popular social networking sites to reach out to the laity and establishing a presence within the digital sphere, religious institutions like the Catholic Church can enter dialogue with their flocks and with other Christians and non-Christians alike under the scrutiny of the broader public sphere. Through a survey and several interviews with priests and lay Catholics from the Diocese of Browntown, this dissertation takes a first step in highlighting the issues that the Church faces in trying accomplish this.

While both groups of participants exhibited openness to using social media for connecting with one another and for religious dialogue, both sides gave only vague descriptions of their expectations and experiences with using social media in this way.

However, the early stages of development of social media use in the Catholic Church, especially at the Diocesan level, likely explains responses where the participants were not as specific or even really insightful in terms of what they would like to see with social media connections between priests and lay Catholics. These kinds of connections in social media space merit further study especially in terms of media and religious communication as a field of study. On the grand scale, for the Catholic Church to be on board with this kind of connectivity between Her own priests and parishioners, however, is an initial step that can be taken toward interreligious and ecumenical discussions which are a necessary component to the rapidly changing religiocultural landscape of the world today.

Religious Communication as a Field

Kawamura (2006) suggests “traditional Christianity has declined and secular atheists are increasing” (as cited in Satoshi, 2008, p. 137). However, according to Jasper (2003), “throughout the world Christian traditions still exert a considerable influence on cultural practices and social attitudes, and although there is decreasing church attendance in some parts of the globe, in other areas communities identifying themselves as Christian are more than holding their own” (p. 178). As the oldest and largest Christian denomination, the Catholic Church is certainly a major stakeholder in religious discourse worldwide – both in-person and online. Jasper suggests that:

Over the centuries the Christian Church has viewed its relationship with the world in a number of different ways. For example: (1) The Church and state are one organic whole, in which civil authorities accept the teaching and values of the

Church and have the responsibility of regulating or even enforcing them. (2) The Church is a spiritual guardian in a 'fallen' world, keeping our eyes on eternal values and standards beyond this mortal life. (3) The Church is 'in exile', a persecuted community which holds the line against a hostile world or represents the Body of Christ in all its vulnerability in the world. (4) The Church is a 'prophetic', sometimes socially-reformist and spirit-filled community speaking for the poor and marginalized, including the non-human world, and against quietism or the corruptions of wealth and power. (5) The Church is a missionary community, preaching the Gospel or good news of salvation to the whole world. (p. 191)

Jasper points out that her list is not exhaustive and that several Christian communities today find that their church adopts many of these views (p. 191). Jasper's suggestions of how the Christian Church views itself are nearly identical to the core values of Catholic Social Teaching. According to the USCCB (1998), the major themes of Catholic Social Teaching are respect for life and the dignity of the human person; a call for celebration of the family, community, and active participation within those units; rights and responsibilities as Catholic citizens; providing options for the poor and vulnerable; respect for the dignity of work and the rights of those working; solidarity among Catholics; and care for God's creation. The USCCB asserts that "the Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society" (para. 17). Moreover, they claim that "in this time of widespread violence...diminished respect for human life and

dignity...around the world, the Gospel of life and the biblical call to justice need to be proclaimed and shared with new clarity, urgency, and energy” (para. 17).

The Second Vatican Council was called in 1962 by Pope John XXIII as an effort to help bring the Church from more antiquated practices into the age of modernity; however, modern times saw an increasingly negative outlook on life and dignity, pushing Catholic values to the back burner while championing more secularist ideals. According to Jasper (2003), Vatican II “generally expressed new openness to ‘the world’ [It] emphasiz[ed] the sense in which Roman Catholic Christians could detect the presence of grace in the signs of the times and in the world” (p. 203) The ideas promulgated by the four-year Council “led to a new attitude towards other Christian churches and some movement towards ecumenism, repentance for anti-Semitism, and some acknowledgement of other faith traditions” (p. 203), which ultimately was a step forward in making the Church more relevant in the modern world.

The use of new media within the Church has helped Her to be more relevant in the modern world: I argue that this time period of the Church experimenting and adopting new media should be likened to the positive experiences the Church witnessed after the Second Vatican Council. According to Catholic media expert Rocco Palmo (2011), the first half of the year 2011 for the Catholic institution should be “especially recalled as a time of media milestones, ones both celebrating achievements past and – at long last – opening up the doors and platforms for Church Central's further penetration into a drastically-altered communications landscape” (para. 1). As such, the International Society of Media, Religion, and Culture (2013) suggests that “the study of media,

religion and culture has broadened out from interests in media representation to thinking about the religious uses... of media, the significance of media for religion in public life, and the role of media technologies for new forms of religious life and practice” (para. 1) has grown over the past decade. This dissertation is an example of what this society would call an exploration into understanding how “public encounter[s] with religion [take] place through media” (para. 2) while attempting to answer important questions such as “what difference do media content, aesthetics, technologies, and networks make to the ways in which religion is understood and practiced? And how do we understand the nature of power in relation to [that]?” (para. 2). The theoretical underpinnings upon which this research rests can help shed further insight into the answers to these questions.

Discussion of Findings

The following sections will relate specific findings from this study to the theoretical foundations on which it was based (see Chapters 1 and 2).

Convergence Culture

Jenkins (2006) defines convergence culture as a period of constant flux – there is no stability as old and new media collide, but there is a sense of unity or community. Old media are not replaced; their use and function in society just shifts as new media garner the attention of consumers. New media complements and also competes with the old media that already exists. Based on this research, this is exactly where we currently find the Catholic institution in her use of new media, at least when it comes to the Diocese of Browntown, its priests, and several lay Catholics: In a state of flux.

Within a convergence culture, institutional thinking is confronted by a grassroots effort to spread the wealth of information to more than just a “brain trust” or a hierarchy that holds all of the answers. Arguably this kind of movement has been taking place within the Catholic Church since the end of Vatican II, but it can definitely be attributed to the use of new and social media that the Church has been experiencing in the last decade. However, it is important to note that many priests still see communication, even communication via social media, as a top-down means of disseminating information.

Many priests in the Diocese of Browntown hint at the interactive component that social media provides but do not understand how to implement it for communicating in their ministerial role. The interactive component of social media is imperative for public ministry because, as Jenkins (2006) suggests, no one knows everything, but everyone knows something: If we pool our knowledge together through various modes of communication, more can be accomplished. We live in an information age: Through the power of the Internet, we have access to more information than ever before which also requires more discernment especially when it comes to engaging in religious discourse in social media spaces. Moreover, we are afforded the ability to connect with various people around the world with relative ease.

This collision of new and old media and the intersection of institutional and grassroots strategies offers a great platform for lay Catholics and priests to engage in spaces and break down barriers that were once thought to be unbreakable. However, efforts to move in this direction will be difficult as many of the older priests, especially, described fears and concerns in using social media at all because of the potential to

spread misconception, misunderstanding, and further falsities concerning the faith. This dose of caution doled out by priests and some lay Catholics offers an interesting counterpoint view to the idea of a utopian, online community. The utopian mindset illustrates how both priests and lay Catholics alike could build more solid relationships that might potentially allow them to tell the story of Catholicism from a much more well-rounded perspective than the standpoint from which it has been told in previous years. However, the pathway of getting to this point will still be met with fear and skepticism because of the lack of control users have once their story is posted on a social media profile.

Narrative Paradigm

To tell the story of Catholicism in social media space fits nicely within the framework Walter Fisher (1985; 1999) establishes for the narrative paradigm. The narrative paradigm suggests that “symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – ...have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, and interpret them” (Fisher, 1999, p. 266). Fisher’s narrative paradigm suggests that human communication occurs through storytelling: Signs and symbols take on meaning for people within various contexts and offer a narration of sorts for what is happening in their lives. Social media is the platform on which many people tell the stories of their lives.

