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ANNOUNCE THE WORD USING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

VATICAN CITY, 23 JAN 2010 (VIS) - This morning in the Holy See Press Office, the Message for the forty-fourth World Day of Social Communications was presented. Its theme this year is: "The priest and pastoral ministry in a digital world: new media at the service of the Word".

Participating in today's press conference were Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli and Msgr. Paul Tighe, respectively president and secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

Archbishop Celli explained how the Pope had chosen the theme of the priest, because of the current celebration of the Year for Priests. However "the Message is not addressed only to them. ... Priests work in the digital world, alongside lay people who are involved in that sector", he said.

The president of the pontifical council noted that "the Pope expresses a positive assessment of new technologies. ... He is aware of their utility and knows they can make a positive contribution to pastoral care".

In his Message Benedict XVI also recalls that "the main task of priests is to announce Christ", said Archbishop Celli, and that "they must focus pastoral attention on the communications media, ensuring it remains at the service of the Word".

For his part Msgr. Tighe, speaking English, explained how in the Message "priests are invited to appreciate the great potential of the new technologies to make known the Good News of God's love for all people".

"The priest is invited to be present in the digital world precisely as a priest", he said, pointing out that the Pope "takes for granted the need for the formation of priests in the skilful use of the new technologies, but his primary concern is to ensure that such technologies are used in ways that promote the Gospel and offer hope to all".

"The Pope invites priests, and by implication all believers, to use the web to create a space of dialogue where Christians, believers of other religions and non-believers can encounter each other in a respectful search for truth and wisdom", he said.

Referring then to specific initiatives in the digital field - such as the website of the Congregation for the Clergy dedicated to the Year for Priests: www.annussacerdotalis.org - the secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications noted how "around the world the new technologies are being used to promote the ongoing theological and spiritual formation of priests. ... In addition, there have been many worthwhile personal efforts by individual priests, often supported by lay people with developed technical proficiencies and media competencies, to use the new technologies to give a new dimension to their pastoral mission".

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THE PRIEST AND PASTORAL MINISTRY IN A DIGITAL WORLD

VATICAN CITY, 23 JAN 2010 (VIS) - Made public today was the Holy Father's Message for the forty-fourth World Day of Social Communications, which will be celebrated on 24 May and has as its theme: "The priest and

pastoral ministry in a digital world: new media at the service of the Word". The Message, published in various languages, is dated 24 January, Feast of St. Francis de Sales, patron of journalists.

Excerpts from the English-language version are given below:

"Church communities have always used the modern media for fostering communication, engagement with society and, increasingly, for encouraging dialogue at a wider level. Yet the recent, explosive growth and greater social impact of these media make them all the more important for a fruitful priestly ministry.

"All priests have as their primary duty the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, and the communication of His saving grace in the Sacraments. ... Responding adequately to this challenge amid today's cultural shifts, to which young people are especially sensitive, necessarily involves using new communications technologies. ... Priests stand at the threshold of a new era: as new technologies create deeper forms of relationship across greater distances, they are called to respond pastorally by putting the media ever more effectively at the service of the Word".

"Priests can rightly be expected to be present in the world of digital communications as faithful witnesses to the Gospel, exercising their proper role as leaders of communities which increasingly express themselves with the different 'voices' provided by the digital marketplace. Priests are thus challenged to proclaim the Gospel by employing the latest generation of audiovisual resources".

"Using new communication technologies, priests ... must learn, from the time of their formation, how to use these technologies in a competent and appropriate way, shaped by sound theological insights and reflecting a strong priestly spirituality grounded in constant dialogue with the Lord. Yet priests present in the world of digital communications should be less notable for their media savvy than for their priestly heart, their closeness to Christ. This will not only enliven their pastoral outreach, but also will give a 'soul' to the fabric of communications that makes up the 'Web'".

"Our pastoral presence in that world must thus serve to show our contemporaries, especially the many people in our day who experience uncertainty and confusion, 'that God is near; that in Christ we all belong to one another'. Who better than a priest, as a man of God, can develop and put into practice, by his competence in current digital technology, a pastoral outreach capable of making God concretely present in today's world?"

"Consecrated men and women working in the media have a special responsibility for opening the door to new forms of encounter, maintaining the quality of human interaction, and showing concern for individuals and their genuine spiritual needs. They can thus help the men and women of our digital age to sense the Lord's presence, to grow in expectation and hope, and to draw near to the Word of God which offers salvation and fosters an integral human development".

"With the Gospels in our hands and in our hearts, we must reaffirm the need to continue preparing ways that lead to the Word of God, while being at the same time constantly attentive to those who continue to seek. ... A pastoral presence in the world of digital communications, precisely because it brings us into contact with the followers of other religions, non-believers and people of every culture, requires sensitivity to those who do not believe, the disheartened and those who have a deep, unarticulated desire for enduring truth and the absolute".

"The development of the new technologies and the larger digital world represents a great resource for humanity as a whole. ... But this development likewise represents a great opportunity for believers. No door can or should be closed to those who, in the name of the risen Christ, are committed to drawing near to others. To priests in particular the new media offer ever new and far-reaching pastoral possibilities, encouraging them to embody the universality of the Church's mission, to build a vast and real fellowship, and to testify in today's world to the new life which comes from hearing the Gospel of Jesus".

"At the same time, priests must always bear in mind that the ultimate fruitfulness of their ministry comes from Christ Himself, encountered and listened to in prayer; proclaimed in preaching and lived witness; and known, loved and celebrated in the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation. ... May the Lord make all of you enthusiastic heralds of the Gospel in the new 'agora' which the current media are opening up".