

Pope asks young Catholics to use technology to share their faith

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI asked young Catholics to use their computers, Facebook accounts, blogs and Internet video posts to share with their peers the joy of faith in Christ.

“Be sure to announce the Gospel to your contemporaries with enthusiasm,” the pope told young people in his message for the 2009 celebration of World Communications Day.

“Human hearts are yearning for a world where love endures, where gifts are shared, where unity is built, where freedom finds meaning in truth and where identity is found in respectful communion,” said Pope Benedict’s message, which was released at the Vatican Jan. 23.

The theme for the 2009 World Communications Day, which will be celebrated May 24 in most dioceses, is “New Technologies, New Relationships: Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship.”

Releasing the message – which included e-mailing it directly to 100,000 young Catholics around the world and asking them to forward it or post it on their Web sites – the Vatican also announced that it would take a further step into the digital age by making video of the pope available on YouTube, a video-sharing Web site.

In his message, Pope Benedict said that if used creatively and correctly new computer technologies can help people meet the human longing to connect with others and share the search for goodness, beauty and truth.

Of course, he said, people must “avoid the sharing of words and images that are degrading of human beings, that promote hatred and intolerance, that debase the goodness and intimacy of human sexuality or that exploit the weak and vulnerable.”

And praising the way young people use the Internet to form and maintain friendships, he also cautioned against trivializing friendship by not forming real,

face-to-face relationships.

“It would be sad if our desire to sustain and develop online friendships were to be at the cost of our availability to engage with our families, our neighbors and those we meet in the daily reality of our places of work, education and recreation,” Pope Benedict said.

“If the desire for virtual connectedness becomes obsessive, it may in fact function to isolate individuals from real social interaction while also disrupting the patterns of rest, silence and reflection that are necessary for healthy human development,” the pope said.

Still, Pope Benedict said, new technologies have an “extraordinary potential” to bring people together, to help them share information, to rally them to work for good causes and to educate.

“They respond to a fundamental desire of people to communicate and to relate to each other,” he said.

“When we find ourselves drawn toward other people, when we want to know more about them and make ourselves known to them, we are responding to God’s call – a call that is imprinted in our nature as beings created in the image and likeness of God, the God of communication and communion,” Pope Benedict said.

Much of the pope’s message was addressed to the “digital generation,” to young people who have grown up using computers and cellular phones, e-mail and text messaging.

He asked them “to bring the witness of their faith to the digital world” and to write openly about the joys of faith when they write their profiles on social-networking sites or blogs.

The first step in evangelization is to understand the culture in which the Gospel will be proclaimed, he said, and young Catholics are the ones who have that understanding of their peers and of the Internet culture they use to communicate.

“You know their fears and their hopes, their aspirations and their disappointments,”

the pope told young Catholics. “The greatest gift you can give to them is to share with them the good news of a God who became man, who suffered, died and rose again to save all people.”

Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, told reporters Jan. 23 that the message was distinctive for the sense of trust and openness it showed toward new technologies and for the fact that it was addressed primarily to young Catholics.

The text of the pope’s message in English is posted online at: https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20090124_43rd-world-communications-day_en.html.

The text of the pope’s message in Spanish is posted online at: https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20090124_43rd-world-communications-day_sp.html.