

EDITORIAL
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WHO ARE YOUR 'FRIENDS'?

A 'friend' in cyberspace may be nothing more than a casual link - or someone who becomes your partner for life!

In this year's [World Communications Day Message](#), Pope Benedict XVI explores the nature of friendship as a participation in God's communicative and unifying love, and looks at how new technologies can help or hinder friendship.

New means, old issues.

The so-called 'digital generation' are often criticised for being permanently connected to their mobile phones and social networking sites, but there is nothing new about the hunger to be in contact with others. When I was a teenager, young people were often criticised for constantly tying up ye olde family landline!

I rather suspect that Benedict XVI doesn't send his own text messages or make his own posts on Face Book, but he understands that it is the quality of the relationship that is important and the technology is merely a means to conduct it. He wants to make use of whatever can help him to reach out in dialogue with others.

With new technical possibilities come new risks – or are they really old risks with new opportunities and expressions?

Wasn't it possible to have shallow and fleeting relationships before the internet? I seem to recall that pornography, hate mail, stereotypical presentations of cultural groups, bigotry, and the trivialisation of women's experiences all had their means of expression 'back in the day'. Any school girl knows that you don't need anything more than your voice to exclude and marginalise others.

Respect, dialogue, friendship.

Benedict calls us to build a culture of respect, dialogue and friendship in the emerging digital communication environment.

It may be helpful to ask ourselves:

Do I communicate in ways that respect the human dignity of others? How can I promote greater respect in the communications of which I am a part?

Who is speaking and who is listening in public discourse? Which voices and experiences are not being heard? How can I contribute to greater participation and inclusivity in public and private conversations?

Whose stories do I really care about? In my communication, do I reach out beyond myself and the groups to which I belong, seeking communion with others? Do my ways of communicating foster right relationships?

In this edition of the *Faith Doing Justice* newsletter, we pay attention to some frequently neglected voices. In Reconciliation Week, and through international action such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are increasingly being acknowledged. Have we noticed that people with disabilities are so often unheard in the fraught world of real estate that our housing stock is increasingly inaccessible and unsustainable? We look at how adequately the human rights of unpopular minorities are protected compared to the rights of those towards whom we feel more positively, and we consider the meaning of the church's preferential option for the poor and the marginalised.

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