Arguably, since the Second Vatican Council and the expansion of media platforms like the broadcast news industry, which occurred roughly at the same time, Catholics have not had the ability to be the primary storytellers of their own story. Fisher (1999) defines narration as “a type of human interaction-activity, an art, a genre, or mode

of expression” (p. 270). Telling stories, recounting and accounting for events that have taken place in our lives, helps “to establish a meaningful life-world... [E]ach mode of recounting and accounting for is but a way of relating a ‘truth’ about the human condition” (p. 270). That Catholics have been living in a world where their story has been told through the eyes of mainstream media for so long, Millennial Catholics are not sure what their story really is (Maher, Sever, & Pichler, 2006). Whether in person or in online spaces, people are constantly sharing parts of themselves through storytelling in order to make sense of their lives and to find truth. Now, with the grassroots efforts of social media paving the way for lay Catholics and priests alike to recapture their stories, these groups are afforded the ability to connect with one another in the social media sphere which will add Catholic voices to the often inflammatory religious discourse that happens in this space. Through sharing their stories on social media, lay Catholics and priests can “give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one’s life” (Fisher, 1999, p. 271). This helps to strengthen social bonds. Even though, as we saw in Chapter 4, the connections in social media space between lay Catholics and priests are slow to be made, the survey participants still reported a desire for these connections to become a reality. For, as Melanie Crawford explained (see Chapter 5), “there are many different forms of social media that could strengthen faith... when it comes to Facebook and Twitter, ... I think it could lead to a better relationship between [lay Catholics and their priests].” And even Fr. Ed Wendt suggested (see

Chapter 5), using social media is “...the way to go now. It’s the way most people seem to communicate, especially young people.”

As such, through communicating via social media outlets, lay Catholics and priests can theoretically create this sense of story and share their common faith in community with one another which helps to strengthen social bonds through methods of relationship maintenance, which are discussed in the next section. It also opens the door, in a broader sense, for interreligious dialogue to occur which Satoshi (2008) argues for in her proposal for promoting interreligious communication studies as a branch of the field of intercultural communication. However, actual evidence of this occurring has yet to be seen in the Diocese of Browntown. Because of that, whether or not Catholics can use social media as a medium to tell their story is only marginally supported by the results of my study. Nevertheless, tweets and posts can relay a powerful message that not only tells part of the story of the creator of the content, but becomes part of the story of the larger community.

Relationship Maintenance

Through faith-sharing in social media spaces, this study also suggests that relationships between lay Catholics and Church hierarchy have the capacity to be cultivated and maintained even though they are not currently a reality in those spaces. On one level, this is an interpersonal relationship maintenance of sorts. However, by viewing the Catholic Church as an organization and Her priests as middle managers through the lens of corporate/organizational communication, several public relations practices can be applied. As discussed in Chapter 5, through connections via social media, the Church

engages in what Ledingham and Bruning (1998) called “a process of continual and reciprocal exchange between an organization and its key publics” (p. 56). Continual interaction in these spaces should result in achieving several of the dimensions Ledingham and Bruning developed in their theoretical framework for relationship maintenance, including investment, commitment, trust, cooperation, and social bonds, among others. For example, we saw in Chapter 5 that the youth especially seem to flock toward connecting with their priest in social media spaces: Tom Haselden explained, “They can more easily engage them and ask them questions and just build better relationships overall and probably learn more that way.” Developing these dimensions online as Dawson (2004) suggests might result in long term relationship development between priests and parishioners that can then be transferred offline, which might ultimately help the Church in other areas. Indeed, Ledingham and Bruning suggest that there is a need to develop “long-term behavioral relationships between organizations and their key publics, rather than relying solely upon symbolic activities designed to enhance organizational image” (p. 56-57).

Furthermore, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) suggest that organizations that focus upon “building trust, demonstrating involvement, investment, and commitment, and maintaining open, frank communication between the organization and its key public does have value in that it impacts the stay-leave decision...” (p. 61). For instance, lay participant Melanie Crawford suggested (see Chapter 5) that

just the sheer fact of sharing a picture from an event or parish activity or...like a Facebook page that a priest maintains for the parish that he serves and being able

to... share reminders and create an open space for discussion about different topics

is but one way that lasting connections that build trust and demonstrate involvement can be made.

The Diocese of Browntown might benefit from setting relationship goals that utilize different public relations strategies to communicate around the Diocese: Priests using social media to communicate with their parishioners is one such strategy that the Diocese of Browntown, and eventually even the universal Church, could put into practice in public ministry. These connections would help to foster positive relationships which should thereby foster a more positive image. The Church could use this communication as “a strategic tool in helping to achieve [the relationship] goals” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 63) that they have established for optimum relationship maintenance, that is positive affect between priests and parishioners (social bonds), investment, trust, interdependence/power imbalance, and structural bonds (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

Additionally, the interactive quality that social media spaces can provide would aid in relationship maintenance. This is specifically where the priests in the Diocese of Browntown, as seen in Chapter 5, are lacking understanding: Right now, they tend to see and champion social media (if at all) for its power to disseminate information, and not for its ability to create connections with true interactivity. But, according to Dawson (2004), “interactivity... draws people into the social life of the Net and binds them to any ongoing social activity” (p. 83). With the capacity to “draw near to the interactivity of

offline relationships” (p. 83), Dawson believes that the exchanges that take place online “emulate face-to-face conversation” (p. 83). Although both groups of participants still desire the personal connections they make with their pastors in the flesh, this emulation of face-to-face conversation that social media offers could help build bridges between the two groups which is the first step toward ecumenism.

However, as discussed in both Chapters 4 and 5, generational differences in using social media cannot be ignored: Users’ understanding of the platforms and purpose for using them vary greatly dependent upon their age. Several of the participants from both groups mentioned this in their interviews. In Chapter 5 specifically, Maggie Johnson’s comments were juxtaposed with older lay participants Linda Thomas’ and Myra Lopez’s opinions about age and social media use. This juxtaposition demonstrated that younger social media users understand the world around them in a different way than those of the older generation. Furthermore, younger social media users (who have grown up using social media) also understand social media in a completely different context than some of the older users who are learning how to use it as adults.

Suggesting that community is an integral component of experiencing religion, Dawson notes that “people use the Internet to augment and extend their pre-existing social lives, not as a substitute or alternative” (p. 85). Along with the desire seen in Chapter 4 especially by the lay Catholics for connection with their priests in social media space, this is further grounds for the Catholic institution to make efforts to help members of Church hierarchy to understand and use the communicative power social media affords its users. As Fr. Finley explained (see Chapter 5), “probably most of the parish is on

Facebook. We should have a Facebook page! ... I'm going to bring that up to the pastor. ...[T]his is easy to do..." By establishing a presence online via social media platforms, Fr. Finley and other members of Church hierarchy can create the spaces that are not substitutes or alternatives, but rather spaces that expand the in-person relationships into online connections that are significant and can serve as enhancements to one's faith life.

Liminality

According to Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra (2008), the concept of liminality, as developed by van Gennep (1960) and later Turner (1969), "refers to in-between situations and conditions that are characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes" (para. 1). According to Turner (1969), liminality is considered to be "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions" (p. 359). The priests and lay Catholics in the Diocese of Browntown seem to be on the same page about social media being used as a platform to engage in religious discourse and as a place to make connections and further tighten the social bonds between groups. However, in reality, liminality can also result in fragmentation of a group and the Church is understandably wary of an outcome where these connections are not realized (or worse, existing bonds are weakened). This concern helps explain why priests of the Diocese of Browntown have adopted a cautious approach to using social media.

Turner argues, though, that through liminality, a sense of comradeship emerge: In this “‘moment in and out of time,’ and in and out of secular social structure, ...some recognition...of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties” (p. 360) is revealed. For example, Fr. Joseph Finley is probably the heaviest user of social media interviewed between both groups. He suggested that his introduction to social media before becoming a priest

opened my eyes to this whole world of Catholicism, and these people were as excited as I was. That was really affirming. You can learn so much, you can meet people from all over the world... [And] in the past few years, and especially as I’ve become a priest, seeing the official channels and seeing the Vatican really embrace [social media] ... that’s really exciting...

As such, those who are buying into the idea of using social media platforms for connectivity are creating very tight social bonds that will only be tightened as others begin joining the movement.

