

Community Education Resource

Social Justice Statement 2019–2020

MAKING IT REAL:

Genuine human encounter in our digital world

This resource is for parish social justice groups, YCS groups and senior secondary students. It describes a process in which to engage with the social justice issues related to the internet and the growing range of social media platforms described in the Australian Catholic Bishops Statement 2019-2020.

There are many possibilities for encounter and solidarity offered by new digital media. But we must be aware of those elements of our digital world that may be harmful. These include information overload; social isolation; marginalisation of the vulnerable; consumerism and fake news. While many users do not realise it, the core business of social media platforms is to sell advertising and maximise profits. People's personal lives may be reduced to data that is traded for profit or power, and it is used to target and influence us in ways previously unthinkable. Pushing users to more extreme positions and promoting fake news is at odds with human solidarity.

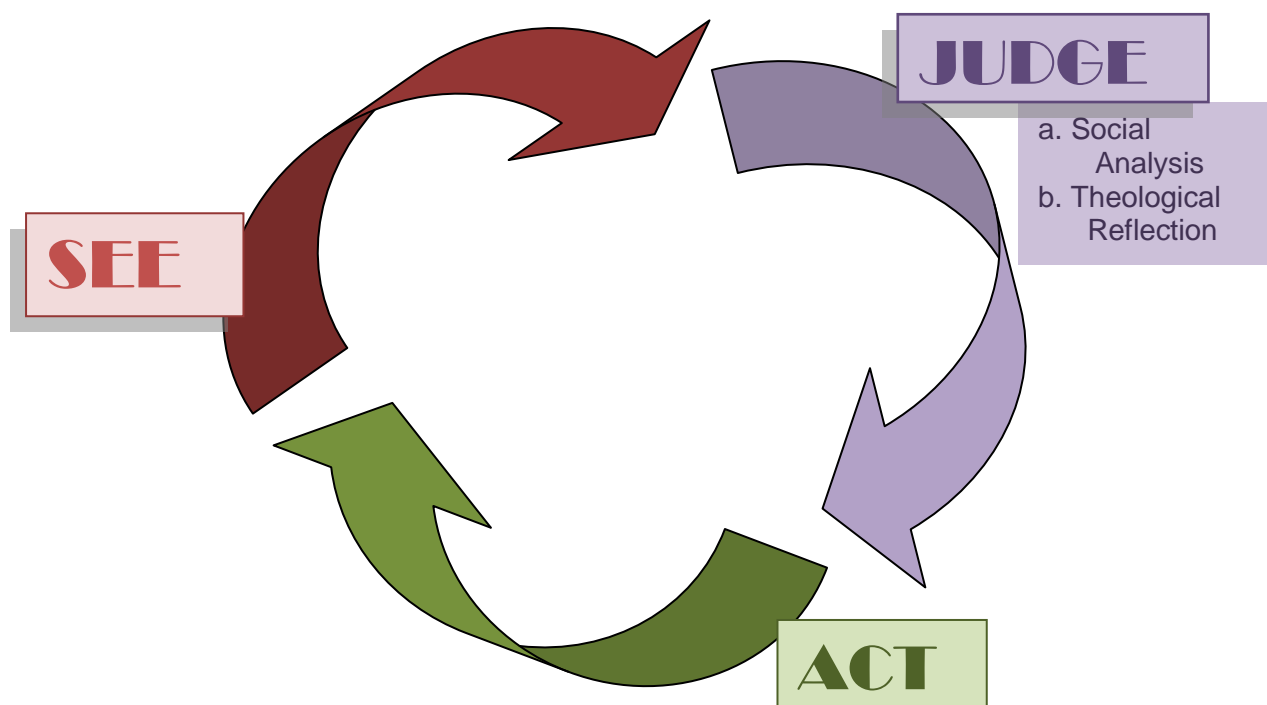
Pope Francis is calling us to 'boldly become citizens of the digital world', with the image of the Good Samaritan as our inspiration. We are called not only to love our neighbour, but to bring the love of God to the new global neighbourhood. All of us – whether we are users, communities, industrial or political leaders – have a role to play in rejecting hatred, divisions and falsehoods. We have a duty to foster a neighbourhood that promotes those human attributes and social values that lend themselves to genuine human encounter – love, understanding, beauty, goodness, truth and trustworthiness, joy and hope.

