



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

The Vision for Communications in the Archdiocese of Edmonton

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis calls the entire Church to pastoral conversion for the sake of her mission. People today need to have the Gospel's message of beauty, joy, peace and love communicated with clarity and conviction. The need remains urgent, and thus the pope summons us to an ecclesial renewal "that cannot be deferred." Such reform pertains not only to the Church's disciples but also her very structures. Structures must change as necessary in order to be clearly and effectively oriented to mission (cf. *EG*, 27).

Among the most important of the Church's structures are those which serve the ministry of communications. The Church, indeed, exists to evangelize, that is, to communicate to the world, the astounding news of the Father's plan to save the world by the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Archdiocese of Edmonton, in response to this precise call of our Holy Father, has established the following as the principles to shape the renewal of our communications ministry.

Principles

1. The Church exists for no other purpose than to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to bring men and women to the personal encounter with Christ in the Church and her sacraments and community life, and to make disciples.
2. Every aspect of the Church's life, every office in the Church, must place itself in service of this mission of evangelization.
3. In the Archdiocese of Edmonton, communications serves the Church's mission of evangelization by informing, inspiring and telling the story of Catholic life right here — the story of how faith in Jesus Christ *is proclaimed and lived in the lives of ordinary Catholics and in the ministries of the Church*. Communications serves this mission through: news reporting and cultural and social analysis; and through creative content and programming produced for the broad spectrum of media platforms and channels. By strategic use of these means, by providing communications expertise and support to the Archdiocese's parishes, offices and institutions, and by collaborating with our partners in Catholic social services, education and health care, communications serves our pastoral priorities of evangelization, formation in the faith, and building a culture of vocations.

These principles enable us to see what needs to be done to address current challenges and how to set goals and shape proposals for future growth. They shall serve as the essential criteria for hiring staff, evaluating performance, setting goals and measuring outcomes.

Current Cultural and Media Environment

To communicate the Church's message, we need to be studying existing media markets and patterns of communication in society. Broadly speaking, we live in a media culture, where people are surrounded by "messages" that are often accompanied by powerful imagery. The average person has grown accustomed to a more passive approach to news consumption. They read what is shared through their "feeds," rather than actively seeking the multiple sides of a story. And they expect to see that news delivered progressively throughout the day. We live within a culture that looks at the headlines and not the content. That is to say, to a large extent, news has become a species of gossip.

Our culture is also increasingly secular — a society where men and women live as if God either does not exist or does not matter. In this culture, unfortunately, most Catholics get most of their news and information about the Church from non-Church sources. Sadly, most of these sources do not present a fair or positive vision of the Catholic Church. *We do not see the stories of the Church's great contributions to the cultural fabric of our communities through our social ministries, schools, and health care facilities.* Instead we see the dominant narrative that the Church is against progress and human freedom.

This biased coverage of the faith is doing significant damage to good people. The dominant secular communication about the Church both drives people away and reinforces decisions to leave the faith among the Catholic lay faithful and within the greater secular society — decisions to stop attending Mass, decisions not to send children to a Catholic school, decisions not to defend the Church.

For these reasons, it is of primary importance that the Church engage the public through the media. This has been reinforced not only by Pope Francis but also by his predecessors, especially Blessed Paul VI, Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI. The Church cannot evangelize if it does not first know how to communicate. In this environment it is no longer good enough to respond to inquiries from the press or to produce in-house publications for a small Catholic audience. The Church must see communications as absolutely vital to its evangelical mission and seek to shape public conversation and to activate lay people for action in the world.

Communications in the Archdiocese of Edmonton Today

The main media tools in the Archdiocese today include the Western Catholic Reporter (WCR) and its website, the official Archdiocesan website, a relatively new and modest social media presence, and the Quid Novum e-newsletter. The combined “reach” of these (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, newspaper circulation), is estimated to be well under 10,000. This is inadequate for the task of serving a Catholic population of roughly 375,000 and communicating the faith in a highly diversified and secularized cosmopolitan society of more than 1.6 million people. The provision of these services comes at a substantial cost, and I am mindful that they are financed through the sacrifice and generosity of the People of God. Therefore, it is important that we find new and more effective means to engage our people, wherever they may be on their faith journey and wherever they may look for their news of the day.

After careful consideration and prayer, I am directing that the Communications Office be reorganized with a new vision, a new mandate, and a new structure. The WCR as we have known it will cease publication on September 26, 2016. Its current print and digital presence will transition to a daily news portal, which will be the hub for content shared across several platforms, including social media, the e-newsletter, and print products.

Reorganization of Archdiocesan Communications Office

Henceforward, the Office of Communications will have the following as its mission statement:

The Communications Office serves the Church’s mission of evangelization by directing strategies and developing messages and vehicles aimed at engaging people in a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ through his Word and Sacraments in their parish communities and in their service to their neighbours and the wider society. The Communications Office helps to form Catholics in their faith and to encourage them to live their faith and spread the Gospel as missionary disciples in the heart of a secular culture.

In fulfillment of this mandate, the Office of Communications will implement Archdiocesan-wide communication policy and oversee all media, digital and design initiatives in the Archdiocese. *It will be dedicated to publicizing and promoting the values and work of the Church through its service to parishes, Church agencies, secular news professionals and the general public.*

The Office will offer services in editorial (writing/reporting/editing), graphic design, print, web, and multimedia production; media briefings and coordinating media interviews, marketing, media advice and social media strategies. The office will be responsible for developing the “messaging” of the Archdiocese to its external audiences (parishes, families, ministries, community organizations, government and the secular media). It will be primarily focused on disseminating messaging via media so as to make known the message of the Gospel and the good works it inspires in the Archdiocese of Edmonton.

This work will be carried on in a co-operative, collaborative way with the offices and institutions of the Archdiocese, sharing skills, knowledge and expertise as necessary in our common mission of evangelization.

The communications team will be the sole provider of logos, posters, prayer cards, flyers, etc. for the Archdiocese, so that all new ideas and brands will be oriented towards the Church’s evangelizing mission and coherent with the direction given to the Archdiocese by the Archbishop.

Website integration between the Archdiocese, its offices and institutions, and its parishes will form a necessary element of an effective communications ministry.

The effectiveness of the Communication Office will be measured by the volume at which it gets the message out (coverage), whether the message is received and propagated (“shares” and “mentions”) and ultimately whether people’s hearts and minds embrace the faith over time (“sentiment shift” by topic).

Office of Communications Restructure and Staffing

To fulfill its renewed mandate, the Office of Communications will be restructured under the leadership of the Chief Communications Officer.

The changes I have outlined are substantive. They will result in impacts on staff, subscribers, advertisers and other stakeholders. We will endeavour in the coming days to ensure that these impacts are dealt with in a sensitive and respectful way.

Conclusion

This new vision and mandate will require time and patience to implement, but I am hopeful that we will begin seeing the first fruits of our new direction before the end of 2016.

For all those affected by these changes, and for those charged with implementing them, I recommend the words of St. Francis de Sales, patron saint of writers: “Never be in a hurry; do everything quietly and in a calm spirit. Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset.”

Let us ask for St. Francis’ intercession as we attempt to bring the Word to the world in new and challenging ways. Let us pray that God inspires our creativity and dedication. In His name, let the words and images we share reflect our precious faith to all.

✠Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton
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