Specific Recommendations

Based on what this study uncovered through both the survey and interview processes, several recommendations can be made specifically for the Diocese of Browntown, and some can potentially be extended to the Catholic institution at large. One of the biggest obstacles the Church will have to overcome in fully embracing social media as a part of priestly ministry is the generational conception that older priests will not use new technology. For example, during the interview process for this research, I

learned that Fr. Eric Ball does not use social media at all. When asked if he felt that maybe people didn't communicate with him because of that, Fr. Ball responded

I would imagine that the younger generation, who now are totally becoming electronic and they do all their communication through texting, that they find it difficult to sit down in a face-to-face conversation and would fail at it. That doesn't bother me though, because I still turn it over to God. If He wants me to communicate, or if He wants them to communicate, then it works out.

He went on to explain that

the Church is doing well where it is. ...It's a good thing. Personally, I've done my share. I'm coming to that time where I don't want to get into anything else. And I see others older than me who are. And I'm thinking maybe I should be doing what they're doing.

What is interesting to note here could be attributed to the generational idiom, "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." Fr. Ball seemed to suggest that he does not want to adopt using social media as a part of his public ministry as a priest. He, like many older adults including some of the other older priests interviewed, is comfortable communicating with his parishioners using older forms of communication and maintains that if a conversation with one of his parishioners is supposed to occur (even with a younger parishioner who may not be as comfortable in a face-to-face situation), then God will see to it that the connection will be made.

The ability to use social media and the purpose for using it are, indeed, impacted by age. As discussed in the previous sections, younger social media users understand the

world around them in a different way and, therefore, understand social media in a different context than some of the older participants who must learn how to use it as adults. Fifteen years ago, Douglas Adams, author of *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* and a renowned, radical atheist, penned a humorous yet true reflection on Internet technology entitled “How to Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the Internet” which speaks to these notions. Adams (1999) suggested that

you would think we would learn the way these things [television, the phone, cinema, radio, the car, the bicycle, printing, the wheel and so on] work, which is this: 1) everything that’s already in the world when you’re born is just normal; 2) anything that gets invented between then and before you turn thirty is incredibly exciting and creative and with any luck you can make a career out of it; [and] 3) anything that gets invented after you’re thirty is against the natural order of things and the beginning of the end of civilization as we know it until it’s been around for about ten years when it gradually turns out to be alright really. (para. 4)

What Adams suggests here not only fits within the notions of convergence but also describes how younger and older users typically approach new things like social media. He went on to liken this phenomenon to the idea of pidgin and creole languages. For example with pidgin languages, speakers have

manage[d] to cobble together a rough and ready lingo made up of bits of [both groups’ language]. It lets them get on with things, but has almost no grammatical structure at all. However, the first generation of children born to the community takes these fractured lumps of language and transforms them into something new,

with a rich and organic grammar and vocabulary, which is what we call a Creole. Grammar is just a natural function of children's brains, and they apply it to whatever they find. (para. 10-11)

Adams suggests "the same thing is happening in communication technology. Most of us are stumbling along in a kind of pidgin version of it... Our children, however, are doing something completely different" (para. 12). Millennials are not surprised by the rapidly changing technological innovations: They adapt well and embrace them (Oakes, 2014). Much of the fear and hesitance in using social media stems from the Boomer generation who, as Adams' quote suggests, fall into the category of believing that social media "is against the natural order of things and the beginning of the end of civilization as we know it."

Accordingly, everyone must understand that social media is not the end all, be all for the Church. It is a tool that could aid the Church in Her mission for evangelization and growth. As social media pervades society even more and the older generations become more familiar with it, they will become more accepting of it, as Adams suggests. Signs of this are already happening as Fr. Ed Wendt (see Chapter 5) claims that using social media "is the way to go now." Like Jenkins' (2006) theory of convergence as it pertains to media, the old way of communicating with parishioners in a face-to-face setting is not being replaced by social media connectivity; it is just being augmented by these connections. Therefore, I recommend that it be used for ministry because what we see here is another example of convergence in how priests can forge meaningful connections with their parishioners.

Since 2012, the Church has revitalized evangelization efforts with what has been coined the new evangelization movement, which is simply a call for Catholics to deepen their faith through witness and sharing. The USCCB (2014) outlines a three year strategic plan (from 2013-2016) based on faith, worship, and witness. In their suggested best practices that would inform new evangelization efforts, the bishops clearly suggest that their “Committee on Communications is focusing on developing best practices for effective communications and creating training opportunities to communicate more effectively. A number of Conference committees and offices are already taking advantage of new media to increase the effectiveness and outreach of their work via webinars, e-newsletters, ‘push technology,’ video conferencing, members only websites, blogs, Facebook, etc...” (USCCB, 2014, n.p.).

Utilizing strategies that Jenkins (2006) discussed in a case study concerning *American Idol*, the new evangelization movement in the Catholic Church should also consider the principles of affective economics. Jenkins described the *American Idol* situation, where marketers tried to understand the feelings of the consumers and how those feelings could best be accommodated, thereby uncovering what made the show’s viewers watch and more importantly, continue to watch. Categorized loosely into three groups, the “loyals” were people who watched *Idol* religiously, no matter what. The “zappers” were those who would be interested but needed a hook within the first few minutes of the show to maintain their interest in addition to a reason to return to the show after a commercial break. The last group is indifferent to the show, but comes back from week to week at the urging of others in their reference group. Marketers learned that if

they could tap into the “loyals” and get them excited about the show, they should be able to reach members of the other two pools through the “loyals:” “Zappers” and the “indifferents” would continue to tune in as well so that they would be able to contribute to the conversations that took place after the show and from week to week as the season progressed. Jenkins surmised that it all comes back to story-telling and making sense of the environment in which you live.

At Mass, every Catholic is called to go and evangelize: At the end of every Mass, the priest offers his final blessing, often accompanied with the words, “The Mass has ended. Go in Peace to love and serve the Lord and one another.” The faithful respond: “Thanks be to God.” These two lines are a call to evangelization, for Catholics to live the Gospel message they just heard in Mass in their day to day lives. While it is more difficult to label Catholics in terms of the loyal, zappers, and those who are indifferent as Jenkins (2006) described in the *American Idol* case study, it can be done. The loyal are those who attend Mass weekly (or daily) on their own, out of a sense of needing or wanting to be there. The zappers are those who attend occasionally, or will go when urged by a friend, but need that extra attention in order to make a commitment to going to Mass. Those who are indifferent can be categorized as the Easter and Christmas Mass attendees, those who self-identify as Catholic when asked, but don’t really attend Church very often. These three loosely defined groups of Catholics can exist in various familial and friendship structures, with different family members or relational partners taking on various roles. The Church should continue to “market” Herself to the “loyals” to serve their needs while taking a special effort to bring in the “zappers” and especially those

who are indifferent. Capitalizing on the fact that no man is an island and must communicate with those around him, the Church uses the evangelization message at the end of Mass as a strategy to reach untapped markets. But that is not enough: Other strategies must be used in order to achieve the vision of evangelization, and social media should indeed be explored as a viable platform for Catholics to engage, witness, and share with one another, with their priests, with other Christians, and with non-believers alike.

Conceptualizing social media in a strictly utilitarian instance might be the way for the Church to couch the argument for priests to begin embracing social media platforms as a part of their public ministry at least at first. In Chapter 5, we discussed how using social media might help priests to cut back on the amount of time spent in meetings and having appointments if lay Catholics knew that they could contact their pastor and get answers to some of their questions and problems via platforms like Facebook and Twitter. In this same discussion, however, many of the lay participants highlighted the difficulties that come along with maintaining a social media profile for someone who works in such a public role: The priest is still human, much like the lay Catholic – however, he is in a very public role that might constrain his ability to post freely.

As such, there should also be more emphasis from the hierarchical structures on how to best position the Church within public discourse. Since social media users have such agency in what is posted and what they can access, having more of a public relations plan (like a parish social media team) in place for how interested lay Catholics can successfully engage others in conversations about Catholic doctrine and teaching would

be beneficial. This would likely be established by the Bishops first and then trickle down to the parishes since the top-down nature of the Catholic Church will not be upended.