Using the See, Judge, Act process, this resource describes the ways in which to see the challenges that arise in the online environment.

Using the See, Judge, Act process, this resource provides ways to see challenges that arise online.

We can then make an informed judgement on the situation and take action to change what can and should be changed.

For each phase of the process, there are references to the Social Justice Statement and suggestions for further resources and research.





Social Justice Statement References

Introduction pp 3–4
Part 1 Love Your Neighbour, pp 5–8
Part 2 Love Your Neighbourhood, pp 9–12
Part 3 A Call to Action & A Call to Us as Church, pp 13–17

In the Social Justice Statement the Bishops name the following as concerns:

Resources in the Statement

Genuine human encounter in this new digital world

- A culture of isolation and objectification
- Those excluded by the digital divide
- Consumerism and profiteering
- Fake News and the undermining of democracy

See notes 1-4

See notes 5-21

See notes 22-27

See notes 28-38

See notes 39-46

The call to action

- Calling all users, communities and political and industrial leaders
- Calling us as Church

See notes 48-55

See notes 56-57

See for yourself!

Other resources

How much do you know about the interpersonal as well as the big social and economic challenges of the internet and social media platforms we use?

Access the book by Beth Doherty, *Tweet others as you would wish to be tweeted*, at the online store:
www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop

Select one of the issues that particularly concerns you.

Visit the eSafety Commission:
www.esafety.gov.au

Name the aspects of this issue that concern you.

Research the digital divide:
www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au

Use the notes in the Statement to find out more about it.

Check out the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission *Digital Platforms Inquiry*: www.accc.gov.au/focus-areas/inquiries/digital-platforms-inquiry

Which organisations address this issue in your state/local area?

Check out the Australian Human Rights Commission *Human Rights and Technology* project:
<http://tech.humanrights.gov.au>

Are there other issues related to the new digital space that need to be addressed?

Further references in the ACSJC *Ten Steps* Leaflet

After this research, what question or questions do you now have regarding this issue?

Take this question to the next stage.

JUDGE

a. Social Analysis

b. Theological Reflection

a. Social Analysis helps us to obtain a more complete picture of the social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships. In this step, we attempt to make sense of the reality that was observed in Step 1. Why does this situation exist? What are the root causes?

Look at and discuss the concern you researched in terms of the following factors.

This deepens our understanding of our experience by asking: 'Which of these areas is this issue really about?'

Economic factors: – Production, distribution, patterns of ownership and decisions about property and resources.

Who owns? Who controls?

Who pays? Who gets? Why?

What part do economic factors play in the disadvantage faced by those who are excluded from the mainstream of our society?

Political factors: Totality of people's participation in decisions that affect their lives.

Who decides? For whom do they decide?

How are decisions made – by individuals? local, state and federal governments/agencies?

Who is left out of the process? How does this happen? Why?

Social Factors: How people group to relate to one another – social, class, ethnic, racial or age groups.

Who is left out?

Who is included?

Who is overrepresented?

Why?

Cultural factors: Sum total of ways of believing, thinking, feeling and acting, which constitutes what people call 'their way of life'

Values – what is important/ Beliefs – what is held to be true/ Attitudes – thoughts, words and actions influenced by beliefs

What values are evident?

What do people believe in?

What attitudes do you see expressed?

Who influences what people believe?

Religious factors: Religion is the expression of humanity's ultimate concern – the articulation of longings for a centre of meaning and value, for connection with the power of being.

What religious beliefs or practices support this practice?

What religious beliefs or practices challenge it?

By the end of this step, the group will have constructed a wider and deeper picture of the issue or focus. The underlying cause begins to emerge. For example, is it predominantly a social, political, cultural, economic or religious issue?

