

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

IDENTITY
AND
MISSION
SERIES

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Our Online Witness: Responsible Digital Citizenship through the lens of the Catholic Graduate Expectations

In his Exhortation on Youth, *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis speaks openly to young people of the gift and the dangers of life online. He cautions young people to be aware of the ways in which social media can contribute to consumerism, to the wasting of time and to getting caught up in negativity. He also sees communication technology as being an important way to transmit the Good News, to share values and to transmit beauty. He encourages youth to be creative, original and aware that God has plans for each of us — even in our online activity.

He says that many young people spend too much time online worried about possessions and appearances. He urges young people to, “Dare to be more!”¹



Photo credit: pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficheiro:Carlo_Acutis

Carlo Acutis

The Holy Father offers the example of the newly beatified Carlo Acutis* as a digital witness for young people. Carlo is being called a #DigitalDisciple and #CyberApostle for the way he witnessed to his

devotion to the Eucharist in his online work. Carlo was born in London, England and moved to Milan, Italy shortly after his birth. He died in 2006 of Leukemia at the age of 15. Carlo’s mother describes him as a

“He saw Jesus truly present in these brothers and sisters on the streets just as he saw him truly present in the Holy Eucharist.”

regular teen in many ways, interested in friends, soccer, computers, and video games. Carlo also had a great love for the Eucharist. He created a website that gathered and shared information about Eucharistic miracles through the centuries. The [website](#) is a large searchable database that lists

miracles by country and date as well as by well-known Saints who were connected in particular ways to the Eucharist.

At Carlo’s funeral, people were amazed by the numbers of poor people who attended at the church. It was learned that Carlo had been taking sleeping bags and food to people living on the street. His faith and his sense of mission were strong. He witnessed to his faith online as well as in his relationships in his family and friends. His witness found concrete expression in his care for the poor of his community. He saw Jesus truly present in these brothers and sisters on the streets just as he saw him truly present in the Holy Eucharist. His mother says he was her teacher in the faith. For having had only a short life, Carlo made a huge impact on his family

and community. He continues to touch the life of the Church through his website and the exhibitions of Eucharistic miracles it has inspired. Carlo is considered the first Millennial saint.**

In the new *Directory for Catechesis*, the Church's latest teaching of how we pass on the faith, the Church recognizes the importance of digital culture especially in the lives of young people — the true digital natives among us. Teachers and catechists are called to reflect on how to become an “evangelizing presence on the digital continent.”² We are cautioned not to equate faith in Jesus with the culture of ‘influencers’ and ‘followers’ but to truly accompany young people so they can rediscover their own life in the context of the community of faith.³

This echoes the themes of *Renewing the Promise* that “Catholic Schools...accompany students in the search for truth, to foster in them a thirst for

justice and an appreciation of the goodness of God, leading them patiently and lovingly in their journey of faith.”⁴ We are reminded we are “communities of accompaniment where the story of our salvation is known and shared, offering the encouragement that comes from knowing that Jesus walks with us.”⁵ Christ is walking with us on the digital continent too!

Pope Francis offers this encouragement to young people: “*You can become what God your Creator knows you are, if only you realize that you are called to something greater. Ask the help of the Holy Spirit and confidently aim for the great goal of holiness. In this way,...you will be fully yourself.*”

As educators called to accompany young people, the following may be used with students to reflect on their online activity and consider what it means to be Responsible Digital Citizens through the lens of the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations.

The following chart is available in poster form for classroom use from the Institute for Catholic Education

#DigitalCitizenship

#DiscerningBeliever

- I believe that God is always with me – even in my online activity
- I witness online to my experience of God’s love expressed to me in Jesus Christ
- I rely on the Holy Spirit’s guidance and conduct myself online as a Joyful Disciple
- I believe in forgiveness and am forgiving and never vengeful online

#EffectiveCommunicator

- I communicate clearly, honestly and with sensitivity while online
- I use my voice online to speak up for others and show I care about them
- I choose words that are life-giving when commenting or posting online
- I work to ensure that I can be proud of my online voice and digital reputation

#ReflectiveCreativeHolisticThinker

- I share my ideas in a respectful way
- I approach conflict online with knowledge, understanding and prayer
- I make wise choices and informed decisions when navigating online
- I use the internet to advocate for kindness, humility, love and hope in the world



#SelfDirectedResponsibleLifelongLearner

- I set goals and continually work to improve myself as a digital citizen
- I reflect on the digital footprint that my online activity creates
- I exercise Christian leadership online to set a positive example for others
- I maintain a healthy balance between my online and offline activities



#CollaborativeContributor

- I collaborate with others online
- I value everyone's work and use other's digitized media ethically
- I use my God-given gifts and talents when contributing online
- I use the online forum to build on my strengths and for the benefit of others



#CaringFamilyMember

- I treat all people online with respect as we are all created in God's image
- I represent myself well during my online interactions
- I recognize how my online activities affect my family and my school community
- I show care and respect for God's creation and everything in it



#ResponsibleCitizen

- I am a peacemaker in the digital world
- I stand up for what is right even when it's not popular
- I witness to the fact that all life is precious
- I advocate for a just and compassionate society



Resources on Carlo Acutis' Life

*More information on Carlo's life can be found:

EWTN: The Life of Blessed Carlo Acutis, the [Tech Teen who Found Jesus](#) (28 min video).

[The Life of Blessed Carlo Acutis](#) (7 min video).

**Carlo was beatified on October 10, 2020. He is now known as Blessed Carlo Acutis. Upon verification of another miracle in Carlo's name, he will be canonized a Saint, that is, the Pope will publicly declare him a Saint and he will be listed in the canon of Catholic Saints.

Credits

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- Adrian Scigliano, Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board, author of "A Catholic Lens for Responsible Digital Citizen" article from Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, Principal Connections, Fall 2020, which inspired the Institute for Catholic Education poster.
- Keri Calvesbert, Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board poster editor.

References

- 1 *Christus Vivit, 107* - Pope Francis' post-synodal Exhortation on Youth, 2019
- 2 *Directory for Catechesis, 371* – Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, 2020
- 3 *Directory for Catechesis, 370*
- 4 *Renewing the Promise, Page 4* – Institute for Catholic Education, 2017
- 5 *Renewing the Promise, Page 7*

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