While the Church does take on a major public relations risk in delving into social media spaces for evangelization, the potential benefits far outweigh the risks: By allowing anyone to comment on anything at any time, the lay person is truly empowered to embrace their faith and enter a lively discussion about it in the social sphere. In recent years, many dioceses have begun employing lay people in roles such as Communications Director and Social Media Managers. Having someone at the diocesan level who can be contacted from the parish level for help in creating social media platforms for a parish to producing educational material that can be used in Parish Schools of Religion would be a beneficial step the Church as an institution could take in helping lay Catholics and priests to be better connected via social media. This person could also help the diocesan priests to understand what social media is and how to effectively use it for evangelization.

Proper discernment, education in Catholic Social Teaching, and training in the use of social media for ministry are all viable options for the Church as institution to adopt in order to make social media a more prominent fixture in the process of evangelization. Education and awareness are probably the most feasible recommendation to be made in using social media spaces as a place for engagement, discourse, and eventual relationship growth: Once lay Catholics and members of Church hierarchy become familiar with the ways in which they can use social media for a common goal (evangelization), and once there are materials to guide the people in how to best achieve that goal, it can be assumed

that lay Catholics and priests will become more comfortable incorporating religious discourse into their social media routines.

For example, while this research and writing process took place, I was consulted for the creation of a Twitter account for my diocese. I suggested that the Bishop of our diocese maintain his own Twitter account and handle so that it would not only be personal to him currently, but if he were transferred to another diocese in the future, the only social media change that would have to be made would be in the biographical portion of his account. I also suggested that a diocesan account be established and maintained to offer news and events updates from around the diocese. This conference call took place on April 2, 2014 and included four diocesan officials sitting in a conference room in the chancery for our diocese and me on my cellphone, sitting in the basement at my local parish. The recommendations that I have made in the previous sections based on the interviews I conducted with the lay Catholics are also a byproduct of this conference call: I found myself trying to explain (over the phone because our diocese does not currently have the ability to Skype or make a video conference call) how to tweet, what the function of the '@' does in a tweet, and what a hashtag was to the other members of this task force. The task force took this information and on April 11, 2014, the bishop's Twitter handle was announced, followed a couple days later by an announcement of the diocese's Twitter handle.

Limitations and Future Research

This project was a major undertaking, and several roadblocks resulted in limitations toward this analysis. At the outset, in the pilot for this study, several

questionnaires that were sent to the bloggers who attended the Vatican blognic were returned to me in blogger's native language. Translating responses from Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese proved to be difficult; however I am confident that the major themes I found in that part of the study were accurate. This confidence was reinforced by the fact that the priests and lay Catholics surveyed and interviewed for this research echoed many of the same ideas the bloggers expressed in the pilot study.

As one of the first of its kind, there have been few previous studies from which this project could build. The survey for this research was constructed based on putting several instruments together to garner an idea of what social media use between lay Catholics and priests looks like. My position as a Catholic and as a staff member for a parish granted me access to some information which definitely was a blessing in completing this project. However, even with this kind of access, there were still groups of people I could not contact. Additionally, while the topic at hand itself does not seem controversial, several participants (primarily priests) were wary of participating in this project for various reasons. Some of the priests questioned my knowledge about Catholicism, my word choice in how I chose to describe the Church, and whether I was out to cause more harm than good.

Originally, the intended lay Catholic sample was to include students from two universities within the Diocese of Browntown; however, numerous attempts to contact one of the universities for possible student participation went unanswered. In order to accurately provide a response rate for the lay Catholic sample, there were few options to garnering more participation apart from using the contact lists the parish offered in order

to recruit survey participants. Several of the participants responded to my recruitment emails offering to forward the survey link to their Catholic friends; but because I limited this study to examine the Diocese of Browntown specifically and because I would not have been able to calculate an accurate response rate with that kind of snowball recruitment technique, I declined their offers. Therefore, the sample sizes for both sets of participants were too low and too isolated to make general claims about the Catholic institution's attitudes and behaviors on a larger scale. Future research should broaden the scope of participation to examine more dioceses both domestically and internationally. Nonetheless, this project can serve as a benchmark for comparison in future studies that are similar in nature because the Diocese of Browntown is not much different than the run-of-the-mill, small-town Catholic diocese that can be found across the United States. Moreover, several patterns of behavior emerged from the surveys and several opinions about social media use within the Catholic Church came from the interviews which could help future researchers in religious communication with a focus on Catholicism to ground their work.

This study could also be completed on a much larger scale if it were sanctioned by a group like the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or a large, Catholic research agency like CARA at Georgetown University. The resources that these groups would have available would allow them to contact a variety of people. The respondents in this study did span several generations (from Millennials to Baby Boomers), but the numbers of participants were nowhere near representative of the generations in terms of Catholics or in terms those who use social media. Nevertheless, this study did paint an

interesting picture of the lay Catholic respondents, most notably in the 30-49 age range. As Table 1 in Chapter 4 suggests, this age range only accounted for about 8% of the total lay Catholic sample which suggests that the Church (or the Diocese of Browntown specifically) is somehow missing this generation. However, these individuals are not necessarily missing from the pews every week: Rather, there is very little Catholic programming available to this generation. Most Catholic parishes offer religious education programming for children from preschool through high school, campus ministry programs for college students, and programs for senior citizens, but no programs for the 30-49 year olds (or really, 25-49 year olds). Some parishes do offer a ‘Theology on Tap’ series for young adults, but programming for the other age groups far outweighs programming for young and working adults. Future research, especially research that is geared toward social media (since this age group is representative of those who were the first users of sites like Facebook), should look into how this group is being served by the Catholic Church and if social media connectivity would help connect them with parish life in more robust ways.

Moreover, only one Diocese was used for this research project. Even though the Diocese itself is similar in nature to other small town Dioceses across the United States, it is by no means representative of all Catholics across the United States. Future research would survey Dioceses of all sizes to see if the same trends that were discovered in the Diocese of Browntown are present there. Additionally, the Catholic Church as a whole is seeing much more growth internationally, so efforts should also be made to see how social media is being used by the Church around the globe.

Since the Church is experiencing a state of liminality in Her use of social media for connecting with others, I faced a situation in which the participants' responses in the interviews were vague. While both groups were indeed open to using social media more for making connections, their experiences and expectations were not fully developed when it came to putting the ideas into practice because it is hard to describe something that we have not seen or personally experienced yet.

Finally, since this research was based on researcher interpretation, a certain level of researcher bias came into play. While I tried to be as neutral as possible, especially in the interview portion, I am sure my personal opinions still present themselves through certain aspects of this research especially with regard to the optimism that using social media platforms is the way of the future for communication in the Catholic Church. However, as Creswell (1994) suggested, qualitative work by its nature is interpretive and the researcher is the instrument of analysis. As long as the researcher's biases, values, and judgments are acknowledged, they do not impinge upon the findings. Finally, as suggested in Chapter 3, if the researcher is consistent, sticks close to the raw data collected, and is mindful of distractions, fatigue, frustration, and confusion, the threats to using thematic analysis as the primary method for analysis are diminished greatly (Boyatzis, 1998).

Conclusions

Overall, this study found that lay Catholics and priests surveyed in the Diocese of Browntown do report that social media spaces can provide a platform for religious expression and growth. However, few participants reported actually engaging with one

another and having relationships in these spaces: While there are some lay Catholics and some priests who report that they engage with one another in social media space, they are the minority. This results in the Church, at least in the Diocese of Browntown, finding Herself in a liminal space.

However, this does not necessarily have pejorative implications: As Turner (1969) suggests, structural and social bonds are tightened within liminal spaces, which means that on the whole, those who engage in these spaces are likely experiencing several dimensions of relationship maintenance that Ledingham and Bruning (1998) outline as positive public relations practices, including increased investment, trust, interdependence/power imbalance, shared technology, structural bonds, and social bonds. By continuing to encourage active participation through mediated means, people of faith have a new platform from which they can speak, connect, and interact.

