

***** NEWS RELEASE *****

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Contact: Dave Maluchnik
Director of Communications
Michigan Catholic Conference
(517) 372.9310

**STATE CATHOLIC CONFERENCES SUPPORT
BISHOP HERZOG'S CALL TO ENGAGE SOCIAL MEDIA**

(Lansing, MI) – State Catholic conferences that utilize Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms are strongly supporting Bishop Ronald Herzog's speech to the USCCB annual gathering this week on the need for the Church to engage further in social media. According to Bishop Herzog, the Catholic Church must begin to adapt to social media platforms, otherwise she risks incurring a third millennium digital version of the Protestant Reformation.

"Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are just a few of the more popular social networking sites that state Catholic conferences are utilizing to share with Catholics what is taking place in the public square," says Dave Maluchnik, director of communications for the Michigan Catholic Conference. "As technology fields continue to grow and expand, communication mediums such as social networking help the laity become more involved in legislative advocacy. By engaging Catholics through social media platforms, we believe we can be of service to our bishops in their role as teachers and shepherds."

State Catholic conferences have been in existence in their current form since the early 1960s and present their respective bishops' positions on matters of public policy to state government and the state's congressional delegation. Catholic conferences exist in approximately 38 states, a handful of which employ communication directors that have been actively involved with social media in their profession. States such as California, Maryland, New York, Florida, Texas and others use Facebook to share legislative developments and opportunities to become more involved in the democratic process with their followers.

"Over the last year, Facebook and Twitter have become integral to our advocacy," said New York State Catholic Conference communications director Dennis Poust. "Email is quickly becoming an afterthought for online communications, particularly among the young. We need to reach people where they are, and that's on social networking sites. We've established a thriving community on Facebook, and it really helps us to keep our fingers on the pulse of the Catholics in the pews."

Catholic conference staff members use the social media site Twitter to share news and positions on legislative issues with those who follow the organization. Twitter allows its users to broadcast messages in 140 characters or less, which is ample space for seasoned communication professionals to provide pithy, informed quotes to members of the news media who may also follow the organization. Missouri, Michigan, Texas, Maryland, and North Dakota are just a few of the state Catholic conferences that can be found "tweeting."

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“We’ve found Twitter to be an excellent resource for making our position known to a large number of people without having to dedicate an inordinate amount of staff time to the exercise,” says Kathy Dempsey, director of communications for the Maryland Catholic Conference. “Twitter also provides an opportunity to link to web pages, YouTube clips or other media where additional, more detailed information can be conveyed to Catholics, their friends and families.”

Young people are no longer relying on traditional email accounts for news or to converse electronically with their peers, Bishop Herzog noted in his 16 November speech. According to Bishop Herzog, a member of the USCCB communications committee: “The news, entertainment, their friends – are all coming to them through their mobile devices and through their social networks. If the church is not on their mobile device, it doesn’t exist. The Church does not have to change its teachings to reach young people, but we must deliver it to them in a new way.”

“Social media is directly integrated into our mission of serving as the bishops’ public policy arm,” says Maria Huemmer, communications director for the Texas Catholic Conference, which also tweets in Spanish at TXcatolica. “We welcome social media as a new method of informing Catholics about the legislative priorities of our bishops and helping Catholics continue to form their consciences and to act as faithful citizens on issues that concern our state and our nation.”

-- 30 --

Editor’s Note: State Catholic Conferences can be found on Twitter by following @MiCatholicConf @TXCatholic @NYSCatholicConf @mdcathcon @ndcatholic @IACatholicConf @mocatholic @VaCatholicConf

State Catholic Conferences that can be found on Facebook include California, Maryland, New York, Texas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Virginia and North Dakota.