In light of the analysis the group renames the issue/question and takes it to the theological reflection

b. Theological Reflection explores the experience and its deeper analysis, in dialogue with the religious tradition. From this conversation we gain new insights and meanings. Two important sources of this tradition are the Scriptures and Catholic Social Teaching.

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| <p>Reflect on how the key Scriptural passage of the Statement can help us to make meaning of this experience?</p> <p>How does this Gospel reading enable us to see this reality in a different way?</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">From the Statement</p> <p>The Statement begins with the Gospel account of a lawyer asking Jesus what must be done to inherit eternal life. The lawyer challenges Jesus in the presence of his disciples – a bit like some of the challenging conversations on social media, where people try to win arguments or trip people up in front of their friends. Jesus guides the lawyer towards the great commandment – love of God and love of neighbour. And, responding to the lawyer’s question, <i>Who is my neighbour?</i>, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:25–37)</p> <p>Pope Francis says our presence online should be like that of the Good Samaritan – to come to the aid of those lying by the side of the road: <i>It is not enough to be passersby on the digital highway, simply ‘connected’; connections need to grow into true encounters.</i></p> |
| <p>What does Catholic Social Teaching say about this issue?</p> <p>What key principles from Catholic Social Teaching apply to this situation?</p> | <p>Like many new technologies or scientific findings, it can take time for us to educate ourselves and mobilise to take action on issues and circumstances of injustice that arise. But this is our digital common home, and the principles we find in Catholic Social Teaching can help guide us to a more just digital space.</p> <p>Consider these CST principles in the context of the social justice challenges raised in the Social Justice Statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Human dignity Vs. a culture of isolation and objectification (p.5)• The common good Vs. the digital divide (p.8)• Integral human development Vs. consumerism and profiteering (p.9)• Solidarity Vs. fake news and misinformation (p.11) |
| <p>What insights emerged for you?</p> | |
| <p>What do you see more clearly?</p> | |
| <p>What ideas for action emerge from your insights?</p> | |

ACT Towards inclusive and sustainable development

Pages 13-17

From your information [Seeing]

... **and analysis and theological reflection [Judging]**

... what **ACTION** needs to be taken

- to change the situation?
- to address root causes?

We all have a role to play :

Understand the bigger picture behind the internet and social media platforms

- What are the economic and social forces that drive the ownership, operation and structure of digital platforms
- Visit the sites listed in the 'other resources' section on p.2 of this Community Education Resource

Parish and local community action

- 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.
- Consider those in your local community who may experience difficulty accessing essential public services and support online. Raise this with your Local Member.
- Host a face-to-face event for an online social justice network

What challenges emerged for you?

What action can you take? (See the 'Ten steps' below – also available as a leaflet)

If no action is clear, what additional research is needed?

How would you transform the structures and relationships that produce this situation?

How can you act to empower those who are disadvantaged in this situation?

What practical help can you offer?

How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your action?

Some useful websites:

ACSJC: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/social-teaching>

Secondary Res. <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/publications/social-justice-statements>

TEN STEPS TOWARDS GENUINE HUMAN ENCOUNTER IN OUR DIGITAL WORLD

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.

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. Find out more about initiatives promoting the rights of users and the accountability of online systems:

- 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 written 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

Prayer for Our Digital World

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Help us to recognise the evil latent in a
communication that does not build communion.
Help us to remove the venom from our judgements.
Help us to speak about others as our brothers and sisters.

You are faithful and trustworthy; may our words be seeds
of goodness for the world:

where there is shouting, let us practise listening;
where there is confusion, let us inspire harmony;
where there is ambiguity, let us bring clarity;
where there is exclusion, let us offer solidarity;
where there is sensationalism, let us use sobriety;
where there is superficiality, let us raise real questions;
where there is prejudice, let us awaken trust;
where there is hostility, let us bring respect;
where there is falsehood, let us bring truth.

Amen.

- A Prayer from Pope Francis, 2018
Message for the 52nd World Communications Day