This study also found that while lay Catholics and priests both are open to the use of social media to help bridge connections between the two groups, there is still a need for in-person connections. Too much can be lost without face-to-face interactions. This result is not unique to this community. There are several, recent popular culture examples of the necessity for having real life, in-person connections. For instance, the entire premise of the television show *Catfish* is to help people who have connections online meet in person. The show is hugely popular on the MTV network; and its creator, Nev Schulman, is releasing a popular press book entitled *In Real Life* in September 2014. Hatchette Book Group (2014) calls Schulman's book "the definitive guide for Millennials about how to connect with people authentically in today's increasingly digital world"

(para. 1). The book covers many topics, but most notably ideas on “how to connect authentically with people over the Internet and how to turn an online relationship into a real life relationship...” (para. 6). The book also looks at “how we interact with each other through social media versus in person – specifically in relation to Millennials who have never known a world without Facebook” (para. 7) in addition to the “the pressing issue of connectivity versus genuine connection which is plaguing our relationships with one another” (para. 8). Another pop culture example of the desire to maintain in-person relationships was depicted in the second episode of the new series, *Girl Meets World*, a spin-off of the television show, *Boy Meets World* (1993-2000). The episode, “Girl Meets Boy” which aired on July 11, 2014, features Cory and Topanga’s daughter, Riley, learning that there is more to life outside of her cellphone, and that the friends she thinks she has inside her phone and the connections it offers her are not to be prized over the connections she can make in real life. Specifically, Riley is assigned a project for her history class taught by her father, Cory Matthews. She is paired with her crush, Lucas, and ultimately learns that by looking him in the eye and holding a conversation with him, she can learn much more than she ever could if they only communicated through text messages, which is exactly the lesson Cory wanted his students to get out of the assignment (IMDb, 2014). These are only two of countless other examples of the importance of maintaining in-person contact portrayed in popular media today.

Nevertheless, social media use by the Catholic Church was never intended to replace the in-person, sacramental aspect of Church life. In fact, as suggested previously, in all of his World Communications Day proclamations, Pope Benedict XVI focused his

message on the use of digital communication in proclaiming the Gospel message; and as time and technologies progressed, he began including social media platforms as a part of that message. By 2012, *Time* reported that social media had been “okayed by the Pope” (McMillian, 2012, n.p.). In 2009, the Vatican launched its YouTube channel, and on December 12, 2012, the first papal tweet from the handle @Pontifex was sent into the Twittersphere, both of which occurred during the papacy of Benedict XVI. Since becoming pope in March 2013, Pope Francis has continued Pope Emeritus Benedict’s campaign of using social media to reach the people where they are by taking up the @Pontifex Twitter handle and engaging mainstream media moreso than did his predecessor. Therefore, taking this perspective of social media advancing and enhancing the proclamation of the Gospel message, we can focus on the positive outcomes that can come from exercising religious expression and making connections in social media spaces. And, in order to achieve the plans for the Church’s use of social media initiated by Pope Benedict and carried on through Pope Francis, this research suggests that proper education in Catholic Social Teaching be offered and that patience in discernment be exercised by lay Catholics engaging in religious discourse in social media spaces.

Lay Catholics would benefit greatly from better religious education, especially in Catholic Social Teaching within the public sphere. Furthermore, patience and discernment needs to be better emphasized and put into practice, especially by lay Catholics who engage in religious discourse online. The hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church should put more emphasis on how to best position the Church and Her teachings within public discourse. A clear answer seems to be making sure priests engage

in social media space as well. Even with the negative attributes to social media use that both groups of participants mentioned in their interviews, the Church should take steps toward investigating how social media can be used as a viable platform for Catholics to engage, to witness, and to share with one another, with their priests, with other Christians, and with non-believers alike.

John Allen (2009), the Vatican correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter*, has suggested that there is a chance that “Catholicism’s hierarchical mode of organization lacks the flexibility needed to keep up with the intense pace at which issues mutate in a globalized world” (para. 1). He describes a trend – horizontal Catholicism – which encompasses the idea of a grassroots effort where members of the laity, religious orders, and other grassroots groups can come together with amazing results – much akin to Jenkins’ (2006) idea of convergence culture. However, Allen (2009) suggests that “this horizontal dimension of Catholic activism remains underdeveloped, at least in comparison with the church’s vertical structures, [and] remedying that deficit is not primarily a task for the hierarchy; indeed, in many cases their most valuable contribution may be to stay out of the way” (para. 3). While several of the suggestions and recommendations I have made in this project do target the hierarchical structure to make things happen, in a sense, the laity is at the crux of all of these suggestions: They will be the Social Media Managers, the Communication Directors who help bring the Church further into modernity through social media use. They should also make efforts to be better informed about the faith in order to do these jobs well. Indeed, Allen (2009) goes on to suggest that

the construction of a more forceful, articulate horizontal sector in the church...depends upon a growing share of lay Catholics, especially the vast majority who don't belong to any formal movement or group, taking it upon themselves to translate their faith into action. Authentic horizontal Catholicism cannot be willed into existence by hierarchical fiat. It has to well up from the grass roots, reflecting a popular determination to get something done. (para. 3)

This kind of determination was seen by the spirit of the bloggers who took part in the Vatican Blognic in 2011 and continues on in the Church today.

Allen (2009) also suggests that “change in Catholicism typically percolates at the grass roots and is then subject to a long period of theological and spiritual discernment at multiple levels, well before it is ever ratified and assimilated by the hierarchy” (para. 5). This perfectly describes the period of liminality that the Church is currently experiencing. What the Church needs, as Allen suggests, is motivation on the level of the laity to want to evangelize, to want to meet the challenges of secularism and modernity head-on.

We have already been given great examples of the faith being lived in the digital world at the highest levels of Church hierarchy with Pope Benedict being the first pope to have owned an iPod and making a special effort to understand new media and to embrace the dialogue coming out of the emergent public sphere in decision making processes that occur within the Catholic hierarchy. Moreover, Pope Francis has embraced his predecessor's quest and has seemingly been championed by mainstream media in his papal journey thus far.

While the top-down notion of communication within the Catholic Church will never be removed, the use of new media for religious communication and debate certainly changes the top-down notion of communication to a more circular model or at least two-way model that is inclusive of lay opinion on the horizontal dimension and offers the Catholic hierarchy specific points of connection to lay concerns. As Allen (2009) succinctly says it: “The real question, therefore, is not whether the bishops are up to the challenges of the 21st century. The question is whether the rest of us are” (para. 7). If a movement comprising of the laity and other grassroots groups were to come together in the spirit of Catholic activism via social media platforms, lay persons would be truly empowered to embrace their faith. And, if priests buy into being a part of this world of social media, they can stand shoulder to shoulder with their parishioners. This helps to offer a sense of transparency into the hierarchy for all social media users and a long overdue feeling of connection and support for the lay Catholic in these spaces. It seems clear in this study that there is a desire on the parts of both the clergy and the laity to meet these challenges: Now, it just has to be done.

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APPENDIX A: LAY CATHOLICS AND SOCIAL MEDIA SPACES SURVEY

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. The next page describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Your response to the survey questionnaire will be considered to be the informed consent needed for participation in this study.

Explanation of Study This study is being done in an effort to better understand the use of social media and the relationships you've formed with lay Catholics and/or members of the clergy via social media spaces. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to a survey questionnaire concerning your use of social media and your opinions about the relationships you've formed with others within social media space. For the purposes of this research, social media spaces include, but are not limited to, Facebook and Twitter specifically. Even if you do not actively use these websites, please consider participation in this survey.

Risks and Discomforts No risks or discomforts are anticipated from participation.

Benefits This research is intended to be a step forward in the quest to engage in thoughtful contemplation about the relationships formed between members of Catholic hierarchy and lay Catholics.

Confidentiality and Records The nature of this research is such that the confidentiality of the participants cannot be guaranteed. Accordingly, this research will strive to only identify participants if they agree to a follow-up interview. Otherwise, survey information will be maintained confidentially and responses to open-ended questions will remain anonymous in the reporting of findings.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with: Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research; Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.

Contact Information If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Mary Catherine Kennedy at mk291908@ohio.edu or (843) 344-2582 or Greg Newton at newtong@ohio.edu or (740) 597-1882.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By participating in this study, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study.
- you are 18 years of age or older.
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary.
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

To complete this survey, please select the response that most closely matches your opinion or behavior. Where prompted for a written answer, please be as specific and detailed as possible regarding your opinion or actions. Remember, all responses will be confidential. Thanks again for your participation.

