

WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

Portals as Access to "Somewhere Beyond"

In the wake of Benedict XVI's resignation as Pope, his Message for World Communications Day 2013 (May 12), entitled, *"Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization,"* takes on new significance, in particular the word "portal." In fact, the word acquires a loftier meaning than that intended in the Message and becomes a symbol of discontinuity, a doorway to "somewhere beyond," giving access to a higher relationship.

At first reading, the primary content of the Message is the Pope's invitation to take on the challenge posed by the social networks to the Church and her mission—an invitation in continuity with his previous Messages. Benedict XVI offers us a positive approach to the new communications technologies, focusing on social networks in particular since they are making a strong impact on people's perceptions of themselves, of reality and of relationships. He says that relationships in the digital world are not only virtual but also real because social networks are "part of the daily experience of many people, especially the young." They are an environment in which people must "make an effort to be authentic" because "what we ultimately share is our very selves."



Benedict XVI invites us to appreciate the potential of social networks to promote human development and solidarity. At the same time, he urges us to improve our "ability to employ the new languages, not just to keep up with the times, but in order to communicate effectively," combining the written word, images and sound to involve people emotionally and intellectually, keeping in mind the value of dialogue, reasoned debate, logical argumentation and non-aggressive persuasion. If in the digital environment "it is easy for heated and divisive voices to be raised," believers should recall that "Elijah recognized God in a still, small voice," not in the great and strong wind of sensationalism.

Although this year's Message takes a step forward with respect to the Pope's previous Messages for WCD, it remains in continuity with them. In fact, his earlier Messages acknowledged the new technologies as "a gift for humanity" (2009) and "an indispensable instrument" (2010) even though they "are changing not only the way we communicate, but communication itself" (2011). Furthermore, "social networks have become the starting point of communication for many people who are seeking advice, ideas, information and answers. In our time, the Internet is becoming ever more a forum for questions and answers" (2012). And in this year's Message the Pope notes that the social network culture is generated by its users and that an exchange of information can become communication, friendship, connection and communion.

The World Wide Web, Twitter, Facebook, Blogs—all these words have become a part of our everyday vocabulary because, as Paulines, we cannot do without these resources in

carrying out our apostolate. They are not simply a trend: they are new ways of being with others, of sharing ideas, of living authentically, of building communion.



In keeping with our charism, the FSPs and SSPs of Italy have been collaborating with one another since 2006 to help the general public pay greater attention to the Pope's annual Message for World Communications Day (which up to then had been notoriously ignored by almost everyone). To achieve this goal, all the book centers of both Institutes combine their energy and creativity to organize and celebrate an annual "Communications Week" prior to WCD.

The upshot is that each year 50 Italian cities host a program rich in events such as meetings for various groups of people (teachers, catechists, pastoral workers, cultural animators), as well as organize musical performances, formative encounters in the book centers for children and teens, and moments of relaxation and celebration—all centered on the WCD theme.

In close connection with Communications Week, the Paulines also hold a "Traveling Festival" that visits a specifically-chosen diocese each year so as to make our pastoral work in the field of communications more concrete to the people. In agreement with the bishop and through his diocesan communications office, the FSPs and SSPs organize various initiatives to celebrate the always more complex world of communications and help the people learn to be comfortable in it.

So far, we have visited the dioceses of Salerno, Bari, Brescia, Alba, Caserta, Padua and Caltanissetta. This year we will be traveling to Avezzano. Each year, the program of events focuses on five communications "paths": the *path of knowledge* (the rapport between communications and the many forms of knowledge); the *path of beauty* (manifested through the world of art); the *path of languages* (via its anthropological, technological and social aspects); the *path of solidarity* (which explores forms of relating to others through volunteer services); and the *path of togetherness* (a celebration of communion—the natural fruit of profound and genuine communication).

Anyone who would like to know more about Communications Week can visit our website: www.settimanadellacomunicazione.it.

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