

## 7. WE MUST PROTECT THE PERSONAL DATA OF CITIZENS

There is a growing awareness that personal data is subject to corporate surveillance and misuse. Research shows nine out of ten Australians using digital platforms like Facebook and Google want to know with whom their information is being shared. They want the platforms to be open about how they use data and to have the ability to opt out of having certain information collected.

- Join the growing call for regulation of platform data gathering which increases notification and consumer consent requirements, with external audits and penalties for breaches of privacy.
- Find out more about the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner: <https://www.oaic.gov.au/about-us/contact-us>
- Make sure your school, parish or church organisation complies with the Australian Privacy Principles.

## 8. JOIN THE CALL FOR TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Governments around the world need to be much more coordinated in working with tech corporations. Civil society and user organisations also need to have a role in the governance of the internet and platforms, ensuring basic standards are not undermined by the drive for profit and market domination. Major corporations need to open their algorithms, data governance and business models to the communities in which they operate. To find out more about initiatives promoting the rights of users and the accountability of online systems, visit:

- The Australian Competition & Consumer Commission Digital Platforms Inquiry: <http://www.accc.gov.au/focus-areas/inquiries/digital-platforms-inquiry>
- The Australian Human Rights Commission Human Rights and Technology project: <http://tech.humanrights.gov.au/>
- The United Nations Internet Governance Forum: <http://www.intgovforum.org>

## 9. TRUTH AND TRUSTWORTHINESS MUST BE GUARANTEED

Honesty and trust are fundamental to the operation of our social, economic and political institutions. Half-truths, lies and slander gone viral can harm the solidarity of a people, particularly during important periods like election campaigns. Our right to truthful information and trustworthy broadcasting requires greater regulation of digital platforms, with sanctions for the spread of fake, divisive and offensive content.

- Call on leaders in the news industry and our governments to support robust and independent journalism.
- Write to your local member about the responsibility of the Federal Government to support and promote the role of the public broadcaster.
- Counter half-truths and misinformation by providing accurate information from reputable sources.

## 10. WE ARE CALLED TO BE CITIZENS OF THE DIGITAL WORLD

As Christians, we are called to 'boldly become citizens of the digital world', with the image of the Good Samaritan as our inspiration. We are called not only to love our neighbour, but to bring the love of God to the new global neighbourhood. We all have a role to play in making this a space where hatred, divisions and falsehoods are rejected. Let's foster a neighbourhood promoting those attributes and social values that lend themselves to genuine human encounter – love, understanding, beauty, goodness, truth and trustworthiness, joy and hope.

- Use the accompanying Prayer Card, including a prayer written by Pope Francis, for personal or family use or for schools and parishes.
- Celebrate World Communications Day on the Sunday before Pentecost.
- Follow the Office for Social Justice of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Facebook: @socialjusticeACBC  
Twitter: @JusticeCatholic

*This brochure is available at: [www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/publications/ten-step-leaflets/](http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/publications/ten-step-leaflets/)*

# TEN STEPS

## TOWARDS GENUINE HUMAN ENCOUNTER IN OUR DIGITAL WORLD



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The title of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement for 2019-2020 is *Making it Real: Genuine human encounter in our digital world*. The Statement affirms the positive possibilities for encounter and solidarity offered by new digital media, while warning of those elements that are harmful to the dignity of individuals and the common good.

Pope Francis is calling us to 'boldly become citizens of the digital world'. Here are ten steps we can take towards making our online presence one that fosters genuine human encounter.

## 1. MAKE YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE ONE OF DIGNITY AND RESPECT

We must always remember that each person we communicate with on social media is a real person – made in the image and likeness of God.

- Be careful not to access or post anything that is demeaning, inappropriate or exploitative. Do not be dismissive, judgemental or aggressive in your conversation.
- Read Pope Francis' World Communications Day messages, which show us how the online world can help foster human dignity: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.index.html>
- Access the book by Beth Doherty, Tweet others as you would wish to be tweeted, at the Bishops' online store: <http://www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop>

## 2. BE PRESENT TO OTHERS IN THE REAL AND VIRTUAL WORLDS

The speed and brevity of communication on social media platforms can be open to misinterpretation and a superficiality that makes others feel that they have not been truly heard or accepted. Similarly, excessive time spent on social media can deprive families and friends of your 'real' presence in their lives.

- Limit the time you spend on devices.
- Take a 'digital detox' for your health and wellbeing. Times of abstinence and reflection fit well with the Seasons of Lent and Advent.
- Establish device free times in your household, for example at meal times.



## 3. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Unfortunately, cyberbullying, trolling and the objectification of others is not an uncommon experience. We cannot stand by when another is denigrated or threatened.

- Call out bad behaviour and stand by the victim. This can require diplomacy. Be mindful that sometimes abusive behaviour is so irrational and unrelenting, the best option is to disengage.
- Discuss experiences of cyberbullying with your family, friends or school.
- Report abuse and access helpful information from the eSafety Commissioner: <http://www.esafety.gov.au/>

## 4. EVERY COMMUNITY SHOULD PROMOTE DIGITAL LITERACY

Digital technologies are increasingly necessary in our day to day lives. People of all ages need the know-how to access and navigate the online world. They need information on the operation of platforms and how personal data is used. Education is key to being aware of the great possibilities but also the pitfalls. Through greater awareness, Pope Francis says, 'we will employ technology wisely rather than letting ourselves be dominated by it.'

- Invite a social media expert with knowledge of both the opportunities and challenges of digital platforms to speak with your parish or community group.
- Share information about assistance available from local social service organisations and public libraries for dealing with the digital world.
- Ask the 'digital natives' in your parish to assist in the development of guidelines for the parish social media presence.

## 5. WE CANNOT LEAVE OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS BEHIND

Too many vulnerable Australians remain offline and without the means to access essential services and opportunities. They are excluded because of problems of affordability, gaps in access, or low digital literacy. There is a role for governments to guarantee internet access, technological devices and user skills as a basic human right. Interpersonal support must remain where online access is difficult or technology cannot meet complex human need.

- Access the Australian Digital Inclusion Index to find out how the digital divide impacts on vulnerable Australians: <http://digitalinclusionindex.org.au>
- Consider those in your local community who may experience difficulty accessing essential public services and support online. Raise this with your Local Member.
- Donate phone cards to services for vulnerable people.

## 6. THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IS A PLACE TO MAKE THE VIRTUAL REAL

Social media platforms are venues not just for socialising, but for raising awareness of local issues, becoming politically engaged, and harnessing the power of crowdsourcing. This engagement can be limited where it does not cross over to the physical community. Advocacy for justice can be reduced to e-petitions, and civic affairs to mere 'clicktivism'.

- Invite young people in your parish to share how they are responding to Pope Francis' invitation to 'find ways to pass from virtual contact to good and healthy communication'.
- Share examples of how local government, churches and community groups are offering a physical space where the online community is made welcome and supported face-to-face.
- Host a face-to-face event for an online social justice network.