Do you have a profile on Facebook?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Facebook? Yes" is selected:

I primarily use Facebook for

- ☐ Purely personal reasons
- ☐ Primarily personal but some professional
- ☐ Equally personal and professional reasons
- ☐ Primarily professional but some personal
- ☐ Purely professional reasons

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Facebook? Yes" is selected:

How often do you log on to Facebook?

- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Once every few days
- ☐ Once a day
- ☐ A few times a day
- ☐ I am always logged in

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Facebook? Yes" is selected:

In general, what is your primary purpose for logging in to Facebook?

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Facebook? Yes" is selected:

Do you specify your religion as Catholic on Facebook?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you have a profile on Twitter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes" is selected:

I primarily use Twitter for

- ☐ Purely personal reasons
- ☐ Primarily personal but some professional
- ☐ Equally personal and professional reasons
- ☐ Primarily professional but some personal
- ☐ Purely professional reasons

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes" is selected:

How often do you log on to Twitter?

- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Once every few days
- ☐ Once a day
- ☐ A few times a day
- ☐ I am always logged in

Answer: If “Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes” is selected:
In general, what is your primary purpose for logging in to Twitter?

Answer if: “Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes” is selected:
Do you specify your religion as Catholic on Twitter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you have a profile on any other social networking site(s)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: “Do you have a profile on any other social networking site... Yes” is selected:
Please specify where:

Answer if: “Do you have a profile on any other social networking site... Yes” is selected:
In general, what is your primary purpose for logging in to this/these site/sites?

Please mark the option that most closely describes your experience.

In your opinion, how many of your friends in social media spaces are "religious" ?

- ☐ All
- ☐ Most
- ☐ Some
- ☐ None
- ☐ I don't know

Specifically, are you friends with any members of Catholic Church "hierarchy" on any of your social networking profiles? (e.g., Religious Brother/Monk or Sister/Nun, Priest, Bishop, etc.)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please mark the option that most closely describes your opinion concerning relationships formed in social media spaces.

Relationships formed in social media spaces are superficial.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Relationships formed in social media spaces can lead to closer friendships.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Many of my close friends are also Catholic.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I feel comfortable discussing religious topics in social media spaces such as Facebook and Twitter.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

If confronted with debate on Catholic doctrine or teaching in a social media space, I could comfortably defend my position as a Catholic.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

If confronted with debate on Catholic doctrine or teaching in a social media space, I have a relationship with a member of Church hierarchy within these communities who would be able to help.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

If confronted with debate on Catholic doctrine or teaching in a social media space, I have Catholic friends within these communities who I could contact instantaneously for information.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

I feel comfortable being religious in face-to-face situations.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I feel comfortable being religious within social media spaces such as Facebook and Twitter.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Social media spaces allow me to comment on religious topics that I wouldn't normally comment on in face-to-face situations.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I frequently have contact with members of Church hierarchy within social media spaces.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I believe my relationship with my pastor is better because of our interaction on Facebook or Twitter.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

I think I know more about the priesthood/religious life because I am friends with a priest on Facebook/Twitter.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I feel like I can better approach my pastor in a face-to-face situation because of our relationship in social media spaces.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I feel more connected to the Catholic Church because I have contact with members of Church hierarchy within social media spaces.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

My involvement in discussions in social media spaces has helped me to deepen my faith.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Overall, I believe that the Catholic Church uses new media effectively.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Please mark all that apply.

When seeking information about the Church, I consult

- ☐ Print version of our diocesan news publication
- ☐ Online version of our diocesan news publication
- ☐ Diocesan website
- ☐ Website for the United States Bishops' Conference (usccb.org)
- ☐ Website of the Vatican
- ☐ Official website or blog sanctioned by the Catholic Church
- ☐ An independent, Catholic-oriented blog/Facebook page/Twitter feed not officially sanctioned by the Church
- ☐ A priest's blog/Facebook page/Twitter feed
- ☐ Secular news sources
- ☐ Wikipedia
- ☐ Something else (please indicate) _____

Please rank the following on a scale of 1-7; 1 being most trusted, 7 being least trusted. Please give each its own ranking, no ties.

Which of the following do you most trust to provide an accurate account of Catholic news and information online?

- _____ Diocesan Website
- _____ Website for the United States Bishops' Conference (usccb.org)
- _____ The Vatican's Website
- _____ Online version of a diocesan publication
- _____ Secular news source
- _____ Independent website/blog/Facebook page/Twitter feed about Catholicism
- _____ Priest/Bishop's Blog/Facebook page/Twitter feed

Please answer the following questions by indicating your level of agreement with the statements provided.

I trust the Catholic hierarchy.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I respect the Catholic hierarchy.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I believe that there are problems within the Catholic hierarchy.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

My point of view concerning my faith differs from that of the Catholic institution.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I believe that many people in my peer group are lacking in morals.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I do not believe that it is necessary to be openly religious around my peers.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Overall, I believe it is important to very strictly follow the official laws and teachings of my religion.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Please respond to the following questions to the best of your knowledge. If you are unsure, please select the option "I don't know."

Does your parish have a website?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Answer if: "Does your parish have a website? Yes" is selected:

Have you accessed your parish's website within the last 3 months?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Does your parish have a website? Yes" is selected:

Have you accessed your parish's website within the last month?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Does your parish have a website? Yes" is selected:

Have you accessed your parish's website this week?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Does your parish use social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Please respond to the following questions with as much detail as possible.

In your experience, how does the Catholic institution already use new media platforms?

In your opinion, how can the Catholic institution best use new media?

How do interactions in social media spaces affect your interactions with other lay Catholics?

How do interactions in social media spaces affect your interactions with priests?

What does it mean to be Catholic in 2012? Please provide your personal definition of being Catholic.

Demographic Questions.

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

What is your age?

What is your occupation?

If you are willing to be contacted for a brief follow-up interview with the primary researcher, please provide your contact information in the space provided. (OPTIONAL)

Thank you for your participation in this study! If you have any questions about this survey or any of the research, please contact Mary Catherine Kennedy at mk291908@ohio.edu or Dr. Greg Newton at newtong@ohio.edu.

APPENDIX B: CHURCH HIERARCHY AND SOCIAL MEDIA SPACES SURVEY

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. The next page describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Your response to the survey questionnaire will be considered to be the informed consent needed for participation in this study.

Explanation of Study This study is being done in an effort to better understand the use of social media and the relationships you've formed with lay Catholics and/or members of the clergy via social media spaces. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to a survey questionnaire concerning your use of social media and your opinions about the relationships you've formed with others within social media space. For the purposes of this research, social media spaces include, but are not limited to, Facebook and Twitter specifically. Even if you do not actively use these websites, please consider participation in this survey.

Risks and Discomforts No risks or discomforts are anticipated from participation.

Benefits This research is intended to be a step forward in the quest to engage in thoughtful contemplation about the relationships formed between members of Catholic hierarchy and lay Catholics.

Confidentiality and Records The nature of this research is such that the confidentiality of the participants cannot be guaranteed. Accordingly, this research will strive to only identify participants if they agree to a follow-up interview. Otherwise, survey information will be maintained confidentially and responses to open-ended questions will remain anonymous in the reporting of findings.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with: Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research; Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.

Contact Information If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Mary Catherine Kennedy at mk291908@ohio.edu or (843) 344-2582 or Greg Newton at newtong@ohio.edu or (740) 597-1882.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By participating in this study, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study.
- you are 18 years of age or older.
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary.
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

To complete this survey, please select the response that most closely matches your opinion or behavior. Where prompted for a written answer, please be as specific and detailed as possible regarding your opinion or actions. Remember, all responses will be confidential. Thanks again for your participation!

Do you have a profile on Facebook?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Facebook? Yes" is selected:

I primarily use Facebook for

- ☐ Purely personal reasons
- ☐ Primarily personal but some professional
- ☐ Equally personal and professional reasons
- ☐ Primarily professional but some personal
- ☐ Purely professional reasons

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Facebook? Yes" is selected:

How often do you log on to Facebook?

- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Once every few days
- ☐ Once a day
- ☐ A few times a day
- ☐ I am always logged in

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Facebook? Yes" is selected:

In general, what is your primary purpose for logging in to Facebook?

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Facebook? Yes" is selected:

Is it clear that you are a priest on your Facebook profile?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Facebook? Yes" is selected:

Are you "friends" with any of your parishioners (past or current) on Facebook?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Facebook? Yes" is selected:

About how many "friends" do you have on Facebook?

Do you have a profile on Twitter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes" is selected:

I primarily use Twitter for

- ☐ Purely personal reasons
- ☐ Primarily personal but some professional
- ☐ Equally personal and professional reasons
- ☐ Primarily professional but some personal
- ☐ Purely professional reasons

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes" is selected:
How often do you log on to Twitter?

- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Once every few days
- ☐ Once a day
- ☐ A few times a day
- ☐ I am always logged in

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes" is selected:
In general, what is your primary purpose for logging in to Twitter?

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes" is selected:
Is it clear that you are a priest on your Twitter profile?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes" is selected:
Do you follow any of your parishioners (past or current) on Twitter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes" is selected:
What are your security settings on Twitter?

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Secure Profile
- ☐ I don't know

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on Twitter? Yes" is selected:
About how many "followers" do you have on Twitter?

Do you have a profile on any other social networking site(s)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on any other social networking site? Yes" is selected:
Please specify where:

Answer if: "Do you have a profile on any other social networking site? Yes" is selected:
In general, what is your primary purpose for logging in to this/these site/sites?

Please choose the response that most closely describes your opinion concerning relationships formed in social media spaces.

Relationships formed in social media spaces are superficial.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Relationships formed in social media spaces can lead to closer friendships.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Many of my close friends are also Catholic.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I feel comfortable discussing religious topics in social media spaces such as Facebook and Twitter.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

If confronted with debate on Catholic doctrine or teaching in a social media space, I could comfortably defend my position as a Catholic.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

If confronted with debate on Catholic doctrine or teaching in a social media space, I have Catholic friends within these communities who I could contact instantaneously for information if needed.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I feel comfortable being religious in face-to-face situations.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

I feel comfortable being religious within social media spaces such as Facebook and Twitter.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Social media spaces allow me to comment on religious topics that I wouldn't normally comment on in face-to-face situations.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I frequently have contact with members of the laity within social media spaces.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I believe my relationship with parishioners is better because of our interaction on Facebook or Twitter.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

I think I know more about the lives of my parishioners because I am friends with them on Facebook/Twitter.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I feel like I can better approach my parishioners in a face-to-face situation because of our relationship in social media spaces.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I feel more connected to the Catholic Church because I have contact with members of the Church within social media spaces.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

My involvement in discussions in social media spaces has helped me to deepen my faith.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Overall, I believe that the Catholic Church uses new media effectively.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Mark all that apply.

When seeking information about the Church, I consult

- ☐ Print version of our diocesan news publication
- ☐ Online version of our diocesan news publication
- ☐ Diocesan website
- ☐ Website for the United States Bishops' Conference (usccb.org)
- ☐ Website of the Vatican
- ☐ Official website or blog sanctioned by the Catholic Church
- ☐ An independent, Catholic-oriented blog/Facebook page/Twitter feed not officially sanctioned by the Church
- ☐ A priest's blog/Facebook page/Twitter feed
- ☐ Secular news sources
- ☐ Wikipedia
- ☐ Something else (please indicate) _____

Please rank on a scale of 1-7; 1 being most trusted, 7 being least trusted. There should be no ties.

Which of the following do you most trust to provide an accurate account of Catholic news and information online?

- _____ Diocesan Website
- _____ Website for the United States Bishops' Conference (usccb.org)
- _____ The Vatican's Website
- _____ Online version of a diocesan publication
- _____ Secular news source
- _____ Independent website/blog/Facebook page/Twitter feed about Catholicism
- _____ Priest/Bishop's Blog/Facebook page/Twitter feed

Please answer the following questions by indicating your level of agreement with the statements provided.

I trust the Catholic hierarchy.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I respect the Catholic hierarchy.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I believe that there are problems within the Catholic hierarchy.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

My point of view concerning my faith differs from that of the Catholic institution.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I believe that our current society is lacking in morals.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

I do not believe that it is necessary to be openly religious.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Overall, I believe it is important to very strictly follow the official laws and teachings of my religion.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge. If you are unsure, please select the response "I don't know."

Does your parish have a website?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Answer if: "Does your parish have a website? Yes" is selected:

Have you accessed your parish's website within the last 3 months?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Does your parish have a website? Yes" is selected:

Have you accessed your parish's website within the last month?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Answer if: "Does your parish have a website? Yes" is selected:
Have you accessed your parish's website this week?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you have oversight of what is posted on your parish's website?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Does Not Apply

Are you responsible for posting content to the website?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Does Not Apply

Who is responsible for posting content to the parish website?

Does your parish use social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Please answer the following questions. Include as much detail as possible.

In your experience, how does the Catholic institution already use new media platforms?

In your opinion, how can the Catholic institution best use new media?

How do interactions in social media spaces affect your interactions with lay Catholics and/or parishioners?

How do interactions in social media spaces affect your interactions with other priests?

What does it mean to be Catholic in 2012? Please provide your personal definition of being Catholic.

Demographic Questions.

What is your age?

How long have you been ordained?

What is your position in your current assignment?

If you are willing to be contacted for a brief follow-up interview with the primary researcher, please provide your contact information in the space provided. (OPTIONAL)

Thank you for your participation in this study! If you have any questions about this survey or any of the research, please contact Mary Catherine Kennedy at mk291908@ohio.edu or Dr. Greg Newton at newtong@ohio.edu.

APPENDIX C: LAY CATHOLIC INTERVIEW GUIDE

You are being asked to participate in a follow-up interview based on your participation from the survey concerning social media spaces, lay Catholics, and members of the Catholic hierarchy from November 2012-January 2013. Thank you for your willingness to continue to help with this research project. First, I will briefly explain the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks of this study.

Explanation of Study: This study is being completed in an effort to better understand the development of relationships in social media spaces as it pertains to Catholic Church hierarchy and Lay Catholics. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond, in vivid detail, to open ended interview questions concerning your opinions about your relationships with Church hierarchy/lay Catholics in both face-to-face situations and in online spaces.

Risks and Discomforts: No risks or discomforts are anticipated from participation

Benefits: The anticipated benefits to the participants of this research are great. This research is intended to be a step forward in a quest to learn more about the ever-changing identity of Catholics today and their engagement with their faith in social media spaces. Above all, this research is an effort to engage in thoughtful and non-inflammatory speech about religion, and namely Catholicism, and its place within social media spaces.

Begin Interview:

- How would you describe your personal media use when it comes to communicating with family/friends/acquaintances?
- What is the most effective mode of communication for you?
- What kinds of electronic communication do you engage in?

Define social media: New or social media, according to Catholic blogger Brandon Vogt, are “new forms of on-demand, Internet-based communication that promote connectivity and interactivity.” So it encompasses more than just using email – it’s communication that allows for instantaneous feedback/commentary – like a conversation, but virtually. I’m most interested in the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter for my research. If you don’t use them personally, I’d still like for you to share your feeling in general.

- What are your feelings regarding the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter for most people?
 - Do your feeling concerning social media change if religious topics are brought up there?
 - What about for your priest? Is there a difference in how they should use social media than how you use it?
- Do you feel a sense of responsibility to defend or to stand up for the faith in person?
 - What about if things are contested online in social media spaces?

If they are social media users:

- How would you describe your use of social media?
- Are you friends with members of Church hierarchy in any of your social media spaces?
 - Do you follow religious-oriented pages? If so – what do you tend to follow?
 - Why?
- How would you categorize your interaction with priests/deacons/religious in social media spaces?
 - Is it sacramental? Personal? Serious? Silly?
 - Are you friends only and have no real interaction?
- In what ways does being friends members of Church hierarchy in social media spaces changed your notion of who they are?
 - How well do you feel like you know them? Why do you feel that way?
 - Do you feel more comfortable with them because of this? Why or why not?
- In your survey you responded that you felt more connected to the Church based on interactions you've had in social media spaces – can you expand on that? How so?
 - Alternate Question: In your survey you responded that you did not feel more connected to the Church based on interactions you've had in social media spaces – can you expand on that? Why not?
 - Alternate Question: In your survey you responded neutrally to feeling more connected to the Church based on interactions you've had in social media spaces – can you expand on this? Why do you not have feelings one way or another?

