New computer technologies pose dangers, pope says

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI warned young people of some of the dangers provoked by new computer technologies.

Today's younger generations are exposed to "a twofold risk caused primarily by the spread of new information technologies," he told some 1,300 students and professors from the University of Parma, Italy, during an audience at the Vatican.

On the one hand, users of information technology can run the risk of "a growing reduction in their ability to concentrate" and to use the new information in their own lives, he said in his speech Dec. 1.

On the other hand, they also face the danger of "isolating themselves in an increasingly virtual reality," he added.

While one's social community can become "dispersed into a thousand fragments," the individual may become more self-centered and tend "to close oneself off to constructive relations with others and those who are different from oneself," he said.

Pope Benedict said fortunately this tendency is counteracted in universities which have struck a "virtuous balance" between time spent focused on the individual and the group, between an individual's research and reflection and the sharing and open exchange" of information with others.

The pope, a former university professor, said he has never stopped keeping up-to-date on university life and "feeling spiritually connected to it."

He said the university must remain free to teach and conduct research without being subject to economic and political pressures.

"This does not mean isolating the university from society, or becoming self-absorbed or pursuing private interests with public money," he explained.

True Christian freedom is that the individual, the community and institutions "fully

respond to their nature and purpose," he said.

He said a university's vocation is to prepare people scientifically and culturally so they can contribute to the development of society and the public good.