Final Questions, even if they are not social media users:

- In what ways can social media use be a hindrance to one's spiritual life?
- In what ways can interactions in social media spaces positively enhance the relationships between lay Catholics and their pastors?
- What do you perceive to be the drawbacks to an increased use of social media in bridging the gaps of that are/were apparent in the accessibility of your pastor?
- In what ways have you experienced the Church using new media?
 - Is there room for improvement?
- Do you see relationships between priests and their parishioners changing because of social media? Why or why not?

APPENDIX D: CHURCH HIERARCHY INTERVIEW GUIDE

You are being asked to participate in a follow-up interview based on your participation from the survey concerning social media spaces, lay Catholics, and members of the Catholic hierarchy from November 2012-January 2013. Thank you for your willingness to continue to help with this research project. First, I will briefly explain the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks of this study.

Explanation of Study: This study is being completed in an effort to better understand the development of relationships in social media spaces as it pertains to Catholic Church hierarchy and Lay Catholics. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond, in vivid detail, to open ended interview questions concerning your opinions about your relationships with Church hierarchy/lay Catholics in both face-to-face situations and in online spaces.

Risks and Discomforts: No risks or discomforts are anticipated from participation

Benefits: The anticipated benefits to the participants of this research are great. This research is intended to be a step forward in a quest to learn more about the ever-changing identity of Catholics today and their engagement with their faith in social media spaces. Above all, this research is an effort to engage in thoughtful and non-inflammatory speech about religion, and namely Catholicism, and its place within social media spaces.

Begin interview:

- In what ways do you communicate (in general) with your parishioners (apart from during Mass/after Mass)?
- What has been the most effective means of communication in your parish?
- What kinds of electronic communication do you have with your parishioners?

Define social media: New or social media, according to Catholic blogger Brandon Vogt, are “new forms of on-demand, Internet-based communication that promote connectivity and interactivity.” So it’s more than just using email – it’s communication that allows for instantaneous feedback – like a conversation, but virtually. I’m most interested in the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter. If you don’t use them personally, I’d still like for you to share your feelings in general.

- What are your feelings regarding the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter for clergy?
- Is there a difference in how clergy can use social media sites from a parishioner’s use? (For you as a priest, are there different “rules”?)

If they have social media profiles:

- How would you describe your use of social media? (Is your profile personal? Church business? Social?)
- Do you accept parishioners as a friends or followers? Why or why not?
- What kinds of interactions do you have with parishioners in a given day/week in social media spaces?
 - Are they sacramental? Are they serious? Are they silly?
- Do you see your participation in social media spaces as a part of your public ministry?
- Social networking sites are typically seen as a public foray into the personal life of those who have chosen to make profiles. Do you find difficulty negotiating the personal / professional spectrums of your existence in social media spaces?
- Do you feel closer to any of your parishioners because of your interactions in social media spaces? How?
- In what ways do you see social media as a hindrance to your public ministry?

Final Questions, even if they don't personally use social media sites:

- In what ways can interactions in social media spaces positively enhance the relationships between lay Catholics and their pastors?
 - Are there negative aspects to note as well?
- What do you perceive to be the drawbacks to an increased use of social media in bridging the gaps of that are/were apparent in your accessibility to your parishioners?
- In what ways have you experienced the church using new media?
 - Is there room for improvement?
- Do you see priestly parish ministry changing because of social media? Why or why not?

APPENDIX E: LAY CATHOLIC INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS

Sarah Jones is a wife and mother. She is a cradle Catholic and works actively for her parish within the Diocese of Browntown. Sarah is in her early 50s and does not use social media.

Carol Miller is a married retiree with two grown children and a few grandchildren. She is a cradle Catholic and active in several ministries in her parish within the Diocese of Browntown. Carol is in her early 70s. She is a light user of social media (Facebook) and an avid user of Apple's iPhone.

Melanie Crawford is a student at one of the universities within the Diocese of Browntown. She described her attendance at Church in this Diocese as rare. Melanie is in her mid-20s and is a moderate user of social media (Facebook and Twitter).

Tom Haselden is a student at one of the university within the Diocese of Browntown. He attends Mass regularly both at school and in his home Diocese where his brother is studying to be a priest. Tom attends a few campus ministry meetings a semester at his university. He is in his early 20s and does not use social media.

Maggie Johnson is a student at one of the universities in the Diocese of Browntown. She attends Mass regularly at school and is involved with the campus ministry program at her university. Maggie is in her early 20s and is a moderate user of social media (Facebook and Tumblr).

Myra Lopez is a wife, mother, and grandmother. She attends Mass regularly at her parish in the Diocese of Browntown and considered herself close with her now-retired pastor. Myra works at one of the universities in the Diocese. She is in her early 50s and is a moderate user of social media (Facebook).

Jeff Harris is a single male who is actively involved in ministry at his parish in the Diocese of Browntown. He works at one of the universities in the Diocese as well. Jeff is in his late 40s and is a light user of social media (Facebook and some Twitter).

Linda Thomas is a wife and mother. She is a cradle Catholic and works for her parish within the Diocese of Browntown. Linda is in her early 60s and is a heavy user of social media (Facebook).

Jane Hannigan is a divorced mother and grandmother. She is a cradle Catholic and works for her parish within the Diocese of Browntown. Jane is in her early 60s and is a light user of social media (Facebook).

APPENDIX F: PRIEST INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS

Monsignor Robert Harper is a retired priest of the Diocese of Browntown. Ordained 50 years, he is simply known as Fr. Rob to his parishioners. Fr. Rob assists with parish ministry in his retirement, offering Masses, visiting the sick, and hearing confessions at a parish in the Diocese. He is in his mid-70s and does not use social media.

Fr. Joseph Finley is the youngest priest I interviewed. He is an active priest in the Diocese of Browntown and serves on the Vocations Team for the Diocese. He also serves as chaplain for Diocesan Catholic schools. Fr. Finley is in his late 20s and has been ordained for 2 years. He is a heavy user of social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and maintains his own blog where he posts his weekly homilies.

The Very Reverend Michael Coolidge is a priest of the Diocese of Browntown and works in the Chancery. Fr. Coolidge has been ordained for 29 years and is in his mid-50s. He is a moderate user of social media (Facebook and some Twitter).

Monsignor John Peterson is the oldest, active priest interviewed. In his mid-70s, Msgr. Peterson serves a very rural area and is a chaplain at several Catholic schools in the Diocese of Browntown. Ordained 49 years, Msgr. Peterson does not use social media and reports that where his parish is located, you can't even get cell phone reception.

Fr. Ryan Haggerty is a priest of the Diocese of Browntown. He serves on the Vocations Team. Fr. Haggerty is in his early 40s and is a light user of social media (Facebook), but currently runs his parish's Facebook account.

Fr. Eric Ball is an active priest of the Diocese of Browntown. He serves a very rural area. Ordained 9 years and in his mid-60s, Fr. Ball does not use social media.

Monsignor Edward Wendt is a recently retired priest of the Diocese of Browntown. Ordained 45 years, he is known as Fr. Ed to his parishioners. In his retirement, Fr. Ed works with seminarians as a spiritual director at a nearby seminary and assists at several parishes in a neighboring Diocese. In his early 70s, he is a light user of social media (Facebook).

Fr. James Hazel is an active priest for the Diocese of Browntown and teaches at a Diocesan school. He works with seminarians as a spiritual director and confessor at a nearby seminary. Ordained 13 years, Fr. Hazel is in his late 40s and is a light user of social media (Facebook).

Fr. Andrew Rodriguez is a priest on assignment serving in the Diocese of Browntown. He is well-versed in Communication as a field. Ordained 15 years and in his early 40s, Fr. Andrew was a heavy user of social media (Facebook and Twitter) until he started a demanding graduate program.



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